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**Motivations for Becoming a Teacher: A Study of Pakistani ESL  
Student Teachers' Views on the Teaching Profession**



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**Abstract**

This study explores the perceptions of undergraduate ESL student teachers in Pakistan regarding the teaching profession and their motivations for pursuing it as a career. The demographic targeted consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in teacher education programmes. Purposive sampling was implemented to identify seventy undergraduate ESL student instructors. The data were collected through emails in which students expressed their aspirations to become teachers, their perceptions of the teaching profession in the Pakistani context, and any individuals or circumstances that influenced their decision. The study employed a qualitative research methodology to categorise students' responses, identifying recurring themes and diverse motivating factors. The results suggested a variety of motivations, such as a commitment to national development, the benefits of inspiring educators, employment security in the public sector, and a profound aspiration to mentor and educate the youth. The results also emphasized the development of emergent educational identities, which are influenced by a variety of personal and institutional factors. These insights suggest that it is imperative to organise teacher education programmes in Pakistan to accommodate a variety of motivational origins, thereby enhancing student engagement, programme completion rates, and long-term commitment to the professional teaching field.

**Keywords:** *Teacher Education; ESL Student Teachers; Teaching Profession Perceptions; Career Choice Motives*

**Introduction**

The motivations for individuals to pursue a teaching career significantly influence their identity, commitment, and enduring job satisfaction. Cultural values, employment security, societal expectations, and a personal aspiration to assist with education can all influence this choice in Pakistan (Jalalzai, Akram, & Kamran, 2021). A multitude of Pakistani student teachers are inspired by factors such as a passion for education, the opportunity to contribute to their nation, and the influence of esteemed educators throughout their own schooling (Kamal ud Din, Altaf, & Mubashar, 2020).

Recent research employing the FIT-Choice framework indicates that pre-service teachers in Pakistan are driven by several factors, including social

utility values, intrinsic career worth, and employment stability (Shaukat et al., 2023). The motivations for attending school generally vary by gender. Female students prioritise safety and service, while male students emphasise employment opportunities and career advancement (Shaukat et al., 2023).

Although quantitative research has illuminated these motivational factors, there is a paucity of qualitative studies examining how Pakistani student teachers articulate their objectives in their own terms, particularly at the onset of their teacher training. Qualitative research conducted in Karachi indicates that contemporary educators face challenges such as insufficient autonomy, limited opportunities for professional advancement, and a lack of social recognition, which may affect their initial enthusiasm (Kanwal & Habib, 2022). The results underscore the significance of soliciting students' perspectives at the onset of their education to enhance our understanding of their expectations and to develop programmes that foster long-term engagement.

This study addresses that gap by analyzing the views of 70 undergraduate student teachers in Pakistan, collected through reflective letters. The study aims to explore 1) why students choose to become teachers, 2) how they perceive the profession in Pakistan, and 3) what external influences shaped their decision. Thematic analysis is used to uncover multiple motivational strands and evolving pedagogical identities. The findings aim to inform teacher education program developers, helping them create supportive learning environments that acknowledge student motivations and encourage retention in the teaching profession.

## **Literature Review**

### **Motivation and Career Choice in Teaching**

Motivation is a big part of why people choose to become teachers and stay in the profession. Richardson and Watt's (2006) FIT-Choice (Factors Influencing Teaching Choice) framework divides reasons for wanting to teach into three groups: intrinsic (e.g., a love of teaching), altruistic (e.g., wanting to help society), and extrinsic (e.g., wanting job security). This concept has been tested in many countries, such as Pakistan (Shaukat et al., 2023).

In Pakistan, pre-service teachers often say they are motivated by strong intrinsic and altruistic reasons, such as wanting to serve others, contribute to the country's progress, and shape the next generation (Jalalzai, Akram, & Kamran, 2021). These results show that many people see teaching

as more than just a job; they see it as a valuable service to society. Shaukat et al. (2023) used real-world testing of the FIT-Choice scale in Pakistan to show that intrinsic worth and social utility are the main reasons why student teachers choose to be teachers. Job stability and work-life balance are also important variables.

### **Cultural Norms and Gender Roles**

In Pakistan, cultural norms and gender roles have a big impact on what people choose to do. Studies show that female pre-service teachers are more likely to put work stability, family compatibility, and social respect first, whereas male applicants are more likely to put job availability and potential career advancement first (Shaukat et al., 2023). These differences show how society generally views teaching as a "respectable" and "safe" job for women, especially in conservative places. Kamal ud Din, Altaf, and Mubashar (2020) also found that teaching was not always the first choice for men, especially among male students. Many students chose to go into teacher education programmes because they did not have many other job options, however this did not always make them less committed to their jobs later on.

### **Professional Identity Formation**

Motivation to teach is closely linked to the development of teacher identity, especially during the early stages of teacher education. When student teachers are allowed to reflect on their aspirations, past educational experiences, and inspirations, they begin to form a professional identity that guides their future practice (Richardson & Watt, 2018). In Pakistan, this process is often under-explored in teacher education programs, which tend to emphasize content delivery over reflective practice (Kanwal & Habib, 2022).

Qualitative studies from Karachi reveal that when teachers are demotivated—due to poor working conditions, limited authority, and lack of recognition—this negatively impacts classroom performance and overall job satisfaction (Kanwal & Habib, 2022). These realities point to a disconnect between student teachers' initial motivations and the professional environment they later encounter.

### **Role Models and Inspirational Figures**

The influence of past teachers, parents, and mentors also emerges as a strong motivator in career choice. In a study conducted by Jalalzai et al. (2021), many student teachers cited inspirational figures who shaped their beliefs about

education. Such findings align with international research emphasizing the role of "significant others" in the career decision-making process (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000).

### **Gaps in Existing Research**

Although a number of studies have quantitatively explored motivations among Pakistani pre-service teachers, there remains a notable gap in qualitative research that allows students to articulate their motivations in their own words. This gap limits understanding of how student teachers perceive their future roles in the education system and how their motivations evolve during the course of their training.

This study responds to that gap by employing reflective letter writing to explore Pakistani undergraduate student teachers' motivations and perceptions. By focusing on the narrative voices of students, it contributes to a deeper understanding of professional identity formation and provides insights for the design of more responsive teacher education programs.

### **Research Objectives**

- To explore the motivations of undergraduate ESL student teachers in Pakistan for choosing teaching as a career.
- To examine how student teachers perceive the teaching profession in terms of societal value, subject knowledge, and personal fulfillment.
- To identify the influence of personal, social, and educational factors (e.g., role models, emotional connection, subject interest) on students' decision to pursue teaching.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the primary motivations of undergraduate ESL student teachers in Pakistan for entering the teaching profession?
2. How do student teachers in Pakistan perceive the teaching profession in terms of respect, value, and contribution to society?
3. To what extent do personal interest, emotional commitment, and subject passion influence the decision to become a teacher?

### **Theoretical Framework**

In the Pakistani context, the way student teachers articulate their motivations

and perceptions about teaching marks a critical initial phase in the development of their professional identity. This identity formation begins even before they formally enter classrooms. Malmberg (2006) suggests that motivations are closely tied to how teachers later approach their work—impacting their teaching strategies, interest in student learning, and overall engagement. These elements are central to building a strong pedagogical identity, especially within Pakistan's evolving educational landscape where public and private institutions function with differing values and priorities.

Students often enrol Pakistani teacher education programmes after having outstanding teachers and understanding about local school systems. These experiences shape their career choices and teaching philosophy. Bernstein's (2000) theory of pedagogic identities examines how teachers-in-training view themselves, their school and social experiences, and their future objectives. The degree to which they are open or resistant to professional change is essential in Pakistan, where institutional inertia typically stifles education changes.

Bernstein discusses four pedagogical identities in the "official arena" of teacher education. Pakistani student instructors often approach this sector for the first time, thinking critically about their professional responsibilities. They define their teaching identities and find their place in these frameworks. Restricted Retrospective Identity is conservative, with student instructors admiring prior educational traditions. In Pakistan, respect for experienced teachers and rote learning are still valued. Selected Prospective Identity implies altering the past to suit your needs. Student teachers desire to improve their instruction while maintaining cultural norms. Differentiated Outside pressures like market needs or institution rivalry generate de-centered identity. Pakistan's growing private education industry makes this increasingly crucial. Therapeutic, or integrated de-centered, identity emphasises collaboration, flexibility, and independent thinking. Student teachers trained in modern teaching approaches and reflective practice are usually progressive. Understanding diverse identities is vital in Pakistan, where teacher education curricula range from traditional institutions to university-led models like ADE or B.Ed. Hons. Different teaching techniques may result from different motivations, such as job security, social impact, or personal interest. Understanding these distinctions helps Pakistani teacher educators design training programmes that promote professional growth, adaptation, and reflective practise.

### **Research Methodology**

This study investigates the motivations and perspectives of Pakistani student instructors towards teaching. Qualitative research method was chosen for its potential to capture participants' profound views, concepts, and intentions, particularly with personal motivations and identity formation (Kanwal & Habib, 2022).

#### **Research Design**

Participants expressed their goals, expectations, and impressions openly and authentically using a qualitative research design. This design can be used to study how Pakistanis make meaning of their lives and professional choices (Asif et al., 2024).

### **Targeted Population**

This study targeted undergraduate student teachers in B.Ed. (Hons.) programmes at three Pakistani teacher education institutes, two of which were public. This cohort was chosen to reflect a variety of socio-economic and institutional backgrounds to explore contextual motives for becoming a teacher in Pakistan's complex educational landscape (Khushi, 2023).

#### **Sample Size and Sampling Technique**

A sample of 70 undergraduate ESL students was selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability technique appropriate for studies targeting specific characteristics, specifically early-stage teacher trainees. This technique facilitates the selection of participants pertinent to the study's aims and enables the investigation of reflective motivation without extending findings to a broader population (Kanwal & Habib, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

#### **Data Collection Tools**

Data were gathered via written narrative reflections. Participants were directed to compose a letter of one to two pages addressing the prompt: "What motivates you to pursue a career in teaching, and how do you perceive the teaching profession in Pakistan?" This method effectively elicits rich, self-directed insights without the interference of structured questionnaires or predefined motivational categories (Asif et al., 2024). The data were collected in the first semester of the participants' teacher education programme to

assess their initial and unfiltered career motivations.

#### Ethical Considerations

All ethical guidelines pertaining to research involving human participants were adhered to. All participants provided written informed consent. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw at any point without facing negative repercussions. Data confidentiality was maintained through the anonymization of reflections and the assignment of pseudonyms. The research complied with the ethical protocols relevant to social science studies in Pakistan (Khushi, 2023).

#### Data Analysis Technique

The analysis of narrative data employed thematic discourse analysis, integrating Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model—textual, discursive, and social practices—with Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) discourse theory. This analytical framework effectively identifies the ways in which language shapes motivational identities and perceptions of teaching. The text identified key themes, including altruistic motives, such as the desire to uplift society; intrinsic motives, such as a love for teaching or children; and extrinsic motives, such as job stability. The coding process was conducted iteratively, accompanied by team discussions to ensure the credibility and consistency of theme identification (Shaukat et al., 2023).

#### Results

The analysis of reflective letters authored by 70 undergraduate B.Ed. students from a public university in Pakistan identified four predominant discourses regarding their motivations for entering the teaching profession and their perceptions of it. These were:

- (Re)Creating the Caring School
- Creating a Desirable (Professional) Life
- Fostering the Upright Human Being
- Forming Valuable Knowledge

Each discourse manifested specific discourse theory concepts: nodal points (central meanings), chains of equivalence (interlinked elements of meaning), and subject positions (ways students position themselves as future teachers).



(Re)Creating the Caring School

This discourse centers on the nodal point of a "*caring school*", constructed through students' past experiences as pupils in Pakistani schools. Both positive and negative school experiences were instrumental in shaping this vision. Many students who had supportive teachers and nurturing environments expressed a desire to replicate that care, while others who had faced emotional neglect, corporal punishment, or academic humiliation aimed to correct those injustices.

For instance, one student wrote:

*"I want to be the teacher I never had—someone who listens, supports, and does not punish students for asking questions."*

This kind of reflection demonstrates a subject position of the teacher as a "*reformer*" or "*protector*". Similarly, other students positioned themselves as role models, guides, or helpers—those who would stand against the harsh, impersonal practices still prevalent in many Pakistani government schools (Naviwala, 2019; Malik & Rafique, 2023).

The chains of equivalence in this discourse included terms such as "*safe space*", "*emotional support*", "*encouragement*", and "*respect for all learners*". These terms were often linked with descriptions of ideal learning environments:

*"A good teacher must make every student feel seen. Even the weakest child should never feel inferior in my class."*

Students training for primary-level teaching placed stronger emphasis on affection, emotional connection, and "*being like a friend*" to pupils. One wrote:

*"In rural areas, many children come from broken families or poverty. I want to be a source of hope for them."*

Here, the nodal point of the caring school expanded to include the school as a "*haven*" for the emotionally or economically deprived child—a reflection of socio-economic concerns deeply embedded in Pakistan's education system (Rahman, 2021; UNESCO, 2022).

On the other hand, some middle and secondary-level student teachers used more academic or motivational language. Their chain of equivalence

included phrases such as *"motivating pupils"*, *"making learning enjoyable"*, and *"creating curiosity"*. However, even these were embedded in broader ideas of student wellbeing and mutual respect.

Interestingly, a few students made critical remarks about their own school experiences, where teaching was rigid, and teacher-student communication minimal, and rote learning was dominant. These reflections created a discursive contrast—the rejection of uncaring educational environments in favor of more democratic, student-centered classrooms. These students adopted the subject position of a *"change agent"* who intends to rebuild the system from within.

Another participant wrote:

*"I saw teachers using harsh words and beatings in my school. I never forgot that pain. That's why I will never raise my hand or voice at a child."*

Such narratives reaffirm the desire to (re)create a caring school as both a professional and moral imperative. This was particularly common among female student teachers who referenced gendered and cultural sensitivities, recognizing the teacher's dual role as both educator and *"nurturer"* within conservative Pakistani contexts (Ali & Noor, 2024; Agha, 2020).

#### Creating a Desirable (Professional)

In the Pakistani context, undergraduate teacher education students often perceive the teaching profession through a lens that balances personal aspiration with pragmatic needs. This discourse, centred around the nodal point of *profession*, reflects how pre-service teachers envision a stable, meaningful, and upwardly mobile career. Among the 70 Pakistani undergraduate students who participated in this study, diverse motivations emerged for choosing teaching as a profession, revealing both intrinsic and extrinsic orientations.

Many students expressed their desire to secure full-time employment in a field that is both socially respected and increasingly in demand due to teacher shortages in public and low-cost private schools (Aslam et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2024). Teaching was seen as a pathway to financial security, particularly for female students who often face limited professional opportunities in rural and conservative areas of Pakistan (Ali & Tahira, 2023). A common response expressed sentiments such as: *"I sought a stable profession that enables me to support my family, and teaching is a respected field where I*

*can secure employment post-graduation.*" These statements illustrate the practical rationale connecting degree attainment, employment, and social mobility, establishing equivalence chains grounded in economic and cultural contexts (Rehman & Qureshi, 2023).

The discourse also reflected the individual educational trajectories of students. Numerous participants indicated that their choice to pursue a teaching career was shaped by role models, specifically former educators who inspired them or offered emotional support throughout their schooling. Former teachers frequently served as guides or mentors, motivating students to consider similar roles (Khan et al., 2022). Expressions like *"I aspire to be a teacher akin to the one who supported me during my Matric exams"* exemplify the impactful experiences that influence career ambitions in Pakistan.

Middle-class urban students exhibited a pronounced focus on self-development and a preference for professions that facilitate ongoing learning and social engagement. Students appreciated the profession for its practical benefits and its potential for personal development while influencing others: *"Teaching will help me grow emotionally and intellectually, and I want to evolve with my students,"* stated one participant. This corresponds with wider discussions in Pakistani teacher education that associate professional identity with comprehensive personal development (Yousaf & Sajid, 2024).

Among middle-class urban students, there was a clear emphasis on *self-development* and the desire to be part of a profession that allows for continuous learning and social interaction. Students valued the profession not only for its utility but also for its opportunity to evolve personally while impacting others' lives: *"Teaching will help me grow emotionally and intellectually, and I want to evolve with my students,"* said one participant. This aligns with broader discourses in Pakistani teacher education that link professional identity with holistic personal development (Yousaf & Sajid, 2024).

Interestingly, many participants (particularly female students) associated teaching with social acceptability and flexibility, features that make the profession desirable within conservative and family-centric Pakistani culture. For example, one student noted, *"My parents support my career in teaching because it is a noble job and manageable for women after marriage."* These observations underscore how the desirability of teaching is often culturally mediated, especially for women balancing familial expectations and career ambitions (Shaheen, 2023).

Another recurring element in this discourse was the desire to make a

difference. Some students voiced the ambition to "*inspire pupils to think differently*" or "*contribute to national development by educating youth*." Although such statements were less frequent, they indicate a vision of teaching as a transformative act aligned with nationalistic and social justice narratives that are often emphasized in Pakistani curricula and teacher training programs (Ministry of Education, Pakistan, 2023).

Overall, the subject positions within this discourse ranged from the *competent professional*—a rational planner securing a future—to the *passionate change-maker*—an idealist driven by hope and social contribution. In both cases, undergraduate students framed their career choice as part of a desirable professional life that balances economic needs, social prestige, and personal growth.

#### Fostering the Upright Human Being

In the Pakistani context, the aspiration to foster upright human beings is a deeply rooted motivation among pre-service teachers. This discourse reflects their intention not only to teach academic content but also to shape the moral and civic character of future generations. The nodal point in this discourse is "society," with related concepts such as *community*, *empathy*, *moral development*, and *social responsibility* emerging frequently in teacher reflections. This emphasis is especially pronounced among undergraduate education students who see teaching as a way to contribute to nation-building by nurturing ethical, respectful, and socially aware citizens (Aslam & Khan, 2023).

Student teachers enrolled in teacher education programs in Pakistan often express their desire to influence the future of the country by fostering values such as tolerance, responsibility, and compassion. This aligns with the National Curriculum of Pakistan, which stresses the development of Islamic values, democratic attitudes, and civic sense (Government of Pakistan, 2021). As one student articulated during a classroom dialogue: "*I want to help children become responsible Pakistanis who care about their communities and their country*." These sentiments reveal a strong alignment between personal motivation and national educational goals.

The idea of *making a difference* in society—both at the individual and collective level—is a central theme. Many student teachers perceive teaching as a calling to contribute to positive social change, particularly in underprivileged or rural regions of Pakistan where access to education remains limited. In such areas, teaching is not just a profession but a form of

social reform (Khan et al., 2022). This mirrors Freire's (2000) concept of the teacher as a transformative intellectual who fosters critical thinking and ethical citizenship.

Another recurring notion among Pakistani student teachers is the joy of knowledge transmission and the emotional satisfaction of witnessing students' intellectual and moral growth. The "aha" moment when a student grasps a difficult concept or demonstrates empathy is often cited as a key motivator. These responses resonate with constructivist theories of learning that emphasize the relational and humanistic dimensions of teaching (Yousuf & Mahmood, 2022).

Moreover, the concept of *teachers as role models* holds particular cultural significance in Pakistan, where educators are often regarded as moral guides and community leaders. Student teachers frequently emphasize the responsibility of being ethical exemplars for children, particularly in light of current challenges such as extremism, gender inequality, and moral decline in society (Shah & Faiz, 2023). Many believe that instilling values such as honesty, cooperation, and respect in young learners will contribute to a more just and peaceful Pakistan.

Interestingly, these values-based motivations are especially prevalent among students preparing to teach at the primary and secondary levels. These future educators express a desire to *nurture the foundation of future generations*, often referring to their role as "*nation-builders*"—a term frequently used in Pakistani educational discourse. The emphasis on *shaping character* and *developing upright individuals* reflects a moral vision of education closely tied to cultural and religious values (Rehman & Bilal, 2021).

In sum, the discourse around fostering upright human beings positions Pakistani student teachers not only as educators but as reformers and moral agents. Their motivations go beyond academic instruction and encompass broader societal transformation, underscoring the need for teacher education programs in Pakistan to integrate value-based pedagogies, emotional intelligence training, and community engagement initiatives.

### Forming Valuable Knowledge

In the Pakistani context, *forming valuable knowledge* reflects undergraduate student-teachers' aspirations to pass on meaningful, relevant, and practical knowledge to learners, especially in their respective subject areas. This discourse merges *subject expertise* and *purposeful education*, where students

express a passion for their disciplines—such as English, mathematics, science, or Islamic studies—and a belief in the transformative power of that knowledge.

Many student-teachers enrolled in programs like B.Ed. (Hons) express motivations rooted in their love for their subject. For instance, a student passionate about Urdu literature may see the subject as a way to cultivate national identity, cultural understanding, and expressive confidence. Similarly, those interested in teaching science or mathematics see their disciplines as tools to foster analytical thinking and innovation in future generations. The central themes in this discourse include "subject knowledge", "passion", "future utility", and "student engagement".

In Pakistan's multilingual, multicultural classrooms, student-teachers also emphasize the need to adapt their teaching strategies based on learners' diverse needs. While the upper-secondary (intermediate and A-level) future teachers prioritize strong subject command, primary and middle school pre-service teachers focus more on creating a *joyful, student-centered learning environment*—emphasizing understanding, curiosity, and individualized support.

This variation reflects a broader understanding that "valuable knowledge" in the Pakistani context is not only about textbook content but also about helping students navigate societal challenges, think critically, and become productive citizens. This aligns with national educational goals, such as those outlined in Pakistan's Single National Curriculum, which seeks to integrate values like tolerance, civic responsibility, and creativity.

Ultimately, in this discourse, the *subject position* is that of an educationalist—a teacher not just transferring textbook facts but also shaping minds with a deep understanding of pedagogy, student diversity, and the transformative role of education in society.

## Discussion

The findings from the discourse analysis reveal a complex, yet meaningful set of motivations and identity positions adopted by undergraduate student teachers in Pakistan. Through the reflective letters of 70 B.Ed. students, four dominant discourses emerged—(Re)Creating the Caring School, Creating a Desirable (Professional) Life, Fostering the Upright Human Being, and Forming Valuable Knowledge. Each discourse provides critical insight into how prospective teachers in Pakistan conceptualize their roles, responsibilities, and aspirations within a socially stratified and educationally under-resourced

national context. These discourses are deeply embedded in the students' lived experiences and reflect broader socio-cultural, economic, and policy-related influences.

The discourse of (Re)Creating the Caring School underscores a profound emotional and moral dimension in students' professional identity formation. Many students shared memories of either nurturing or neglectful school environments, which then shaped their vision of becoming empathetic educators. This aligns with the concept of "pedagogical love" as discussed in Pakistani and international literature, where teaching is seen as a moral and emotional endeavor (Noddings, 2005; Malik & Rafique, 2023).

The emphasis on emotional support, trust, and safety demonstrates a rejection of traditional authoritarian schooling models still prevalent in many public schools in Pakistan (Naviwala, 2019). Female students especially articulated this discourse within culturally expected gendered roles—identifying as 'nurturers' and emotional caregivers (Agha, 2020; Ali & Noor, 2024). This signals both a challenge and conformity to patriarchal expectations in Pakistani schooling: while asserting care as central, these women are also negotiating their professional authority within culturally prescribed limits.

This discourse reflects a critical awareness among student teachers of the need to humanize the schooling experience—especially in rural and low-resource contexts where emotional and physical safety is often compromised (Rahman, 2021). It also aligns with UNESCO's (2022) calls for inclusive, emotionally responsive education systems in South Asia.

This discourse reveals teaching as not just a vocation, but also a pragmatic strategy for upward mobility, particularly for women and rural youth. Participants frequently emphasized job stability, societal respect, and the "noble" nature of teaching as reasons for their career choice. These findings resonate with recent studies that suggest teaching remains a gendered yet accessible profession for Pakistani women navigating conservative social structures (Ali & Tahira, 2023; Shaheen, 2023).

Importantly, students articulated a strong link between education and economic empowerment. For many, especially those from low-income or rural backgrounds, teaching was one of the few socially acceptable professions that provided a path toward economic independence and social status (Aslam et al., 2022). This is particularly true for female pre-service teachers who often seek careers that are "marriage-compatible" while also offering professional identity (Rehman & Qureshi, 2023).

The dual framing of teaching—as both passion and profession—illustrates how student teachers navigate the intersection of idealism and realism. Their views align with global teacher identity literature that highlights intrinsic and extrinsic motivations as co-existing rather than mutually exclusive (Day et al., 2006). This finding suggests that Pakistani teacher education programs must support both identity development and career-readiness to sustain long-term motivation.

Perhaps the most culturally resonant discourse is that of fostering upright human beings—rooted in Islamic, national, and ethical values. Students often positioned themselves as moral agents tasked with guiding future generations not just academically, but ethically. This reflects the deeply held belief in Pakistan that education is a spiritual and civic responsibility (Government of Pakistan, 2021).

Such positions align with both Islamic educational philosophy and Freirean notions of education as liberation (Freire, 2000). However, in the Pakistani context, this discourse is also shaped by societal anxieties about moral decline, extremism, and civic disengagement (Shah & Faiz, 2023). The frequent mention of honesty, tolerance, empathy, and responsibility indicates that student teachers see themselves as key actors in social reform—particularly in shaping the ethical consciousness of young learners.

These moral imperatives are especially pronounced among students preparing to teach at the primary and middle school levels, where character formation is emphasized. The teacher is imagined as a role model and community builder, not just a classroom instructor (Khan et al., 2022). This mirrors the state curriculum's objectives and underscores the need to integrate value-based education, especially in teacher preparation programs.

The fourth discourse—Forming Valuable Knowledge—emphasizes the transformative power of subject knowledge. Students expressed a desire to engage deeply with content and transfer that understanding to learners in meaningful ways. This reflects a constructivist view of teaching, where learning is contextual, critical, and participatory (Yousuf & Mahmood, 2022).

This discourse is particularly prevalent among students specializing in secondary-level subjects like English, science, and mathematics, where subject mastery is viewed as essential for fostering critical thinking and societal progress. Students also viewed knowledge as a tool for equity—one that could empower learners from marginalized backgrounds to challenge their circumstances (Rehman & Bilal, 2021).



The emphasis on “valuable” knowledge—rather than rote memorization—signals a desire among new teachers to break from outdated pedagogical models and promote more interactive, inquiry-based learning. This aligns with Pakistan’s National Curriculum goals for competency-based learning and aligns with global trends toward 21st-century skills (Government of Pakistan, 2021; UNESCO, 2024).

Collectively, the four discourses present a nuanced, contextually grounded picture of how Pakistani student teachers imagine their future roles. They are not passive recipients of a state-assigned role but are actively negotiating personal values, professional goals, and societal expectations. The dominant subject positions—reformer, nurturer, change agent, guide, and knowledge creator—reflect an emerging teacher identity that is relational, aspirational, and socially situated.

These findings hold significant implications for teacher education in Pakistan. Programs must go beyond technical training to include critical reflection, moral reasoning, emotional intelligence, and socio-cultural awareness. Moreover, curriculum developers and policymakers must recognize that teacher motivation is not unidimensional—it intersects with gender, class, location, and life history.

## Conclusion

The study reveals that Pakistani undergraduate student teachers enter the profession with a rich blend of emotional, ethical, intellectual, and economic motivations. By analyzing the four discourses, we gain insight into how future educators in Pakistan hope to reshape schools, empower learners, and reimagine their professional selves. These findings not only contribute to the understanding of teacher identity in South Asia but also call for responsive, equity-driven, and values-centered teacher education policies.

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