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## Exploring the determinants of students' motivation in pursuing a degree in the field of education in the UAE

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### ABSTRACT

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) aims to improve its education sector by recruiting qualified and diverse student teachers. Therefore, the aim of this study was to examine the factors affecting student motivation to enroll in colleges of education. Using simple random sampling, a total of 199 consenting students were recruited to participate in this study (154 females and 45 males). The participants were informed about the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Data was analyzed using factor analysis to construct the composite variables for the factors that motivated students to join the College of Education. The results proved a positive correlation between career advancement and personal and social needs. However, the outcomes regarding admission and working conditions were negative. This study revealed significant differences in career advancement, personal, and social needs factors specifically among fourth-year students. Thus, factors affecting students' motivation must be considered when recruiting in the UAE.

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## Introduction

The education system faces challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers, with a recurring concern of teacher shortage (Edge et al., 2017). UNESCO reports that by 2030, 69 million teachers must be recruited to fulfil universal primary and secondary education recruitment needs. To reach that goal, the organization prioritizes recruiting well-qualified teachers while ensuring that they are motivated, empowered, and supported within well-resourced and qualified institutions (UNESCO, 2020).

Teachers are crucial for a country's educational system, and countries invest significant funds into education. For instance, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have invested in developing teachers' capabilities, aiming to provide a world-class education system and create a qualified human resource base (Trines, 2021). The educational system in the UAE has difficulties providing qualified Emirati teachers for teaching and/or academic leadership positions. Approximately, 43% of the 22,000 teachers are Emirati, while the rest are foreigners. With more Emirati women entering higher education, they gain more advantages to demonstrate their competencies as prospective and efficient teachers. On the other hand, it has been found that young males prefer not to work in the teaching profession due to several factors that will be addressed later on in the review. Only 4.5% of the working force are employed as teachers, which highlights the importance of addressing these issues to ensure the continuous development of educational outcomes in the country (Anzar, 2019). The College of Education (COE) at UAE University (UAEU)

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provides professional programs and training for teachers and education leaders to meet national educational requirements. Its mission is to prepare teachers and school leaders with the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions required by global standards (CEDU, 2020).

In 2020, COE had only 21 male and 778 female enrolled students (UAEU Facts & Figures, 2020). This discrepancy in the numbers has driven this research. In educational systems with expanding student numbers, recruitment is crucial, and motivating teachers and students to pursue teacher education is essential for their full participation. However, researchers contend that not enough attention is given to this issue. In international systems, careful teacher recruitment, supportive working conditions, and motivation are believed to support the retention of existing teachers (Edge et al., 2017).

We can deduce that the problem may start with attracting and encouraging students to pursue teacher education. It has been found that motivation is a primary driving force that guide people's decisions. Thus, by exploring the factors that motivate individuals to pursue a teaching career can lead to better solutions, such as improving the working conditions of teachers leading to more effective learning environments. Improving the quality of schools requires the training of competent and motivated teachers (Wang & Zhang, 2021; Onyefulu et al., 2023). Studying factors that influence people's motives can help guide policy makers and educational reformers to promote effective teaching motivations and practices. Nevertheless, it is challenging to capture the entire spectrum of influences on human behavior. For example, is the passion for teaching what drives individuals to become teachers, or is it the benefits that come with the job, or could it be the sense of purpose that teaching brings to teachers? Additionally, it has been found that the motivation of male and female teachers varies depending on the context (Azman, 2013). For example, in Jamaica and Poland, females have higher motivation than males for the teaching profession (Onyefulu et al., 2023). In contrast, all over the world the number of male teachers in early childhood education is very low compared to that of females (Koch & Farquhar, 2015). It has also been found that female teachers are more driven by intrinsic and altruistic motivational factors, whereas male teachers focused more on extrinsic ones (Obiagu, 2023; Haruna & Sackey, 2023).

This study examines extrinsic, intrinsic, and altruistic motivations in teaching careers while exploring the influence of each category on undergraduate students' choices in pursuing teaching as a career in the UAE. Intrinsic motivation involves internal desires, while extrinsic motivation is influenced by external factors, whereas altruistic motivation is driven by a genuine concern for well-being, growth, and development of students. The study also focuses on the relationship between gender on one side and motivational factors on the other side, specifically intrinsic, extrinsic, and altruistic motivation, while examining their effect on individuals' choices to become teachers.

### ***Purpose and research questions***

This study examines factors affecting undergraduate students' motivation and identifies differences between males and females in enrolling in education. It focuses on intrinsic and extrinsic motives, examining why males are less likely to choose education majors unlike females. The findings will assist UAE's higher education in addressing issues affecting students' enrolment in education. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What factors affect the motivation of undergraduate students to enroll in the College of Education (COE)?
2. What are the significant differences between male and female students in their motivation to enroll in the education field?

Previous studies have not explored the motivation of Emirati students to pursue teaching. The UAE has implemented knowledge management initiatives, but research has not examined their impact on Emiratization, particularly in teacher education (Abdusheikh, 2012). This quantitative research aims to fill the gap in literature on motivation to join education programs in the UAE, specifically among male undergraduate students. It offers insights about undergraduate students and preservice teachers' motivation for teaching in the UAE context, by exploring the link between motivation and individuals' perceptions, values, expectations, and attitudes towards teaching as a career. Further, it adds to the literature

in terms of exploring gender disparities regarding the motivation to make the choice of becoming a teacher.

### **Literature review**

The academic field suffers from a teacher shortage, particularly among males, mainly due to low enrollment rates and teacher dropouts resulting from increasing workload and number of students accompanied by a decrease in the social status and value of teaching as a profession (Ivanec, 2020; Pauwels et al., 2022; Ivanec & Defar, 2023). Teachers around the world face challenges related to working conditions, resources, classroom settings and management, and supportive infrastructure as well as heavy workloads, compensation issues, and parental involvement (Onyefulu et al., 2023). In the Middle East, only 10% of primary school teachers are males, 10% in Kuwait and 11% in Qatar (UNESCO, 2020). In Abu Dhabi, there are around 50 male Emirati teachers in primary schools (Dickson & Le Roux, 2012). Similarly, Western countries struggle to attract and retain male teachers (Richardson & Watt, 2006). In the OECD, Denmark, Germany, Sweden, the UK, and the Netherlands the number of teachers quitting teaching jobs is higher than the number of students enrolling in teacher training programs. Fuchs et al. (2022) claimed that in the US, around 76% of the teaching workforce are females. Recruitment issues in the teaching profession include failing to attract bright young people (Lee & Nason, 2013; Pauwels et al., 2022). Similarly, in the UAE, there is a shortage of males in the number of students in education programs and Emirati teachers, which may be attributed to a lack of motivation.

### **Motivation**

Motivation is a major factor both attracting future teachers and retaining qualified teachers (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2014; Wang et al., 2020; Alexander et al., 2020; Haruna & Sackey, 2023). Motivation drives individuals into performing goal-oriented actions, influencing carried out strategies as well as perseverance to achieve results (Fuertes et al., 2020). Teacher motivation can be attributed to three main categories: altruistic, intrinsic, and extrinsic motives (Hayamizu, 1997; Tang et al., 2020; Fuchs et al., 2022). In general, intrinsic motivation is driven by internal desires, while extrinsic motivation is influenced by external factors. Altruistic motives aim to benefit society (Yüce et al., 2013).

According to American Psychological Association (n.d.), intrinsic reward is a positively valued consequence inherent in an activity, such as the satisfaction derived from mastering a special skill. These incentives are derived directly from work performance and are not derived from other individuals or objects. Intrinsic motivations for teaching include teacher adherence to family problems, passion for working with children, and the multifaceted and stimulating nature of teaching (Richardson & Watt, 2006; Sharif et al., 2014; Pauwels et al., 2022; Tang et al., 2020). Additionally, Fuertes et al. (2020) asserted that intrinsic motivation is directly related to responsible behavior and openness to experience. Onyefulu et al. (2023) emphasized that interest in teaching a specific subject is regarded as an intrinsic motivator.

Extrinsic motivation refers to a person's behavior driven by external rewards, such as work conditions, holidays, or career advancement (American Psychological Association, n.d.). This motivation can be both tangible and intangible and can persist even if the task is not intrinsically rewarding (Yüce et al., 2013). Some extrinsic motivators are job security, compensation, status, vacations, and lifestyle (Tang et al., 2020; Onyefulu et al., 2023). Other studies categorized job transferability and socialization influences as extrinsic factors (Obiagu, 2023) in addition to opportunities for future development (Wang & Zhang, 2021). Extrinsic motivation is also involved in operant conditioning, where individuals are conditioned to perform a certain behavior in response to a reward or consequence (Tranquillo & Stecker, 2016). The authors argued that extrinsic factors, if not carefully planned and implemented, can influence long term motivation, especially intrinsic and altruistic motivation. Finally, Haruna and Sackey (2023) and Obiagu (2023) emphasized that with altruistic motivation, a teacher can be an influential leader. Altruistic motivation has to do with teachers' love for children and the desire to shape and influence them as well as considering teaching as an honorable profession as well as the desire to contribute to society (Wang et al., 2020).

### **Motivation and teaching career choice**

Improving the quality of schools requires training of competent and motivated teachers. Recruiting qualified and motivated teachers improves quality of education thus promoting international competitiveness. Understanding the motivating factors of teachers can assist policy makers in improving teacher education (Haruna & Sackey, 2023). For that reason, several studies have investigated the role of various categories of motivation in influencing the decision of undergraduate students to choose a teaching career.

Studies revealed that preservice teachers were more motivated by intrinsic factors such as interest in subject taught, competence in teaching, and the multifaceted and stimulating nature of teaching. Kwok-Wai (2004) found that teachers chose teaching as a career mostly due to intrinsic motives, such as liking to work with students, believing that their personalities fit, or finding teaching meaningful and challenging. Watt et al. (2012) found that intrinsic and altruistic motivations consistently influence choice of teaching. The authors emphasized that individuals seeking jobs as teachers are strongly associated with altruistic motives and their desire to contribute to society. Moreover, it was found that intrinsic factors, such as involvement with children and adolescents and positive prior experiences, dominate pre-service teachers' choices. The authors also implied that intrinsic motivation may persist for a while due to inexperience and lack of professional exposure emphasizing the necessity of engaging pre-service teachers in teaching practice to prevent burnout or resignation. Additionally, students' observation of teaching practices can help construct intrinsic motivation and develop an understanding of the profession. Anspal et al. (2011) also confirmed that student teachers learn best when they have the opportunity to practice their teaching. Gavish and Friedman (2010) found that novice teachers' expectations and optimism during their undergraduate years were not met when they faced professional conditions, leading to burnout. It is crucial to investigate the profession and its dimensions to understand students' concerns and address them to reduce attrition rates and increase the number of students joining education programs. Understanding these concerns can help stakeholders improve the education experience for undergraduate students and ultimately improve their decision to pursue teacher education (Roness & Smith, 2010). These findings highlight the need for better understanding and support for students pursuing careers in education. Recently, Pauwels et al. (2022) argued that with more pre-service teacher involvement in the teaching process, commitment can be enhanced.

Tang et al. (2020) highlighted the significance of intrinsic motivation in promoting positive learning experiences and outcomes in initial teacher education. Fokken-Bruinsma and Carrinus's (2014) study supported this by stating that intrinsic motives, anchored by the desire to work with children and adolescents, are the primary motivators for becoming a teacher. Pre-service teachers aspiring to become secondary teachers were dragged by intrinsic motivations related to their love of teaching in the secondary stage, while pre-service teachers involved in primary education were motivated by their passion for teaching children. In Romanian educational setting, a study by Bobocea (2023) revealed that pre-service teachers' choices were mostly affected by intrinsic factors, while a study in a Croatian setting conducted by Ivanec and Defar (2023) revealed that the intrinsic value of teaching is rated highest, followed by altruistic then extrinsic values. Wang et al. (2020) concluded that teachers in Scottish educational settings were mainly motivated by altruistic factors such as helping children and positively impacting their lives, as well as intrinsic factors such as career enjoyment, perceived self-efficacy, in addition to extrinsic factors such as income and job security. Most participants believed that teaching is a challenging and demanding profession that is highly underpaid, but their sense of contributing to society drove them into teaching. Teachers select their profession because of their professional competencies. The authors implied that even though participants were mainly driven by intrinsic and altruistic factors, extrinsic factors may affect their decision to remain in the profession. This was supported by Alexander et al. (2020) who revealed that preservice teachers in Australia value intrinsic (positive teacher perception and teaching and subject interest) and altruistic factors with lower emphasis on extrinsic values. Other studies also confirmed that subject matter knowledge and interest are important for pursuing a teaching career (Wang & Zhang, 2021; Tang et al., 2020; Ivanec, 2020; Fuchs et al., 2022). Ivanec (2020) also found that prospective teachers are influenced by intrinsic and altruistic factors as well as self-efficacy and to a lesser extent extrinsic factors. Fuchs et al. (2022) cited other studies that revealed that intrinsic and altruistic factors were prevalent as motivators for highschoolers to choose education as a career. Their study

revealed that highschoolers perceived intrinsic and altruistic factors as prime motivators for pursuing a teaching career. Further, Haruna and Sackey (2023) found that all types of motivation affected teachers' choices, but altruistic factors mostly influence teachers' initial motivation in Ghana's Basic education, mainly teachers' love for children and the desire to shape and influence them as well as considering teaching as an honorable profession.

Interestingly, Bastick (2000) found that intrinsic and altruistic motivations affect teachers in developed countries, while teachers in developing countries are more extrinsically motivated. On the other hand, Onyefulu et al. (2023) revealed that teachers in developing countries such as Jamaica, Poland, and Turkey were mostly motivated by intrinsic factors followed by extrinsic ones, and to a lesser significance altruistic factors. Whereas Obiagu (2023) argued that in developing countries such as Zimbabwe and Nigeria, extrinsic factors, such as salary, working conditions, job transferability and socialization influences, including referrals by family and friends ranked highly as motivating factors. The author also concluded that altruistic factors, such as contributing to society, were the highest motivating factors for preservice teachers' choice of teaching. Tang et al. (2020) concluded that in developed cities such as Hong Kong, where the teaching profession is highly regarded and properly paid, with less work challenges, intrinsic factors such as interest in teaching characterizes millennial preservice teachers' intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, self-development and an ideal lifestyle are highly rated intrinsic motivators.

McCreight (2000) explained that students may avoid the teaching profession due to various reasons, including external factors like salary, promotions, vacancies, teaching requirements, workload, professional development, and job market options. These factors can either strengthen students' desire to stay in the education major or lead to disappointment and dissatisfaction (Suryani et al., 2016). Additionally, low emphasis on professional development and lack of career advancement opportunities can also impact students' motives in teaching. Overall, external factors play a crucial role in shaping students' attitudes toward teaching. Kwok-Wai (2004) found out that extrinsic factors, such as salary, stability, holidays, and easy job opportunities, are more valued than other extrinsic factors like inspiration and social contribution. Further, a study in the USA by McCreight (2000) showed that there is a shortage of teachers due to low salaries, unpreparedness for teaching, and rigorous certification examinations. This was confirmed by Fuchs et al. (2022) which emphasized that being underpaid as teachers as well as the working conditions are determinants for pursuing a teaching career. Similarly, a study in the Romanian context showed that subjects aged 18- 28 are less interested in the teaching profession due to low income and social status (Anghelache, 2014). On the contrary, a study conducted in Zimbabwe highlighted that students' motivation to study teacher education is based on their future salary (Mudavanhu, 2015). Moreover, in Italy, participants appreciate material benefits, external rewards, and secure progression prospects (Cornali, 2018). In Malaysia, Tang et al. (2020) found that millennial preservice teachers valued extrinsic factors such as financial security and work-life balance. Further, in their study, Wang and Zhang (2021) confirmed that preservice second language teachers in China were more interested in extrinsic factors such as job stability, salaries, and future opportunities for development. Pauwels et al. (2022) also found that work perspectives such as salary and vacations are extrinsic factors that affect teachers' motivation.

Additionally, it has been found that guidance counselors, along with parents and teachers, significantly impact pre-entry selection criteria (Perez & McDonough, 2008). Subramaniam, Ariff and Idris's study (2012) found that 'teacher' and 'family' factors were more important in pre-entry selection criteria. Close family members can influence a student's decision by providing valuable insights. Family and social factors are the most significant influences on students' preferences regarding their academic careers, while economic factors had no effect. Chinese students are motivated to become teachers for rewards, but disparities in career choices are linked to student interests, academic performance, and parents' wishes (Arif et al., 2019). Further, Richter et al. (2021) and Fuchs et al. (2022) found that social influences, such as parents, family members, teachers, and peers, also play a significant role in a teacher's decision to pursue a teaching career. However, in some cases, research results demonstrate that teachers did not intend to be teachers and they took up the profession by chance (Richter et al., 2021).

### **Gender and motivation**

It is generally known that female teachers dominate the teaching profession (Mukminin et al., 2017). Females prioritize their work enjoyment, teaching challenge, and schedule allowing parenthood, while males prioritize responsibility that comes with teaching, long vacations, and career change (Azman, 2013). Mukminin et al. (2017) found that the intellectual aspect of teacher education programs significantly influences females to become teachers. In their study, Sharif et al. (2014) stressed that gender is an important factor that influences the decision to become a teacher, especially in the UAE. The authors also argued that male students may be discouraged and pressured by their friends and family from pursuing a teaching career. Furthermore, the study revealed that female students are more likely to choose teaching as a first choice, whereas male students would rather choose something else. It was found that intrinsic factors such as the desire to work with children primarily motivated female students. Interestingly, the study revealed that male participants were slightly more altruistically motivated to teach than their female counterparts.

In general, studies revealed that females valued intrinsic factors while males highly perceived extrinsic factors (Wang & Zhang, 2021). In Fuertes et al. (2020)'s study, intrinsic motivation was found to be higher in female participants, while male participants valued self-efficacy factors. Furthermore, the authors concluded that males enrolling in educational studies reflected female characteristics. Pauwels et al. (2022) also revealed that subject and student orientation factors (intrinsic factors), as well as work perspectives such as salary and vacations (extrinsic), are prime motivators; however male participants reflected more preference for extrinsic factors than females, yet both females and males perceived the work dynamic in education as a motivator to pursue a teaching degree. Haruna and Sackey (2023) also found that extrinsic factors such as salary expectations were more evident in male participants than in female ones, concluding that female teachers were more driven by their love to children and passion for teaching. In the African context, female teachers were found to be more intrinsically and altruistically motivated to teach, while male teachers were motivated by extrinsic factors (Obiagu, 2023). Furthermore, Alexander et al. (2020) revealed that males show lower levels of altruistic factors and tend to be more motivated by their subject of choice, while scoring lower than females on intrinsic factors such as passion of teaching. In contrary to this, Ivanec (2020) revealed that female teachers were more motivated by extrinsic factors such as having more family time.

Moreover, the UAE and the Arab world have a high percentage of female teachers in primary schools due to females' intrinsic and biological affinity for childcare (Dickson & Le Roux, 2012). Therefore, socio-cultural beliefs play an influential role in motivating women's career choices. A study from the UAE context found a significant positive correlation between female students and their intention to teach, with the phrase "education is a feminine profession" being frequently heard (Sharif et al., 2014). On the other hand, males in the UAE are more likely to pursue education due to extrinsic motives, such as higher wages and financial responsibilities (Giersch, 2021). Factors contributing to male students' decline to teach include fear of peer harassment and making more money in other occupations (Dickson & Le Roux, 2012). Azman's (2013) study in Northern Ireland confirms Sharif, Hossan and McMinn's (2014) findings about salary, status, and family opinions. Although cultural motives influence teacher career choices, practical reasons may also play a role in such decisions. Dickson and Le Roux (2012) found no intrinsic or altruistic motivations among Emirati male teachers in Abu Dhabi, indicating that males' motives in the UAE are all extrinsic.

### **Methodology**

This research adopted quantitative positivist research paradigm to describe the phenomenon under study in order to draw a valid and objective conclusion.

### **Study sample**

The sample consisted of 708 students, with 199 motivated students who are interested in enrolling in the COE at UAEU. Researchers used simple random sampling to select students, as the university had

14,387 students by 2020. A stratified sample was then used to divide the population into homogeneous subpopulations based on specific characteristics, such as motivation or demotivation. The study sample was motivated students ( $n = 199$ ) with 154 females and 45 males.

### **Data collection instrument**

The research instrument consisted of two questionnaires titled Factors Affecting Students' Motivation to Enroll in the COE. The questionnaires were designed to assess students' motivation and identify factors affecting their enrollment. The first part asked for personal and organizational information, while the second part had 18 items covering career advancement, personal and societal needs, admission, and work conditions. The questionnaire was developed using a five-point Likert scale, with response duration taking less than 7 minutes. The questionnaire was available in Arabic and English, allowing respondents to read it in their preferred language of choice, enhancing their understanding and response speed.

### **Reliability and validity of the instrument**

The researchers employed a judgmental approach to establish content validity, involving literature reviews and expert evaluations (Taherdoost, 2016). They contacted five expert professors and Ph.D. students to gather input and feedback on the tool, rather than the three researchers who worked on it. They sent an email questionnaire requesting their judgment and feedback (Ayre & Scally, 2014). Cronbach's alpha test was used to measure the internal consistency amongst the study variables, as well as the reliability of the sub scales as in Table 1.

Prior to conducting the analytical tests, we tested the reliability of 18 items of the study's questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha test. The results revealed an excellent overall reliability level ( $\alpha = 0.818$ ). The 18 items in the questionnaire data were divided into three factors that reflected the main study variables, which are Career Advancement and Opportunities, Personal and Social Needs, Admission and Work Conditions. The internal reliability using Cronbach's alpha test was once again performed for each construct. Table 1 depicts  $\alpha$  scores of the internal reliability coefficient, Cronbach's alpha, of 0.785 for Career Advancement and Opportunities, 0.698 for Personal and Societal Needs, 0.728 for Admission and Work Conditions.

### **Procedure**

Ethical approval was obtained from the UAEU Research Ethics Committee (ERS\_2022\_8482). The participants consented to take part in the study and could withdraw at any time. The questionnaire was distributed to subjects via email after official contact with the research office, the advising unit of the COE, and the UAEU's registration unit. Altogether, 708 students completed the questionnaire. We considered only the motivated ones as the sample for this study and analysis. This number was 199 altogether. The data collection was done during the spring semester of the 2022 academic year.

### **Analysis and interpretation**

Data was analyzed with factor analysis to construct the composite variables for the factors that motivated students to join the COE. Then, composite average scale values were computed for each variable by using the codes 5 for strongly agree, 4 for agree, 3 for don't know, 2 for disagree, and 1 for strongly disagree. These average values for each scale variable were examined for normality. Since the composite

**Table 1.** Reliability coefficients for the three composite variables (Career Advancement and Opportunities, Personal and Social Needs, Admission and Work Conditions) and the overall scale.

Constructs	N	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Career Advancement and Opportunities sub-scale	199	.785	7
Personal and Societal Needs sub-scale	199	.698	6
Admission and Work Conditions sub- scale	199	.728	5
Scale reliability	199	.818	18

scale variable values were found to be not normally distributed, the data were analyzed through a one-sample Wilcoxon signed rank test for students' motivation level for each factor, an independent sample Mann-Whitney test for gender differences, an independent sample Kruskal-Wallis test for the academic year differences, regression, and non-parametric correlation analysis for interrelationship of the variables.

## Results

One hundred and ninety-nine responses were recorded for motivation to join the COE and qualified for data analysis. Data were analyzed through a normality test (Table 2), a one-sample Wilcoxon signed rank test (Tables 3–5), the independent samples Mann-Whitney test for gender differences (Table 6), and the independent samples Kruskal-Wallis test for academic year differences (Tables 7 and 8).

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality for the variables in Table 2 showed that the three variables that were related to students' motivation to enroll in the COE were not normally distributed ( $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the remaining tests were performed using non-parametric tests (e.g., one-sample Wilcoxon signed rank test, Mann-Whitney U-test, and Kruskal-Wallis test). To examine whether these differences were statistically significant, one-sample Wilcoxon signed rank tests were performed (Tables 5-7). The results for each thematic area have been discussed below.

### Career Advancement and opportunities

The results about education students' perceptions towards their Career Advancement and Opportunities are presented in Table 3. The results of the one-sample Wilcoxon signed rank test for Career Advancement and Opportunities to enroll in Education in the UAE University in the spring semester of the academic year 2021-2022 showed that the undergraduate students had overall statistically significant motivation to join Education College ( $z = 9.148$ ,  $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). Moreover, the results showed that their view on "One with a degree in the field of education can work in various functional fields outside the Ministry of Education" was statistically significant ( $z = 8.853$ ,  $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, they had a

**Table 2.** Test of normality for the variables related to Career Advancement and Opportunities, Personal and Social Needs, Admission and Work Conditions and overall students' motivation to enroll in the College of Education.

Subscales	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig	Statistic	df	Sig
Personal and Social Needs sub-scale	.099	199	<.001	.948	199	<.001
Career Advancement and Opportunities sub-scale	.056	199	.200*	.984	199	.021
Admission and Work Conditions sub-scale	.145	199	<.001	.915	199	<.001

\*This is a lower bound of the true significance.

**Table 3.** One-sample Wilcoxon signed rank test for Career Advancement and Opportunities (Test value = 3 from the 5-point Likert-scale items).

Item No	Item/Variable	Total N	Test Statistic	Standard Error	Standardized Test Statistic	Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)
18	One with a degree in the field of Education can work in various functional fields outside the Ministry of Education	199	11592.000	572.869	8.853	.000
17	I think that teaching career development is better than other careers	199	8392.000	493.430	6.134	<.001
16	I believe that there is an ease of moving up the career ladder in the field of education	199	5641.500	424.478	2.794	.005
11	I like to work in education because vacations for teachers are generally long	199	7796.500	479.972	5.518	<.001
10	Salaries and benefits are attractive in the field of education in the UAE	199	8626.000	494.870	6.589	<.001
6	I want to pursue graduate studies in Education to obtain higher degrees	199	10668.500	525.975	9.230	.000
4	Studying an Education major is easier compared to other Sciences for me	199	8014.000	494.234	5.359	<.001
	Career Advancement and Opportunities sub-scale	199	16158.000	764.117	9.148	.000

statistically significant positive interest regarding “I think that teaching career development is better than other careers” ( $z = 6.134, p = < 0.001 < 0.05$ ), and “I believe that there is an ease of moving up the career ladder in the field of education” ( $z = 2.794, p = .005 < 0.05$ ), and “I like to work in education because vacations for teachers are generally long” ( $z = 5.518, p = < 0.001 < 0.05$ ), and “Salaries and benefits are attractive in the field of education in the UAE” ( $z = 6.589, p = < 0.001 < 0.05$ ), and “I want to pursue graduate studies in education to obtain higher degrees” ( $z = 9.230, p = 0.00 < 0.05$ ), and “Studying in education major is easier compared to other sciences for me” ( $z = 5.359, p = < 0.001 < 0.05$ ) (Table 3).

An independent sample Mann-Whitney U-test (Table 6) for gender differences in joining education in the UAEU showed that there was a statistically significant difference between male and female students in terms of their perceptions of Career Advancement and Opportunities factors (Female: Mean Rank = 105.35,  $n = 154$ ; Male: Mean Rank = 81.70,  $n = 45, z = -2.428$ , and  $p = .015 < 0.05$ ). The Kruskal-Wallis test (Table 7) showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the students in different academic years in their perceptions of Admission and Work Conditions.

### Personal and societal needs

Table 4 shows the results of the one-sample Wilcoxon signed rank test for UAEU students’ perceptions of the Personal and Social Needs factors that motivate them to enroll. The results showed that the UAEU students had an overall statistically positive agreement ( $z = 11.830, p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). Moreover, the results showed that their view on “I have an Interest in the study of education” was statistically significantly positive ( $z = 11.798, p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, they had a statistically significant positive interest regarding “teaching children”, “working in the field of education to get a job”, and “requirements of Emirati Society” ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 4). An independent sample Mann-Whitney U-test (Table 6) for gender differences in agreement on Personal and Social Needs factors showed that there was a statistically significant difference between male and female students (Female: Mean Rank = 106.17,  $n = 154$ ; Male: Mean Rank = 78.88,  $n = 45; z = -2.808$ , and  $p = .005 > 0.05$ ). The Kruskal-Wallis test (Table 7) for the differences in students’ perceptions of the Personal and Social Needs factors found significant statistics ( $z = 9.493, df = 4, p = 0.050 < 0.05$ ). The differences were observed between the fourth-year students and first, second, third, and fifth-year students, and they were more based on the pairwise comparisons of the academic year ( $p = < 0.05$ ) (Table 8).

### Admission and work conditions

Table 5 shows the results of the one-sample Wilcoxon signed rank test for Admission and Work Conditions factors that may affect the motivation of UAEU students to enroll in education. The results showed that the students have significant disagreements on the items in this domain. Their views on “In schools or in the educational sector, the workload and demands are less than in other professions” were statistically significant and negative ( $z = -3.395, p = < .001 < 0.05$ ). Likewise, their views on “I like to enroll in education programs because admission to the job market in the field of education has few

**Table 4.** One-sample Wilcoxon signed rank test for Personal and Social Needs (Test value = 3 from the 5-point Likert-scale items).

Item No	Item/Variable	Total N	Test Statistic	Standard Error	Standardized Test Statistic	Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)
1	I have an Interest in the study of education	199	16857.500	699.683	11.798	.000
2	I have an interest in teaching children	199	16488.000	693.723	11.500	.000
3	I like working in the field of education because it is convenient to me as men are separated from women	199	6909.000	455.143	4.644	<.001
7	The UAE culture highly respects educators and teachers	199	16812.000	716.219	11.071	.000
9	I intend to choose the education major to get a job in the Ministry of Education	199	8787.000	470.350	8.040	<.001
12	The Emirati societal needs require education specialists and that motivates me to choose education specialization	199	13434.000	611.538	10.361	.000
	Personal and Societal Needs sub-scale	199	19390.000	806.403	11.830	.000

**Table 5.** One-sample Wilcoxon signed rank test for Admission and Work Conditions (Test value = 3 from the 5-point Likert-scale items).

Item No	Item/Variable	Total N	Test Statistic	Standard Error	Standardized Test Statistic	Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)
15	In schools or in the educational sector, the workload and demands are less than other professions.	199	3416.500	468.077	-3.395	<.001
14	I like to enroll in the College of Education because admission to the job market in the field of education has few requirements.	199	2840.000	443.152	-4.102	<.001
13	I like to enroll in the Education College, because the working conditions in this field can be suitable for me.	199	2844.500	580.098	-6.617	<.001
8	The teaching profession is more suitable for women than for men in our culture.	199	6442.500	518.276	1.359	.174
5	I have no other option but to study at the College of Education because of my grades.	199	1834.500	664.351	-9.229	.000
	Admission and Work Conditions sub- scale	199	2938.000	721.750	-7.720	<.001

**Table 6.** Independent-samples Mann-Whitney U test for gender differences.

Statistic	Career Advancement and Opportunities	Personal and Society Needs	Admission and Work Conditions
Total N	199	199	199
Mann-Whitney U	2641.500	2514.500	3529.500
Wilcoxon W	3676.500	3549.500	4564.500
Test Statistic	2641.500	2514.500	3529.500
Female N	154	154	154
Male N	45	45	45
Female mean rank	105.35	106.17	99.58
Male mean rank	81.70	78.88	101.43
Standard Error	339.133	338.438	338.178
Standardized Test Statistic	-2.428	-2.808	.191
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)	.015	.005	.849

**Table 7.** Independent-samples Kruskal-Wallis Test for academic year differences.

Statistic	Career Advancement Opportunities	Personal and Society Needs	Admission and Work Conditions
Total N	199	199	199
Test Statistic	3.659 <sup>a,b</sup>	9.493 <sup>a</sup>	3.957 <sup>a,b</sup>
Degree Of Freedom	4	4	4
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)	.454	.050	.412

requirements", "I like to enroll in the Education College because working conditions in this field can be suitable for me", and "I have no other option but to study at the COE because of my grades" were all statistically significant and negative at the 0.05 level of significance (Table 5). One item whose results were not significant was that "The teaching profession is more suitable for women than for men in our culture" ( $z = 1.359$ ,  $p = .174 > 0.05$ ). The overall scale level of students' agreement on the items of Admission and Work Conditions factors was statistically significantly negative ( $z = -7.720$ ,  $p = <.001 < 0.05$ ) (Table 5).

An independent sample Mann-Whitney U-test (Table 6) for students' perceptions of the Admission and Work Conditions factors showed that there was no statistically significant difference between male and female students (Female: Mean Rank = 99.58,  $n = 101.43$ ,  $z = .191$ , and  $p = .849 > 0.05$ ). Similarly, the Kruskal-Wallis test (Table 7) showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the students in different academic years on their perceptions of Admission and Work Conditions.

## Discussion

The current study found that UAEU students were significantly motivated to enroll in college and pursue education, with two main domains: 1) Personal and Social Needs and 2) Career Advancement and Opportunities, with positively significant factors ( $z = 9.910$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $0.05$ ). Students felt that these factors impacted their desire and motivation. However, their responses to the admission and work conditions factors were significantly negative affirming that these specific factors demotivated them from pursuing

**Table 8.** Pairwise comparisons of academic year.

Sample 1-Sample 2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig	Adj. Sig. <sup>a</sup>
4RTH-1ST	24.124	11.774	2.049	.040	.405
4RTH-2ND	27.338	11.647	2.347	.019	.189
4RTH-MORE	-31.054	13.915	-2.232	.026	.256
4RTH-3RD	33.415	13.295	2.513	.012	.120

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same.

Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .050.

<sup>a</sup>Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.

teaching as a career. Admission and Work Conditions and Career Advancement and Opportunities factors were significant predictors of Personal and Social Needs factors, indicating that these factors significantly impact students' motivation to enroll in college ( $B = -.079$ ,  $p = <.001$ ). The study found significant gender differences in Personal and Social Needs and Career Advancement and Opportunities domains for males and females, with females scoring higher on these factors. Fourth-year students had a distinct view of these needs compared to other academic years. The findings align with previous research and contrast with other findings. The unique Factor Analysis revealed that factors motivating students to enroll in education programs were categorized differently under three domains: Career Advancement and Opportunities, Personal and Social Needs, and Admission and Work Conditions. The study found that the teaching profession is not considered a feminine profession in the UAEU context, contrary to expectations. The respondents did not believe that teaching is a feminine profession, which contradicts a previous study from the UAE that cited education as a feminine profession (Sharif et al., 2014). Additionally, motivated students disagreed significantly with factors in admission and work conditions, suggesting that these factors do not motivate them to study education. Work conditions and demands negatively affected students' motivation in other investigations, similarly to an American study where new teachers experienced burnout and were more optimistic before graduation (Gavish & Friedman, 2010). The authors discussed how preservice teachers had unrealistic perceptions of the working dynamics of teaching at the beginning of their education which changed later on due to a lack of appreciation and professional recognition by both students and public, as well as lack of supportive and collaborative structure. This was also reflected in Wang and Zhang (2021)' study which revealed that preservice second language teachers in China were more interested in extrinsic factors such as job stability, salaries, and future opportunities for development.

In contrast, according to McCreigh's study (2000) in the American context, the job market admission requirements negatively impacted students' motivation to study education. Students disagree that studying education is the only option because of their grades. They have other options they can choose from, but they prefer this option. This differs from Arif, Iqbal and Khalil's (2019) study, which found that academic performance affects career choices. No gender differences or differences based on academic year, or admission and work conditions factors were found. The Personal and Social Needs factors of the study revealed that participants have an interest in education and teaching children, which motivates them to pursue education. According to Kyriacou and Coulthard (2000), training teachers select teaching because they believed the job would provide desired career influences, such as commitment and contributions to society. This was reflected in a study by Fuchs et al. (2022), which affirmed that higher social utility, which is related to altruistic motivation, implies more interest in teaching as a career. The UAE culture highly respects educators and teachers and identifying individuals' interest in continuing education is crucial for UAE academics and policymakers (Mau et al., 2008). Moreover, the current study found that Emirati social needs education specialists based on participants' perceptions. Abdusheikh (2012) found that many Emiratization initiatives have been implemented to attract UAE citizens to teach, but the impact of these initiatives on the field of education has not been examined yet. Previous research by Sass et al. (2011) emphasized the importance of support for students' development in the teaching profession. Sharif et al. (2014) found that three-quarters of education students desire to teach, which is likely good news for UAE teachers. Obtaining a job in the Ministry of Education is another motive for enrolling in the education faculty. However, extrinsic motivation had a minor influence on students' choices to become teachers. Furthermore, there was a reduction in the mean extrinsic motivational score, suggesting that teaching is not as rewarding in the UAE as other professions. This was also

confirmed by Tang et al. (2020)'s study which revealed that millennial preservice teachers in Hong Kong value extrinsic factors such as financial security and work-life balance.

Participants in this study also like working in the field of education because it is convenient for them, as men are separated from women in the personal and societal domains. On the other hand, the career advancement and opportunities domain reveal that students are significantly motivated to enter education colleges to advance their careers. Wang and Zhang (2021) also confirmed that Chinese preservice second language teachers were also motivated by future opportunities for development. These factors align with the literature review, suggesting that students are drawn to education colleges for various functional fields outside the Ministry of Education. The motivation factor related to education offers a variety of opportunities, making students more likely to enroll in a college of education. However, neither the literature findings nor the students' perceptions of this factor are supported. Concerning the factors "I believe that career development in teaching is better than in other professions", "I believe that moving up the ladder in the education field is easier", and "wanting to pursue graduate studies in education to obtain higher degrees" they are all considered prosperous to students. Through them, an individual will prosper and grow professionally in comparison with other domains. The findings of the factors "I believe that moving up the ladder in the education field is easier" and "wanting to pursue graduate studies in education to obtain higher degrees" are similar to the literature. In Indonesia, one of the factors that affects students' motivations to become teachers is the secure progression prospects, as revealed by Suryani et al. (2016). Similarly, the finding of the factor "I believe that career development in teaching is better than in other professions" is consistent with previous studies. Based on McCreight (2000), low emphasis on professional development and a lack of career advancement opportunities in the USA are also factors affecting the motivation for a teaching career. The literature, however, does not compare teaching development with other careers. Therefore, it may have something to do with the UAE context. In addition, the factor "studying education as a major is easier compared to other sciences" indicates that students are motivated to pursue education because it is easier than other majors and programs. It seems that this motivation factor is new and important because the results of the findings are significant.

The results of the factors "I like to work in education because vacations for teachers are generally long" and "salaries and benefits are attractive in the field of education in the UAE are in accordance with the literature. In that sense, studies confirm that extrinsic factors such as salary, vacations, promotions, and vacancies are prime motivators to enter the field of education. Additionally, the stimulating and challenging nature of the teaching job as well as the opportunities for professional development may eventually strengthen their desire to be attracted and maintain the major of education. On the other hand, recent challenges in education, increasing workload, and societal perceptions of teaching may push teachers—to leave with disappointment and dissatisfaction (Azman, 2013; Anghelache, 2014; Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2012; Gavish & Friedman, 2010; Kwok-Wai, 2004; Johnston, 2010; McCreight, 2000; Mudavanhu, 2015; Mukminin et al., 2017; Roness & Smith, 2010; Suryani et al., 2016; Ivanec, 2020). This leads to the mention that extrinsic factors of the career, which are the tangible and not tangible rewards such as salary, stability, holidays, and easy finding a job, were important factors that affected the motivations of the teachers to join the teaching career (Kwok-Wai, 2004).

As for gender differences, female students are more motivated by career advancement and opportunity factors than male students, although both males and females are significantly motivated by career advancement and opportunities. These findings contradict the literature, specifically the factors related to salaries and benefits in the UAE. In the literature, male students are more likely to enroll and practice teaching because of the salary and incentives (Obiagu, 2023; Haruna & Sackey, 2023). As such, more males than females rated 'teaching would bring a lot of responsibility', 'longer holidays', and 'a change of career' as very important "(Azman, 2013). Moreover, it has been found that males tend to be attracted to extrinsic motives when making career decisions. Giersch (2021) suggested that males are primarily concerned with making higher wages because they are financially responsible for their families. This has been confirmed in a study conducted in the UAE, which contradicts our study. According to Dickson and Le Roux (2012), there are no intrinsic or altruistic motivations among Emirati (male) teachers in Abu Dhabi, meaning that their motives are all extrinsic, whereas female students are more motivated to obtain higher degrees and career advancement. A study conducted by Mukminin et al. (2017) confirmed

that one of the significant factors that influence females to become teachers is the intellectual aspect of teacher education programs, which provides graduates with more opportunities for academic advancement after graduation.

### **Implications and limitations**

This study presents several important implications. First, the studies investigating students' motivation to study and enroll in education programs in the UAE context are limited; therefore, this study fills a gap in the literature on this issue. Moreover, the findings of this study are essential to addressing the demotivation of students and their rejection of specializing in education which is reflected by the lack of Emirati teachers in the field. The perceptions of those who are not practicing teaching are important to shed light on the motivators of choosing teaching as a profession. Understanding the factors that affect their motivation helps policy makers and stakeholders in educational programs to recruit and attract more students to this field. Additionally, it can help in creating meaningful opportunities for prospective teachers to achieve their professional goals and enhance their commitment and enthusiasm in teaching. The results of this study also raise the need for policy makers and educational leaders to allocate equal attention to both intrinsic and extrinsic values of teaching in an attempt to make teaching both internally and externally rewarding. This can be achieved by supporting teachers in achieving their professional goals while mediating distracting factors related to excessive workload and challenges that deters them from following their intrinsic and altruistic values of helping children and contributing to their societies. On the other hand, by revealing that there are differences in the factors that motivate male students from female students, this is an indication that this must be taken into consideration when recruiting the male students, who are already in smaller numbers in the field.

There were some limitations in this investigation revolving around the needed to identify the exact motivation factors of males and females toward enrolling in the faculty of education. In addition, the study did not delve into the reasons as to why females were more interested in teaching than males. On the other side, time restriction presented itself as a major limitation in the sense that the results of the demotivated students were not included in the study, which might have affected the results of this study. As we mentioned that 708 students participated in this study, but we only addressed the data of those who are motivated. It would be an added value to investigate perception of students who are demotivated to pursue teaching as a career and to explore methods to address their demotivation. Another limitation was that this study is limited to students at the college of education at the UAEU, making the sample size relatively small, thus it is challenging to generalize the findings to preservice teachers. Furthermore, the number of male participants is significantly smaller than the female on (almost a third) which also can lead to ungeneralizable results. Additionally, the study relied on questionnaires, thus it may not be able to completely investigate the complex nature of motivation, whereas applying a mixed-methods approach such as conducting interviews may provide a better understanding of the issue.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

Globally, educational systems and governments are facing challenges related to shortage of qualified teachers resulting from decreasing rates of enrollment in teacher educational programs. These challenges extend to include retaining in-service teachers who leave the profession due to high levels of burnout, increasing work demands, and lower appreciation for the teaching profession. Furthermore, there is a worldwide gender disparity where females dominate the teaching profession. Motivation plays a vital role in attracting and retaining teachers, and in improving the quality of teaching, ultimately enhancing educational outcomes.

There has been only limited research conducted on the motivation of males and females to pursue teaching, in the context of the UAE. This study revealed that all categories of motivation, intrinsic, extrinsic, and altruistic, were the main motives for students to enroll in education programs. It was also found that female students tend to be more motivated to teach than male ones, but both were equally driven by extrinsic factors such as salaries and benefits.

Thus, society should focus on implementing initiatives to acknowledge these motivations and their effect on students' decisions. Some relevant recommendations are to explore the motivation of the in-service teachers to see whether it remains stable or changes after facing reality, since there are different factors affecting it. In addition, it is very important to identify the initiatives the UAE implemented to attract students to work in teaching and study their impact on the students' motivations. Extending on that idea, this raises the need to explore the role of professional development and teacher self-efficacy in motivating them to become teachers. Additionally, since intrinsic factors plays an important role in motivating undergraduates to pursue teaching as a career, it would be beneficial to explore the influence of personality traits on preservice teachers' perceptions of the demands of the profession which could influence their motivation. Further future research could be conducted using different methodologies to investigate more details regarding the differences between males and females and employ the results to improve the education sector as a priority of UAE policies. Finally, there is a need to conduct the study at a larger scale and at several universities to validate the findings in the UAE context, particularly since some of the factors have not been examined in other studies.

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