This is an open access article under the
Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

PROBLEMS
OF EDUCATION
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Vol. 84, No. 5, 2026

MOTIVATIONAL PREDICTORS OF SATISFACTION WITH THE CHOICE OF PROFESSION AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

Tihana Kokanović, Siniša Opić
University of Zagreb, Croatia
E-mail: tihana.kokanovic@ufzg.hr, sinisa.opic@ufzg.hr

Abstract

The teacher shortage is becoming a growing problem, especially as many leave the profession soon after entering it, so it is important to understand not only why people choose to become teachers, but also what shapes their subsequent satisfaction with that choice. Using a cross-sectional design, this study examined how far the motivational dimensions of the FIT-Choice framework (Watt & Richardson, 2007) account for satisfaction with the choice of teaching among primary school teachers, and additionally described perceived job demands and beliefs about the profession as background indicators of the present professional climate. An online sample of 130 primary school teachers completed a FIT-Choice-based instrument, and the motivational variables were entered into a quantile regression model (q = 0.50). Three predictors reached statistical significance: prior learning and teaching experiences, the motivation to work with children, and perceived social influences. Intrinsic motivation, perceived teaching ability, and job security did not prove to be statistically significant. Notably, and against theoretical predictions, higher perceived social influence was linked to lower rather than higher satisfaction. Altogether, the model accounted for 35.1% of the variance in satisfaction (pseudo-R^2 = .351). The findings are discussed with reference to the FIT-Choice model and self-determination theory, and their implications for policies aimed at raising the social standing of teaching are considered.
Keywords: *FIT-Choice model, teaching motivation, satisfaction with choice of profession, quantile regression, prior teaching experiences*

Introduction

In contemporary education systems, the issue of teacher motivation and their professional stability is becoming increasingly important, particularly in the context of increasing job demands, changes in education policy, and challenges related to retaining quality teachers in the profession. People start teaching for various motivational, social, and professional reasons that intertwine, and these same reasons shape their satisfaction and engagement even after entering the profession (Watt & Richardson, 2007; Watt et al., 2012). Among the frameworks used to understand this motivation, the FIT-Choice model (Factors Influencing Teaching Choice; Watt & Richardson, 2007) has been particularly influential. Grounded in expectancy-value theory, it brings together intrinsic, altruistic, and extrinsic motives alongside perceptions of the profession and of one's own abilities (Watt & Richardson, 2007, 2012). Applications of the model in different cultural and educational contexts mostly confirmed its validity and stability (Suryani et al., 2016; Watt et al., 2012). Expectancy and value theory in its original form (Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield and Eccles, 2000) assumes that career decisions are based on two factors: the assessment of one's own competence for a particular activity and the subjective value attached to it. Building on this, researchers distinguish three broader constructs: expectations of success and beliefs about one's own ability, subjective values of the task (intrinsic, use and achievement value), and perceived difficulty of the task, i.e., the effort expected in the task (Eccles and

ISSN 1822-7864 (Print) ISSN 2538-7111 (Online) https://doi.org/10.33225/pec/26.84.763

PROBLEMS
OF EDUCATION
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Vol. 84, No. 5, 2026

Wigfield, 1995, according to Marušić et al., 2011). The FIT-Choice model translates these constructs into the specific context of choosing to teach, adding sociocultural elements unique to the profession.

Intrinsic Motivation and Altruistic Values

The FIT-Choice model gives particular weight to intrinsic and altruistic values, wanting to work with children, wanting to contribute to society, which tend to go together with greater satisfaction and longer careers in teaching (Suryani et al., 2016; Watt & Richardson, 2007). Extrinsic motives such as job security or working conditions, by contrast, correlate less strongly with engagement and satisfaction (Watt et al., 2012), a pattern that fits self-determination theory's claim that intrinsic motivation is the stronger driver of workplace satisfaction and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). More recent work complicates this picture, however. Klassen et al. (2011) found that motivational profiles shift across career stages, so that altruistic motivation present at entry can be reshaped by later professional experience, institutional context, and external pressure. De Clercq et al. (2022) similarly showed that intrinsic motivation, even without an initial group difference, can still buffer the effect of stressors on burnout and turnover intention. In the Australian context, Worthington et al. (2023) reported that teachers who cited intrinsic and altruistic reasons as their main motivation for entering the profession showed greater satisfaction and lower intention to leave the profession, regardless of objective working conditions, suggesting that the motives behind one's choice of teaching profession continue to shape their professional identity long after entering the profession.

Prior Learning and Teaching Experiences

Despite their importance for shaping and developing teachers' professional identity, prior learning and teaching experiences remain a relatively poorly researched construct. Within the FIT-Choice model, this construct is divided into two parts: the existence of inspiring teacher role models and positive learning and teaching experiences in a broader sense, both of which shape the aspirations and self-concept of future teachers (Richardson & Watt, 2006). Bandura's (1997) concept of self-efficacy offers one possible mechanism, observing competent teachers at work can build personal belief that one will one day teach well. Longitudinal research results support this, linking positive school experiences and inspiring role models to greater perceived competence and satisfaction later in the teaching profession (Flores & Day, 2006; Scheopner Torres, 2012). Drawing on Lortie's (1975) concept of "observational learning," Monobe and Host (2015) found that prospective teachers already have a picture of what teaching looks like, built over years of observing their own teachers from the role of students. When these early experiences are positive, the results of this research suggest that a lasting motivational foundation is created that carries over after the person actually begins working as a teacher.

Perceptions of Job Demands and Beliefs About the Profession

The way teachers perceive the profession itself, its social status, value, and degree of recognition is also significant, and a negative perception of the profession is associated with lower job satisfaction and weaker commitment (Watt & Richardson, 2007). Numerous studies have focused on perceived job demands, workload, emotional demands, and the pressure of maintaining a high level of professionalism, which increases the risk of burnout and leads to reduced levels of satisfaction with the profession (Lazarides et al., 2019). Within the FIT-Choice model, job demands include two dimensions: beliefs about the expertise that teaching requires and perceptions of workload and emotional demands, and neither of these necessarily

https://doi.org/10.33225/pec/26.84.763 ISSN 1822-7864 (Print) ISSN 2538-7111 (Online)

PROBLEMS
OF EDUCATION
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Vol. 84, No. 5, 2026

deter people from entering the profession. Watt et al. (2012) found that the demanding image of teaching can make the profession more attractive to individuals who perceive themselves as highly capable, although the high workload itself is usually a deterrent to entering the profession. Results of meta-analyses (Freedman and Appleman, 2009; Ingersoll and Strong, 2011) have indicated a significant rate of early attrition, particularly in the first few years after entry. Veenman (1984) attributed this less to the burden itself and more to the discrepancy between teachers' expectations and the reality they encounter, the so-called "reality shock", which is particularly damaging when initial beliefs about the profession were positive but unrealistic. Later work reinforces the link between motivation, well-being, and retention; intrinsic motivation and a sense of competence appear protective, while heavy demands and a negative view of the profession raise the risk of dissatisfaction (De Clercq et al., 2022). In a longitudinal study by Ferreira et al. (2021), it was found that perceived professionalism and emotional job demands predicted burnout mainly in teachers with weaker intrinsic motivation, while in intrinsically motivated teachers these predictors lost their predictive power. In this study, perceived job demands and beliefs about the profession are treated as descriptive, contextual indicators of the current professional climate rather than as predictors formally entered into the regression model; their predictive role is further discussed as a direction for future research.

Social Influences and Professional Identity

Within the FIT-Choice model, social influence represents a separate motivational dimension that includes how a person perceives the attitudes of friends, family, and colleagues towards their decision to choose a profession. Support from significant others can encourage career choice, while perceived disapproval can reduce satisfaction and identification with the profession (Richardson & Watt, 2006; Watt et al., 2012). Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and the professional identity literature (Beijaard et al., 2004) suggest one way of understanding this: that teachers' professional identity develops through the ongoing interaction of personal motivation, job beliefs, and external evaluations by others. When teachers have low social status, negative external perceptions of the profession can undermine this identity and, in turn, satisfaction with their career choice. Writing in the Croatian context, Domović (2011) argues that professional identity is shaped by the settings teachers work and develop in, so its strength depends not just on an individual's own motivation but on how much recognition the profession receives from society more broadly. Cross-country comparisons (Watt et al., 2012) show substantial variation in how teachers' social status is perceived, with these cultural differences moderating the link between motivation and satisfaction. Given that Croatian teachers occupy a relatively low financial position and the profession is not especially well regarded publicly (OECD, 2020), negative social influence may carry particular weight in this setting.

Satisfaction with Career Choice as an Outcome

Satisfaction with career choice is conceptualized in the literature as a cognitive and affective evaluation of the professional decision, distinct from the broader construct of job satisfaction. Whereas job satisfaction is a reactive outcome reflecting current working conditions, satisfaction with career choice has a more stable character and reflects an evaluation of the long-term career decision (Watt & Richardson, 2012). FIT-Choice measures it with three items covering satisfaction with the choice itself, happiness with the decision, and the extent of deliberation involved in entering the profession. Research shows a connection between satisfaction with the choice of profession and teachers' intention to remain in the profession, their professional engagement, and well-being (De Clercq et al., 2022; Richardson & Watt,

PROBLEMS
OF EDUCATION
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Vol. 84, No. 5, 2026

2006). A study conducted among Croatian primary school teachers showed that teaching approach is closely related to perceived self-efficacy, job and life satisfaction, and the emotions teachers experience in the classroom (Vidić and Miljković, 2019). Sabljar et al. (2020) further found that teachers in positions of greater responsibility, such as mentors and advisors, reported higher job satisfaction than their colleagues who did not advance professionally.

Research Aim and Research Questions

A great deal of research has looked at why people choose to teach, but far fewer studies connect the various FIT-Choice motivational dimensions to satisfaction with that choice, particularly among teachers who are already working in the profession. The aim of this study was therefore to examine the role of motivational factors defined by the FIT-Choice model in predicting satisfaction with the choice of teaching profession among primary school teachers, guided by two research questions:

RQ1: To what extent do FIT-Choice motivational factors predict primary school teachers' satisfaction with their choice of profession?

RQ2: Which of these motivational factors are the strongest predictors of satisfaction with their choice of profession?

Research Methodology

General Background

This study followed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design: motivational factors, beliefs about the profession, and perceived job demands were all measured at one time point, and their relationship to satisfaction with the choice of teaching was tested using quantile regression. The topic is significant because many education systems report a persistent shortage of qualified teachers, significant attrition from the profession, especially in the early years, and a decline in young people's interest in the teaching profession (OECD, 2020). As a result, researchers and policymakers are increasingly paying attention not only to the factors that attract people to the teaching profession, but also to the conditions under which they remain satisfied with their choice once they enter the profession, given that initial motivation does not guarantee lasting satisfaction. The Croatian education system faces similar challenges related to the social status of the profession, the demanding nature of teachers' daily work, and the retention of experienced staff (OECD, 2020), which further emphasizes the practical relevance of examining satisfaction with the choice of profession among already employed teachers. Given this aim, the study tested the following hypothesis:

H1: Motivational factors, as defined by the FIT-Choice model, will significantly predict satisfaction with choosing the teaching profession.

Perceived job demands and beliefs about the profession (social status, salary) were assessed descriptively as well (Table 1) but were not entered into the regression model as predictors; they were therefore not framed as separate, formally tested hypotheses but are instead discussed as directions for future research.

Sample

The study included 130 primary school teachers who voluntarily completed a questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed via email to elementary schools and posted in active teacher groups on social networks, but 130 teachers responded. The sample was still sufficient for the analysis, although future studies should certainly include a larger number

https://doi.org/10.33225/pec/26.84.763 ISSN 1822-7864 (Print) ISSN 2538-7111 (Online)

PROBLEMS
OF EDUCATION
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Vol. 84, No. 5, 2026

of respondents so that the results can be more reliably generalized to the entire population. Given the aforementioned limitation, the interpretation of the results obtained is approached with particular caution. The statistical power and generalizability of the results are discussed in the Limitations section. The sample is predominantly female (f = 122; 93.8%; m = 8; 6.2%), which reflects the demographic structure of the teaching staff in Croatia. Four age bands were represented: 23–30 years (n = 22; 16.9%), 31–40 years (n = 28; 21.5%), 41–50 years (n = 40; 30.8%), and over 50 years (n = 40; 30.8%). Most participants (66.9%) lived in a city, 32.3% in a rural area, and 0.8% on an island. Work experience was fairly evenly spread: up to 5 years (n = 28; 21.5%), 6–12 years (n = 19; 14.6%), 13–20 years (n = 33; 25.4%), 21–30 years (n = 27; 20.8%), and more than 30 years (n = 23; 17.7%). Data were collected in 2025. Participation was voluntary and anonymous; participants were told the purpose of the study and were free to withdraw at any point.

Instrument and Procedures

Data were collected using the Croatian adaptation of the FIT-Choice scale (Watt and Richardson, 2007), which measures motivational factors, beliefs about the profession, and perceived job demands through 57 items, arranged on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree / not at all like that) to 7 (strongly agree / completely like that). Based on the theoretical model, composite variables were formed representing latent motivational dimensions: (1) perceived teaching abilities (M = 5.84; SD = 1.05), (2) intrinsic motivation (M = 5.99; SD = 1.28), (3) job security (M = 4.07; SD = 1.51), (4) time for family (M = 3.95; SD = 1.29), (5) influence on children and adolescents (M = 5.61; SD = 1.38), (6) enhancement of social equity (M = 4.83; SD = 1.60), (7) social contribution (M = 5.45; SD = 1.29), (8) working with children/adolescents (M = 5.75; SD = 1.45), (9) prior learning and teaching experiences (M = 4.90; SD = 1.60), and (10) social influences (M = 4.67; SD = 1.88). Perceived job demands were captured through expertise (M = 5.94; SD = 1.02) and workload and demand (M = 6.28; SD = 0.91), while beliefs about the profession covered social status (M = 2.82; SD = 1.30) and salary (M = 2.58; SD = 1.47). Satisfaction with the choice of profession was measured by the composite variable Satisfaction (M = 5.65; SD = 1.41).

Data Analysis

Before running the regression, descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were computed for every composite variable to summarize the motivational, job-demand, and belief dimensions. The prediction model itself relied on median quantile regression (q = 0.50), chosen because unlike ordinary least-squares regression, it is robust to extreme values and yields more reliable parameter estimates when the outcome variable departs from normality. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

Research Results

On average, participants rated their motivational and job-related dimensions above the scale midpoint, with the highest mean values for intrinsic motivation and perceived teaching abilities, while beliefs about social status and salary were rated the lowest. Descriptive statistics for all composite variables are shown in Table 1.

PROBLEMS
OF EDUCATION
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Vol. 84, No. 5, 2026

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of the Composite Variables

Variable	*N*	Range	Min.	Max.	*M*	*SD*	Skewness	Kurtosis
Perceived teaching ability	130	6.00	1.00	7.00	5.84	1.05	-1.44	3.44
Intrinsic motivation	130	6.00	1.00	7.00	5.99	1.28	-1.60	2.45
Job security	130	6.00	1.00	7.00	4.07	1.51	-0.34	-0.56
Time for family	130	5.80	1.00	6.80	3.95	1.29	-0.29	-0.38
Influence on children and young people	130	6.00	1.00	7.00	5.61	1.38	-1.46	2.50
Enhancement of social equity	130	6.00	1.00	7.00	4.83	1.60	-0.65	0.03
Social contribution	130	6.00	1.00	7.00	5.45	1.29	-1.41	2.35
Working with children/ adolescents	130	6.00	1.00	7.00	5.75	1.45	-1.51	1.66
Prior learning and teaching experiences	130	6.00	1.00	7.00	4.90	1.60	-0.52	-0.71
Social influences	130	6.00	1.00	7.00	4.67	1.88	-0.52	-0.87
Job demands – Expertise	130	6.00	1.00	7.00	5.94	1.02	-1.73	5.04
Job demands-Workload and demandingness	130	6.00	1.00	7.00	6.28	0.91	-2.78	12.40
Social status	130	5.00	1.00	6.00	2.82	1.30	0.40	-0.67
Salary	130	6.00	1.00	7.00	2.58	1.47	0.89	0.12
Social dissuasion	130	6.00	1.00	7.00	3.86	1.61	-0.09	-0.83
Satisfaction	130	6.00	1.00	7.00	5.65	1.41	-1.51	2.72

Legend: *M*–mean; *SD*–Standard deviation

Table 1 shows that participants reported a high level of satisfaction with their choice of profession ($M = 5.65$; $SD = 1.41$), with a negative skew in the distribution (skewness = -1.51), indicating a concentration of responses at higher scale values. The same applies to intrinsic motivation ($M = 5.99$; $SD = 1.28$) and perceived teaching abilities ($M = 5.84$; $SD = 1.05$). These distributions show markedly negative to slightly positive skewness and leptokurtic to slightly platykurtic distributions. Interestingly, participants perceived high job demands, particularly in the workload and demand dimension ($M = 6.28$; $SD = 0.91$; skewness = -2.78). At the same time, beliefs about the profession in the domains of salary ($M = 2.58$; $SD = 1.47$) and social status ($M = 2.82$; $SD = 1.30$) had low values, reflecting a negative evaluation of the material and status-related aspects of the profession.

Table 2
Quantile Regression Model Values

Model Quality (q = 0.5) a,b,c	
Pseudo R Squared	.351
Mean Absolute Error (MAE)	.6610

a. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction
b. Model: (Intercept), Perceived teaching abilities, Intrinsic motivation, Job security, Time for family, Influence on children and adolescents, Enhancement of social equity, Social contribution, Working with children/adolescents, Prior learning and teaching experiences, Social influences
c. Method: Simplex algorithm

PROBLEMS
OF EDUCATION
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Vol. 84, No. 5, 2026

The quantile regression model for predicting satisfaction with career choice (q = 0.50) achieved pseudo-R^2 = 0.351 with mean absolute error (MAE) = 0.661, indicating moderate to high explained variance of the criteria (Table 2).

Table 3
Parameter Estimates

Parameter	Coefficient	*SE*	*t*	*df*	*p*	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
(Intercept)	-.015	.4446	-.033	119	.974	-.895	.866
Perceived teaching abilities	.166	.1272	1.302	119	.195	-.086	.417
Intrinsic motivation .019		.1101	.173	119	.863	-.199	.237
Job security	-.004	.0593	-.075	119	.940	-.122	.113
Time for family	.066	.0803	.817	119	.415	-.093	.224
Influence on children and adolescents	.161	.0984	1.639	119	.104	-.034	.356
Enhancement of social equity	-.016	.0791	-.198	119	.844	-.172	.141
Social contribution	-.029	.1246	-.235	119	.814	-.276	.217
Working with children/adolescents	.354	.1107	3.203	119	.002**	.135	.573
Prior learning and teaching experiences	1.546	.2841	5.442	119	.000**	.984	2.109
Social influences	-1.248	.2202	-5.668	119	.000**	-1.684	-.812

Note. Parameter Estimates (q = 0.5) a,b. ** p < .01
a. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction
b. Model: (Intercept), Perceived teaching abilities, Intrinsic motivation, Job security, Time for family, Influence on children and adolescents, Enhancement of social equity, Social contribution, Working with children/adolescents, Prior learning and teaching experiences, Social influences

Table 3 shows the analysis of parameter estimates, revealing that the statistically significant predictors of satisfaction with career choice were: Prior learning and teaching experiences (B = 1.546; SE = 0.284; t(119) = 5.44; p < .001; 95% CI [0.984, 2.109]), Working with children (B = 0.354; SE = 0.111; t(119) = 3.20; p = .002; 95% CI [0.135, 0.573]), and Social influences (B = -1.248; SE = 0.220; t(119) = -5.67; p < .001; 95% CI [-1.684, -0.812]). The remaining predictors, Perceived teaching abilities (β = 0.166; p = .195), Intrinsic motivation (B = 0.019; p = .863), Job security (β = -0.004; p = .940), Time for family (B = 0.066; p = .415), Influence on children and adolescents (B = 0.161; p = .104), Enhancement of social equity (B = -0.016; p = .844), and Social contribution (B = -0.029; p = .814), did not reach statistical significance (all p > .05). In summary, median satisfaction with the choice of teaching profession increased with more positive previous learning and teaching experiences and with stronger motivation to work with children, and decreased with increasing perceived social influences. None of the remaining motivational factors had a significant independent contribution after all predictors were taken into account.

Figures 1a–1c plot the prediction lines for the three significant predictors from the median quantile regression (q = 0.50). Each predictor is shown separately so that the shape of its relationship with satisfaction can be considered without the overlap that would result from combining all three lines on the same axes.

PROBLEMS
OF EDUCATION
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Vol. 84, No. 5, 2026

Figure 1a
Prediction Lines

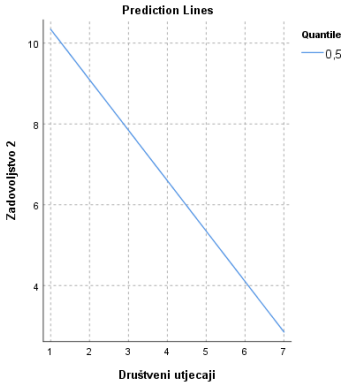


Figure 1b
Prediction Lines

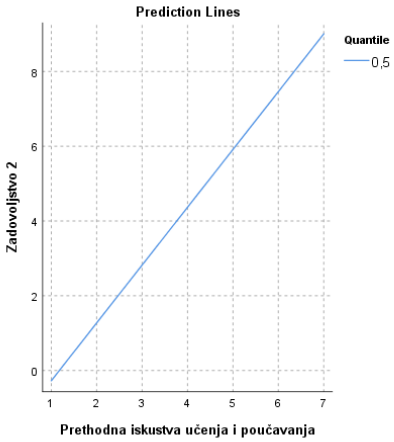
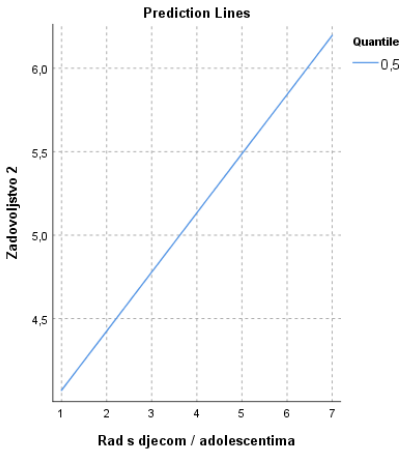


Figure 1c
Prediction Lines



PROBLEMS
OF EDUCATION
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Vol. 84, No. 5, 2026

A positive linear pattern appears in Figures 1b and 1c: more positive prior learning and teaching experiences and greater motivation to work with children go together with higher median satisfaction with the choice of teaching. Figure 1a shows the opposite pattern: stronger perceived social influence, meaning greater perceived support from friends, family, and colleagues for entering teaching, is associated with lower median satisfaction.

Figure 2 graphically presents the fit of the quantile regression model and the relationship between observed and predicted values of satisfaction with the choice of the teaching profession.

Figure 2
Fit of the Quantile Regression Model

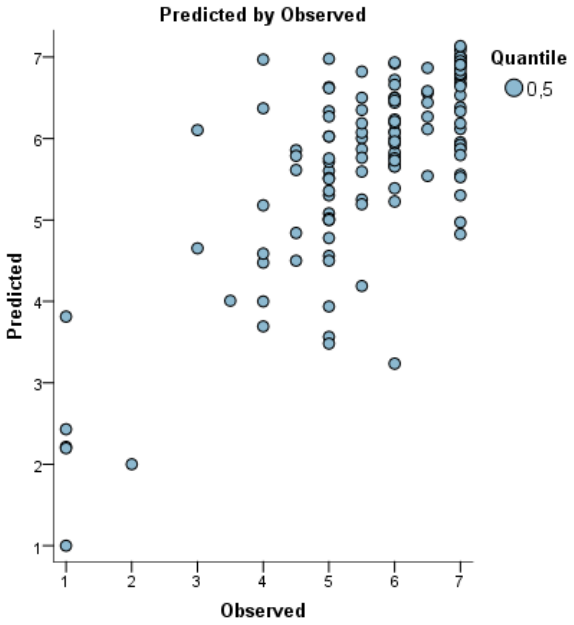


Figure 2 shows a relatively good agreement between the observed and predicted median values of satisfaction with the choice of the teaching profession, indicating a satisfactory fit of the quantile regression model. Larger deviations are present at lower criterion values, while the model more precisely estimates the median satisfaction at higher values.

Discussion

This study aimed at examining how FIT-Choice motivational factors predict satisfaction with the choice of teaching among primary school teachers, while reporting perceived job demands and beliefs about the profession descriptively as contextual indicators. Overall, the results lend partial support to the theoretical claims of the FIT-Choice model and self-determination theory regarding motivational predictors, alongside some findings that ran against expectation, discussed below. Because the design is cross-sectional, the patterns discussed below describe associations between motivational dimensions and satisfaction rather than causal effects; possible directions of influence and why they cannot be disentangled here are considered in the Limitations section. Job demands and beliefs about the profession, although not entered into the regression model, are discussed here in relation to participants' satisfaction

PROBLEMS
OF EDUCATION
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Vol. 84, No. 5, 2026

and flagged again as directions for future research. Prior learning and teaching experiences emerged as the strongest predictor of satisfaction with career choice (β = 1.546; p < .001), consistent with the social-learning and observational accounts reviewed above (Bandura, 1997; Lortie, 1975). Motivation to work with children was also a significant positive predictor of satisfaction (β = 0.354; *p* = .002), in line with the FIT-Choice model's core claim (Watt & Richardson, 2007) that altruistic, prosocial motives are central to satisfaction with choosing teaching. Read through self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), this dimension looks like a form of intrinsic motivation specifically anchored in the relational side of teaching, the satisfaction that comes from direct contact and relationships with students. What is notable is that the broader intrinsic-motivation dimension, which includes a general love of teaching as an activity, was not significant (β = 0.019; *p* = .863), suggesting that it is the emotional bond with children, rather than a purely cognitive appraisal of teaching as a task, that mainly drives satisfaction. This fits O'Connor's (2008) work on the emotional side of teaching practice, which treats emotional engagement with students as central to professional identity and satisfaction, even for teachers who may be intrinsically drawn to the subject matter but not to the relational dimension of the job. Social influences produced the largest coefficient of any predictor (β = -1.248; *p* < .001), but, against theoretical expectation, in a negative direction. The underlying items measure perceived encouragement from friends, family, and colleagues to become a teacher (e.g., "my friends/family think I should become a teacher"), so higher scores mean more perceived support for the decision. One reading is that teachers who leaned more on others' validation when choosing the profession were less anchored in their own internal conviction, leaving their later satisfaction more exposed to the demanding reality of the job (Richardson & Watt, 2006). Another possibility is that strong support from others creates a heightened sense of external expectation or obligation that is harder to live up to once the complexity of daily practice sets in, again lowering satisfaction. The high value of this coefficient (*B* = 1.248) in relation to other predictors indicates that the perceived social evaluation of the profession is one of the key factors shaping satisfaction, even among motivated teachers. Contrary to theoretical expectations (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Watt and Richardson, 2007), the intrinsic value dimension did not prove to be a statistically significant predictor of satisfaction, which probably reflects characteristics specific to this sample, rather than an actual absence of such an effect. It is possible that intrinsic motivations in this population are so uniform and highly distributed (Table 1) that the remaining variance is not sufficient for prediction. Furthermore, it is possible that in experienced teachers, initial intrinsic motivation has been transformed with experience over the course of their careers, in line with Klassen et al.'s (2011) results on the transformation of motives during professional development. Finally, it is possible that its association with satisfaction differs depending on the quantile, rather than the median, given how asymmetric the distribution of satisfaction is. A similar reasoning can probably be applied to the non-significant effect of perceived teaching abilities, whose distribution is similarly asymmetric.

Limitations and contribution of the research

There are several limitations to this research that have been taken into account in the interpretation. Methodologically, relying on self-report and the relatively small sample limits external validity and generalizability, though the sample size was sufficient for the analyses performed. Since the research was conducted via an online questionnaire, it is possible that there was a bias in favour of teachers who are more active in the digital space or who have a stronger professional identity. A larger and more diverse sample in future research would help confirm and expand the results obtained here. An additional limitation is the cross-sectional design of the study, which precludes causal inferences about the direction of the relationships found. Two possible explanations are: (a) positive prior teaching experiences lead to greater

https://doi.org/10.33225/pec/26.84.763 ISSN 1822-7864 (Print) ISSN 2538-7111 (Online)

PROBLEMS
OF EDUCATION
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Vol. 84, No. 5, 2026

career satisfaction, or (b) teachers who are satisfied with their profession selectively remember and positively reinterpret their prior experiences (retrospective reframing). Longitudinal research spanning the period from the beginning of teacher education to the mature stage of their professional careers would help to distinguish between these possibilities. The self-report method is also susceptible to socially desirable responses and subsequent rationalization of experience-based motives. Participants who have been in the profession for a long time may have retrospectively reconstructed their prior experiences in a way that fits their current professional identity. This motivational bias has been documented in the career counselling literature (Savickas, 2002) and may artificially emphasize the effects of prior experiences on satisfaction. Finally, the pronounced gender asymmetry of the sample (93.8% women) reflects the actual demographic structure of the teaching profession in Croatia, but at the same time it prevents the analysis of gender differences and reduces the possibility of comparison with research conducted in cultures with a more even gender representation of the teaching profession. It is known that motivational profiles for choosing the teaching profession show gender differences (Watt et al., 2012), so the limited variability of this dimension may mask potentially significant moderator effects. On the analytic side, median quantile regression (q = 0.50) only estimates predictive relationships for a typical participant near the centre of the distribution. Given that satisfaction with choice of teaching profession is negatively skewed and leptokurtic, the predictive relationships could well look different at the tails, among teachers who are extremely dissatisfied or extremely satisfied and examining additional quantiles (e.g., q = .10, .25, .75, .90) would give a fuller picture of this heterogeneity in future work. The regression also left out job demands (expertise, workload, and demand) and beliefs about the profession (social status, salary) as predictors, a natural extension for subsequent research, and did not incorporate school-level contextual variables (such as leadership, collegial support, or a school's socioeconomic status) that might moderate the link between motivation and satisfaction.

These limitations aside, the study contributes on several fronts. Empirically, it offers a picture of the motivational structure and professional satisfaction of working primary school teachers in Croatia, using the internationally validated FIT-Choice scale (Watt & Richardson, 2007). Unlike most of the literature on FIT-Choice, which usually relies on student samples, this research deals with professionally active staff, which allows insight into how stable motivational constructs remain in the later phase of the profession and adds data from the Croatian context to the international literature on FIT-Choice (Suryani et al., 2016; Watt et al., 2012). At a theoretical level, the results partially contradict the dominant view in the FIT-Choice literature that intrinsic motivation is the primary predictor of job satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Watt & Richardson, 2007). For these experienced teachers, it was the relational-emotional, rather than the broader cognitive-evaluative, dimension of motivation that predicted satisfaction. The contribution of this study lies less in replicating the structure of the FIT-Choice model itself than in applying it to an outcome that the model has rarely been used to explain: satisfaction with the choice of teaching profession among incumbent teachers, rather than motivation to enter the profession. Within this outcome, the pattern of significant predictors- prior learning and teaching experiences, and social influence rather than intrinsic motivation- represents a novel empirical finding, rather than a direct replication of earlier FIT-Choice results on motivation to enter the profession. The finding that past experiences are the strongest predictor of satisfaction points to an important, often overlooked mechanism, how teachers themselves interpret and experience their own professional journey. In other words, it is not only important what objectively happened in the past, but also how a person views these experiences today, whether they attribute positive meaning to them and whether they perceive them as a reason for satisfaction with choosing the teaching profession. This is important not only for future teachers or students, but also for experienced practitioners

PROBLEMS
OF EDUCATION
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Vol. 84, No. 5, 2026

who over time question whether they made the right choice in choosing a profession. This understanding of satisfaction is closer to constructivist approaches to professional development (Kelchtermans, 2009) and narrative career psychology (Savickas, 2002), which emphasize that professional identity is not a static category, but a story that a person continuously builds and reinterprets. Instead of explaining satisfaction solely by the motives with which someone entered the profession, it is important to consider the experience that a teacher has gained during their professional journey. The practical contribution can be focused on emphasizing the importance of systematic measures for improving the social position of the teaching profession. This does not mean only material incentives, but also policies that recognize and value the work of teachers in public discourse, not only declaratively, but also in practice, enabling continuous professional development that strengthens the professional competences of teachers, and thus their satisfaction with the profession (Kokanović, 2019). Taking into account these results and numerous studies that indicate the problem of teachers leaving the profession, measures to improve the teaching profession should become a priority of the educational policy of every country if it is to develop a quality knowledge society. The experiences that an individual gains during his profession mark his professional development and greatly influence the formation of a professional atmosphere in which he can teach quality. A society that continuously ensures quality educational conditions, starting with the teaching staff, can in this case expect an educated and satisfied society.

Conclusions and Implications

This research contributes to the understanding of the factors that predict satisfaction with the choice of teaching profession in the context of the FIT-Choice model, with a special emphasis on the population of employed primary school teachers (and not those just entering the profession). The overall quantile regression model achieved a pseudo-$R^2 = .351$, indicating a relatively good fit of the model in estimating the median satisfaction with the choice of teaching profession, with three predictors reaching statistical significance. The key contribution of this research is the empirical confirmation that previous learning and teaching experiences are the strongest predictor of satisfaction with the choice of career. Theoretically, these results extend the FIT-Choice model with new empirical evidence from the Croatian context, highlighting the importance of the relational and experiential dimensions of motivation for teaching. Practical implications include the need for systematic investment in the quality of pedagogical experiences during early education, the development of mentoring programs that encourage positive formation of professional identity, ensuring continuous professional development, and the implementation of public campaigns aimed at improving the social position of the teaching profession.

Ethics Statement

The research was conducted in accordance with the Code of Ethics of the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb, with a previously obtained positive opinion from the Ethics Committee.

Acknowledgements

This study was conducted as part of the TEACH – Teaching: Exploring Aspirations, Choices, and Happiness project (UFZG-NPOO-25-478), funded by the European Union's NextGenerationEU Recovery and Resilience Mechanism through the institutional research project of the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare no competing interests.

References

Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2007). The job demands–resources model: State of the art. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 22*(3), 309–328. https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940710733115

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W. H. Freeman.

Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 20*(2), 107–128. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2003.07.001

De Clercq, M., Watt, H. M. G., & Richardson, P. W. (2022). Profiles of teachers' striving and wellbeing: Evolution and relations with context factors, retention, and professional engagement. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 114*(3), 637–655. https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000702

Domović, V. (2011). Učiteljska profesija i profesionalni identitet učitelja [The teaching profession and teachers' professional identity]. In V. Vizek Vidović (Ed.), *Učitelji i njihovi mentori* [Teachers and their mentors] (pp. 11–37). IDIZ.

Eccles, J. S., Adler, T. F., Futterman, R., Goff, S. B., Kaczala, C. M., Meece, J. L., & Midgley, C. (1983). Expectancies, values, and academic behaviors. In J. T. Spence (Ed.), *Achievement and achievement motives* (pp. 75–146). W. H. Freeman.

Ferreira, M., Martinsone, B., & Talić, S. (2021). Promoting sustainable development through education: Challenges, opportunities, and the role of teacher professional development. *Sustainability, 13*(5), Article 2562. https://doi.org/10.3390/su13052562

Flores, M. A., & Day, C. (2006). Contexts which shape and reshape new teachers' identities: A multi-perspective study. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 22*(2), 219–232. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.09.002

Freedman, S. W., & Appleman, D. (2009). 'In it for the long haul': How teacher education can contribute to teacher retention in high-poverty, urban schools. *Journal of Teacher Education, 60*(3), 323–337. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487109336181

Ingersoll, R., & Strong, M. (2011). The impact of induction and mentoring programs for beginning teachers: A critical review of the research. *Review of Educational Research, 81*(2), 201–233. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654311403323

Kelchtermans, G. (2009). Who I am in how I teach is the message: Self-understanding, vulnerability and reflection. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 15*(2), 257–272. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540600902875332

Klassen, R. M., Al-Dhafri, S., Hannok, W., & Betts, S. M. (2011). Investigating pre-service teacher motivation across cultures using the FIT-Choice scale. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 27*(3), 579–588. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.10.008

Kokanović, T. (2019). Značaj cjeloživotnog usavršavanja za razvoj profesionalnih kompetencija odgojitelja [The importance of lifelong learning for the development of preschool teachers' professional competencies]. *Croatian Journal of Education, 21*(Sp.Ed.1), 47–59. https://doi.org/10.15516/cje.v21i0.3494

Lazarides, R., Gaspard, H., & Dicke, A. L. (2019). Dynamics of classroom motivation: Teacher enthusiasm and the development of math interest and teacher support. *Learning and Instruction, 60*, 126–137. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2018.01.012

Lortie, D. C. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study.* University of Chicago Press.

Marušić, I., Jugović, I. & Pavin Ivanec, T. (2011). Primjena teorije vrijednosti i očekivanja u kontekstu odabira učiteljske profesije [Expectancy-value Theory of Motivation and the Choice of Teaching as a Career]. *Psihologijske teme, 20*(2), 299-318. https://hrcak.srce.hr/74208

Monobe, G., & Host, T. R. (2015). Teaching in complex environments: Exploring preservice teachers' motivations, fears, and desire for diversity training. *Education and Urban Society, 47*(4), 469–486. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124513495267

O'Connor, K. E. (2008). 'You choose to care': Teachers, emotions and professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 24*(1), 117–126. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2006.11.008

PROBLEMS
OF EDUCATION
IN THE 21st CENTURY
Vol. 84, No. 5, 2026

OECD. (2020). TALIS 2018 results (Volume II): Teachers and school leaders as valued professionals. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/19cf08df-en

Richardson, P. W., & Watt, H. M. G. (2006). Who chooses teaching and why? Profiling characteristics and motivations across three Australian universities. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 34*(1), 27–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/13598660500480290

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25*(1), 54–67. https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1020

Sabljar, M., Opić, S., & Šulentić Begić, J. (2020). Piano teachers' job satisfaction in music schools in the Republic of Croatia. J*ournal of Elementary Education, 13(*4), 497–518. https://doi.org/10.18690/rei.13.4.497-518.2020

Savickas, M. L. (2002). Career construction: A developmental theory of vocational behavior. In D. Brown & Associates (Eds.), *Career choice and development* (4th ed., pp. 149–205). Jossey-Bass.

Scheopner Torres, A. (2012). Irreparably broken: Schools and the path to teacher dissatisfaction. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 28*(7), 1030–1039. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2012.05.008

Suryani, A., Watt, H. M. G., & Richardson, P. W. (2016). Students' motivations to become teachers: FIT-Choice findings from Indonesia. *International Journal of Quantitative Research in Education, 3*(3), 179–203. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJQRE.2016.078648

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.

Veenman, S. (1984). Perceived problems of beginning teachers. *Review of Educational Research, 54*(2), 143–178. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543054002143

Vidić, T., & Miljković, D. (2019). Povezanost pristupa poučavanju s percipiranom samoefikasnosti, zadovoljstvom poslom i životom te emocijama učitelja u osnovnoj školi [The relationship between approach to teaching and perceived self-efficacy, job and life satisfaction, and emotions of primary school teachers]. *Psihologijske teme, 28*(2), 291–312. https://doi.org/10.31820/pt.28.2.4

Watt, H. M. G., & Richardson, P. W. (2007). Motivational factors influencing teaching as a career choice: Development and validation of the FIT-Choice scale. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 75*(3), 167–202. https://doi.org/10.3200/JEXE.75.3.167-202

Watt, H. M. G., & Richardson, P. W. (2012). An introduction to teaching motivations in different countries: Comparisons using the FIT-Choice scale. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 40*(3), 185–197. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2012.700049

Watt, H. M. G., Richardson, P. W., Klusmann, U., Kunter, M., Beyer, B., Trautwein, U., & Baumert, J. (2012). Motivations for choosing teaching as a career: An international comparison using the FIT-Choice scale. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 28*(6), 791–805. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2012.03.003

Wigfield, A., & Eccles, J. S. (2000). Expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation. Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25(1), 68–81. https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1015

Worthington, A. C., Chan, K. W., & Worthington, R. (2023). Motivations to teach and teacher retention: Evidence from a large cohort of newly qualified Australian teachers. *Australian Journal of Education, 67*(1), 30–52. https://doi.org/10.1177/00049441221141424

Received: *July 16, 2026* Revised: *August 14, 2026* Accepted: *October 02, 2026*

Cite as: Kokanović, T., & Opić, S. (2026). Motivational predictors of satisfaction with the choice of profession among primary school teachers. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, *84*(5), 763–777. https://doi.org/10.33225/pec/26.84.763

Tihana Kokanović *(Corresponding author)*	PhD, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb, Savska cesta 77, Zagreb, Croatia. E-mail: tihana.kokanovic@ufzg.hr ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4980-0194
Siniša Opić	PhD, Full Professor, Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb, Savska cesta 77, Zagreb, Croatia. E-mail: sinisa.opic@ufzg.hr ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9800-0145