



### **Motivations for Entering the Teaching Profession: Illuminating the Voices of Female Pre-Service Teachers on the U.S.-Mexico Border**

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**Abstract:** Teacher retention is a global problem, and why individuals choose the teaching profession can help sustain teacher motivation. This study surveyed 29 predominately Mexican American female students enrolled in the College of Education at a border university in South Texas. The participants were selected using convenience sampling from two courses taught by the researcher in the spring of 2024. A 15-question survey, including Likert scale and open-ended questions, was used to gather data. Findings revealed that pre-service teachers selected teaching as a profession for altruistic and intrinsic reasons. Participants' educational experiences, both positive and negative, impacted their decision to become educators. The concept of altruism emerged to describe the interdependency of altruistic and intrinsic motivations. The study underscores the importance of examining the educational experiences of minority women living along the U.S.-Mexico border to understand their aspirations and motivations to enter the teaching profession.

**Keywords:** Pre-service, motivation, teaching, retention, altruism

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### **Motivations for Entering the Teaching Profession: Illuminating the Voices of Female Pre-Service Teachers on the U.S.-Mexico Border**

Pre-service educators enrolled in educator preparatory programs in universities across the nation have made a choice to become educators. While their reasons for entering the profession may vary, researchers have discovered that the most common reasons for entering the teaching field tend to focus on intrinsic and altruistic motivation (Kwok et al., 2022; Van den Borre et al., 2021; Gore, 2018). Experiential factors can also influence the motivation to enter the teaching field. For example, Chandran et al. (2024) found that 38.57% of pre-service teachers were

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motivated to enter the teaching profession because of an educator. Unfortunately, not all who enter the teaching field remain in the profession (Le Velle, 2019). Thus, understanding pre-service teachers' motivations to enter the teaching profession is essential to help sustain their motivation to remain in the field.

Worldwide the field of education is faced with tackling two significant issues. The first is teacher attrition (Shuls & Flores, 2020), and the second is a diminishing number of individuals entering the teaching profession (Casley-Hayford et al., 2022). During the pandemic in 2021, 14% of public school teachers abandoned the field, opting to work in non-education-related fields (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). In the U.S. alone, roughly 8% of the nation's teachers leave the profession yearly, and this number has remained constant since 2012 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023; Sutchter et al., 2016). In addition, it is estimated that 50% of early service teachers abandon the teaching profession within the first five years of teaching (Alam & Asmawi, 2024; McLean, 2019; Ingersoll et al., 2018). While the reasons teachers abandon the field are due to many factors (e.g., personal, financial, and job-related), motivation is a significant factor in teacher retention (Casley-Hayford et al., 2022). However, it is important to understand that motivation can change. Teachers need to continually practice self-reflection and be in tune with the internal compass that oriented them to select teaching as a career since that understanding is crucial to remaining in the field (Manuel & Hughes, 2006). Hence, the purpose of this research was to understand pre-service educators' initial motivations for entering the teaching profession. Motivation is important because it fuels teachers' actions to complete their day-to-day instructional tasks to teach and nurture children and ultimately is a factor in their decision to remain in the field (Casley-Hayford et al., 2022). Understanding pre-service teachers' motivations for entering the teaching profession could help school leaders address their teacher retention issues (Watt & Richardson, 2007). Furthermore, Van den Borre et al.'s (2021) research of 11,613 early career teachers from 3,998 schools across 31 countries indicated that there was a positive relation between a teacher's motivation for entering the teaching profession and staying in the profession.

While many studies have explored the factors that motivate educators to enter the teaching profession, the participants, though predominately female, often are white and non-Hispanic (Van den Borre et al., 2021; Ye et al., 2021; Ivanec, 2020; Yu, 2015), leaving a dearth in research that highlights Hispanic voices around motivations of pre-service teachers. To address this gap, this research centers the voices of Hispanic female pre-service teachers from a border university in south Texas regarding their motivations for entering the teaching profession.

Researching pre-service teachers' motivation for entering the teaching profession from diverse cultural backgrounds helps contribute to the research literature on understanding motivational factors for choosing teaching as a career of choice (Klassen et al., 2011). This research brings to the forefront the experiences of minority women from the U.S.-Mexico border. While the intention of this study was to understand why pre-service teachers chose to become educators, what is revealed are bold, complex stories showcasing the significant impact teachers make on students' lives who experience bullying, discrimination, and feelings of otherness. Examining the educational experiences of pre-service teachers when they were enrolled in the K-12 system helps bring to the center the aspirational voices of the periphery-*minority women living along the U.S.-Mexico border* into the realm of teacher motivation.

This research asked:

(1) What factors (intrinsic, extrinsic, or altruistic) motivated pre-service teachers to enter the teaching profession?

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(2) How do past educational experiences influence the decision to enter the teaching profession?

### Literature Review

#### Motivation

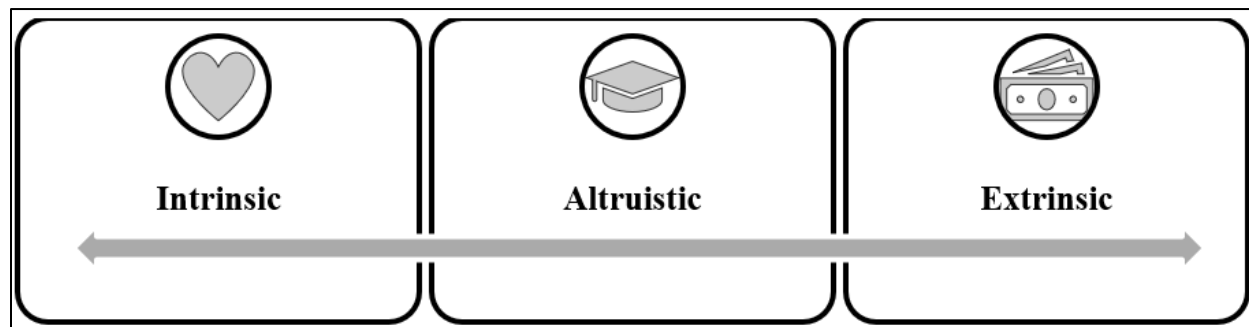
Qin et al. (2015) define motivation as the "force that drives us to do something" (p. 3). Ryan and Deci (2000) further add that "to be motivated means *to be moved* to do something" (p. 54, emphasis in original). When someone is motivated, their internal compass (e.g., beliefs, values, goals) guides them to act and do something in their lives. It is the internal compass that will continually guide an individual's actions. Self-determination theory suggests that individuals have a need to feel successful, connected, and be in control of their actions. When these basic needs are met then individuals will be more motivated. However, one aspect of Ryan and Deci's (2017) self-determination theory suggests that motivation can be "volitional" (p. 14) because it is a manifestation of an individual's preferences. As human beings, we are prone to change; therefore, our level of motivation is prone to fluctuate based on day-to-day experiences. However, motivational origins and impact vary for everyone. Motivation may be internal, external, or situational, and depending on the source, it will lead to a specific action. Specifically, the motivation to teach can be identified as a "self-selection" (Van den Borre et al., 2021, p. 3) factor affecting the choice to become a teacher. Individuals make the innate choice to become teachers. No one tells them to do so, and neither does society. The question, though, is, what factors contribute to an individual's decision to select teaching as a profession? Pop and Turner (2009) write that motivation influences a pre-service teacher's decision to enter the teaching profession, even though the contextual factors of individuals may be different (e.g., experiences, background). The authors further contend that an individual's identity, beliefs about teaching, and general confidence also affect the decision to enter the teaching profession. As Ryan and Deci (2000) explain, the crux of motivation is an internal combination of our beliefs, values, and aspirations, which, when combined, steer us to make a choice. In the case of pre-service educators, it involves understanding the reasons that contributed to their decision to become a teacher.

Scholars who research motivation for entering the teaching profession generally agree that motivational factors can be classified into three broad categories: intrinsic, extrinsic, and altruistic (Kwok et al., 2022; Van den Borre et al., 2021; Ivanec, 2020; Heinz, 2015; Gore, 2018; Tang et al. 2018). As illustrated in Figure 1, these motivational categories are each distinct. Intrinsic motivation, as defined by Van den Borre et al. (2021), is when an individual does something out of pure enjoyment because it makes them happy. For pre-service teachers, an example is the love of teaching and working with children in general (Reeves & Lowemhaut, 2016). Intrinsic motivations of pre-service teachers can also include the desire to make an impact and a belief that they are good at working with children (Ivanec, 2020). Altruistic motivation is defined as putting the needs of others first before their own to ensure well-being or success and extrinsic motivation is focused on the opportunities and benefits that a job provides (Van den Borre et al., 2021). While individuals may choose to enter the teaching profession for various reasons, in terms of motivational factors, prior research (Chong & Low, 2009; Reeves & Lowemhaut, 2016) has concluded that the primary reasons for individuals entering the teaching profession fall into both altruistic and intrinsic motivational reasons.

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**Figure 1**

*Motivation Categories*



*Note:* Author created figure. Icon represents a characteristic of the motivation type but is not all-inclusive.

Altruistic factors for entering the teaching profession include wanting to be of service to others, making an impact on the lives of students, and making a societal contribution (Fray & Gore, 2018). Pre-service teachers enter the profession eager to make a difference and with a "sense of mission: to transform the lives" (Manuel & Hughes, 2006, p. 21) of students. Altruistic reasons are the most common motivational factor that individuals indicate for entering the teaching profession (Kwok et al., 2022). When individuals select teaching as a profession to make an impact/difference in society (Bilim, 2014; Bergmark et al., 2018) or because they see teaching as a worthwhile profession and want to help children grow (Noor et al. 2012), it is out of altruistic motivation. On the other hand, when an individual engages in a task or action due to pure enjoyment, self-satisfaction, or because "it is inherently interesting" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 55), then they are driven by intrinsic motivation. Individuals who possess the abilities to teach in general, specific abilities in a given subject, or a general belief that teaching is their true calling enter the teaching profession intrinsically motivated (Kwok et al., 2022; Fray & Gore, 2018). However, when individuals enter the teaching profession to yield a gain, such as a reward or approval, they are driven by extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). External factors that motivate individuals to enter the teaching profession include the work schedule, career stability, pay, work environment, and time off for holidays (Fray & Gore, 2018). Whether altruistic, intrinsic, or extrinsic, the reality is that there is a great need for teachers. Teacher attrition and retention is a global problem, and identifying the motivational reasons pre-service educators enter the profession needs to be a priority because, as Chiong et al. (2017) argue, educators who enter the teaching profession for intrinsic reasons tend to remain in the profession.

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this exploratory survey research was to identify the reasons (extrinsic, intrinsic, or altruistic) that motivated pre-service teachers to enter the teaching profession and to understand if experiences with educators in their past influenced their career choices.

### **Participants and Context**

The sample consisted of 29 primarily Hispanic pre-service teachers who were enrolled in the College of Education at a border university in South Texas. The research utilized a convenience sampling approach since the participants were enrolled in courses taught by the

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researcher and fit the population of interest for the research. The students were enrolled in courses addressing literacy and social studies instruction for EC-6 learners. 100% of the respondents were female, 6.9% were sophomores, 58.6% were classified as juniors, and 34.5% were seniors. While all respondents were enrolled in the College of Education, 62.1% were pursuing an EC-6 generalist specialization, and 37.9% were pursuing a Bilingual education specialization. Table 1 shows the demographic profile of each of the 29 participants in this study. About 51.7% of pre-service teachers indicated that they had a family member who was an educator, while 48.3% indicated that they did not have a family member in the education field. The majority of pre-service teachers indicated wanting to work with children in Pre-kinder/1st grade (48.3%) and 2nd/3rd grade (48.3%), and one indicated a preference for teaching middle school.

**Table 1**  
*Pre-Service Teachers (PST) Profile Demographics*

PST	Classification	Program	PST	Classification	Program
Amy	Junior	EC-6 generalist	Cindy	Senior	EC-6 generalist
Eliza	Junior	Bilingual	Sylvia	Senior	Bilingual
Vanessa	Senior	EC-6 generalist	Ana	Junior	Bilingual
Karen	Senior	EC-6 generalist	Lydia	Junior	EC-6 generalist
Kimberly	Junior	Bilingual	Brianna	Senior	Bilingual
Kayla	Junior	EC-6 generalist	Brenda	Senior	EC-6 generalist
Jessica	Junior	EC-6 generalist	Alexandra	Senior	EC-6 generalist
Denise	Junior	Bilingual	Elena	Junior	Bilingual
Valentina	Junior	EC-6 generalist	Adriana	Senior	Bilingual
Victoria	Sophomore	EC-6 generalist	Beth	Junior	EC-6 generalist
Claudia	Sophomore	Bilingual	Julie	Junior	EC-6 generalist
Brenda	Junior	EC-6 generalist	Veronica	Senior	EC-6 generalist
Iliana	Junior	Bilingual	Jackie	Junior	EC-6 generalist
Alice	Senior	EC-6 generalist	Esther	Junior	Bilingual
Sara	Junior	EC-6 generalist			

**Note:** The table displays demographic information collected about the participants. The names listed are pseudonyms for the pre-service teachers that participated in the research study.

## Data Collection

Data was collected from 29 pre-service teachers enrolled in a border university in south Texas. A researcher-developed survey was emailed to pre-service teachers via their university email to complete. The collected data consisted of both quantitative and qualitative responses. The researcher developed an instrument consisting of 15 questions, of which 13 were Likert scale items (1-Strongly Disagree, 5-Strongly Agree) and 2 were open-ended. The Likert scale items asked pre-service teachers to indicate the extent to which they agreed on the reasons why they chose to enter the teaching profession: (1) altruistic "to make a difference in a child's life," (2) intrinsic "enjoy working with children," "good at explaining and showing others how things work," and (3) extrinsic "the job of teaching seems easy to do," "because of the work schedule." The open-ended questions provided pre-service teachers with information regarding why they chose to become educators and whether they had a positive or negative experience with an educator.

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### **Data Analysis**

To better understand the motivational factors influencing pre-service teachers' reasons for entering the teaching profession, Likert scale data was quantitatively analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis, which is reported as percentages. In the Likert scale questions, pre-service teachers indicated their level of agreement with the statement regarding their choice to enter the teaching profession. The statements addressed altruistic reasons (items # 6 and 15), intrinsic reasons (items # 7, 8, and 9), and extrinsic reasons (items #10, 11, 12, 13, and 14), or experiences (items # 16, 17, and 18). For the open-ended items (#19 and 20), two rounds of thematic coding were performed. During initial coding, each experience was classified as being either positive (coded 0) or negative (coded 1), and initial codes were identified. First, each pre-service teacher's response to open-ended question #19 was read and coded as being either a positive or negative experience. If participants used the word "positive" or "negative" in their response, the response was coded as such. There were 16 pre-service teachers who had a positive experience and 12 who had a negative experience. During the first coding phase, the researcher identified a word or short phrase and used *in vivo* coding to identify themes. During the first phase, predominant codes that emerged included "teacher help and support," "learning environment," and "teacher pedagogy." These three predominant themes were utilized to focus on during the second coding phase to re-code the experiences. During the second coding phase, thematic codes were narrowed down to the following themes: encouragement/teacher support, teacher pedagogy, and sense of belonging, to describe pre-service teachers' experiences with educators.

The same process was followed for the question asking pre-service teachers to explain why they chose to become educators. First, pre-service teachers' answers were classified as either altruistic, intrinsic, or extrinsic. If participants indicated enjoyment or passion working with children that contributed to the experience being classified as intrinsic, and if they indicated wanting to make a difference, impact, or change, the reason was coded as altruistic. There were 13 pre-service teachers who had altruistic motivations for entering the profession and 15 who had intrinsic motivations. During the first coding phase, the researcher identified keywords or a short phrase to identify themes. During the first phase, predominant codes that emerged included "make a difference or impact," "passion," and "working with children." These three predominant themes were utilized to focus on during the second coding phase to re-code the experiences. During the second coding phase, the thematic codes that were predominant included: make a difference, passion, and experience/true calling. Pre-service teachers gave no extrinsic reasons for entering the teaching profession for the open-ended question.

### **Findings**

#### ***Motivational Factors***

The analysis of the data (see Figure 2) indicated that 89.7% of pre-service teachers strongly agreed they entered the teaching profession for altruistic reasons, such as to make a difference, and 79.3% because they generally agreed that it was a worthwhile profession. As for intrinsic reasons, 79% of pre-service teachers strongly agreed that their self-efficacy in working with children influenced their decision to enter the teaching profession, while 86.2% generally agreed that they chose to enter the field because they enjoyed working with children. However, only 65.5% generally agreed that their self-efficacy in explaining to others influenced their

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decision to enter the teaching profession. As for extrinsic reasons, 51.7% of pre-service teachers generally disagreed that their choice to become an educator was due to teaching being an easy profession; however, 41.1% indicated uncertainty that their choice was influenced by the perception that teaching may be easy. Pre-service teachers generally disagreed (62%) with being motivated to enter the teaching profession due to pay. However, 55.2% generally agreed that the flexibility of the work schedule influenced their decision to become an educator. Also, 62.1% of pre-service teachers indicated they generally disagreed that working with children was easy as a reason for entering the profession. Furthermore, 58.6% of pre-service teachers see the teaching profession as a stepping stone to other positions within the education field. The results, therefore, indicate that pre-service teachers generally are motivated to enter the teaching profession for altruistic and intrinsic reasons. While some may be attracted to enter teaching because of the work schedule, pay is generally not a motivating factor for becoming an educator.

Aside from altruistic, intrinsic, and extrinsic factors influencing teaching as a career choice, it is also important to note that experiential situations can also be influencing factors. For example, while 57.1% of the pre-service teachers had a family member who was an educator, it did not influence their decision to become a teacher themselves. However, 72.4% of pre-service teachers indicated that their positive interaction with an educator influenced their decision to become a teacher, while 41.3% of pre-service teachers' negative experiences with an educator influenced their decisions to enter the teaching profession. Furthermore, 44.8% of pre-service teachers indicated they had a negative experience with an educator but generally disagreed that it influenced their decision to enter teaching.

**Figure 2**

*Pre-Service Teachers' Motivations*



*Note:* Numbers represent percentages. (A) denotes altruistic motivation, while (I) denotes intrinsic motivation

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### ***Altruistic Motivation***

In the survey, pre-service teachers were asked to describe why they chose to become an educator. Responses were thematically coded and classified as either altruistic, intrinsic, or extrinsic. Analysis of the data indicated that 44.8% (N = 13) of pre-service teachers provided an altruistic reason for entering teaching, while 51.7% (N = 15) of pre-service teachers indicated intrinsic reasons for entering the education field. No pre-service teachers indicated extrinsic reasons for choosing to become an educator. The self-reported reasons for entering the teaching profession support prior findings that the pre-service teachers indicated in their level of agreement for entering the profession, where most indicated both altruistic and intrinsic reasons. The codes that emerged for altruistic motivations included those of being a role model (N = 3), creating a safe space (N = 5), and making a difference or impact (N = 10).

**Role model.** Teachers are not only responsible for teaching content, but they also serve the roles of nurturers and caregivers, and impressionable young minds often see them as role models. In this research, pre-service teachers indicated serving as role models and wanted students to view them as "someone that they can trust and depend on as well" (Amy). Perhaps Belinda wrote it best, stating that "teaching is a profession that requires you to play many roles... counselor...nurse...but most importantly, a teacher must be the base of foundations that the students rely on." Teachers are often the individuals that students can look to for hope and serve as inspiration. As Esther explains: "I came from a low-income school and had the support and empathy of my teachers, which made me realize the impact one person can have in making a child's life better. I want to be one of those people." These pre-service teachers are altruistically motivated to assume the responsibility of nurturing their future students and being someone who can be counted on for support in the classroom.

**Safe Space.** A classroom requires more than books, desks, students, and a teacher. It requires love, understanding, and a sense of safety. A classroom should feel like a second home. Teachers have the responsibility to create a learning environment that helps students feel welcomed, safe, and supported. Pre-service teachers indicated wanting to become teachers because they wanted to create learning environments for their students where they felt safe and supported, just as when they were students. Vanessa writes, "Because as a young kid, I had to deal with unstableness and unsafe at home, so I used school as an escapism. I know there will be children in my classroom with similar experiences, and I want to make a difference and inspire them to become someone in life." Feeling safe at school is important, as Kimberly explains, because "without the sense of safety, children cannot learn." Teachers wear many hats in the classroom, one of those being to create a sense of belonging because as Denise writes, "for some of these students' school is the only place that they feel safe and loved, you never know what a child is going through at home." A classroom is a second home for students, and these pre-service teachers understand that developing a safe and secure learning environment is essential to the social and emotional well-being of students.

**Make a difference/impact.** Pre-service educators driven by altruistic motivation have a goal in mind: to make an impact. The impact that they make may involve creating a nurturing and supportive learning environment, but it also entails being an advocate for students. Rita Peirson (2013) said, "Every child deserves a champion-an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insist that they become the best they can possibly be." The most common altruistic reason that pre-service teachers gave for entering the teaching profession was to make a difference/impact in the lives of children. Pre-service teachers

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understand that what they teach is impactful "because they will use those skills for the rest of their life" (Victoria) in "a beautiful career to teach our potential future leaders" (Iliana). Others want to teach students "to be able to create without having limits" (Claudia) in an environment where "failing is okay because I will help them get back on track" (Brenda). Pre-service teachers believe that "the next generation deserves educators who care in developing their young minds" (Lydia) and help them "create courage to overcome their obstacles" (Belinda). Pre-service educators understand that they are the chief inspirational officers in the classroom; they have the power to unlock students' potential, support their dreams, and guide students on the right path to success in the future.

### *Intrinsic Motivation*

Intrinsic motivation involves having a love and passion for doing something (Van den Borre et al., 2021). The pre-service teachers in this research indicated intrinsic motivations as a factor for entering the teaching profession. The analysis and coding of pre-service teachers' open-ended responses revealed the following themes: passion, working with children, and experience/true calling.

**Passion.** Individuals who have a passion for something can immerse themselves in it for a long time and genuinely reap satisfaction from doing it. Pre-service teachers indicated they entered the teaching profession because they genuinely had a passion for teaching. A teacher who has a passion for the profession, as Victoria writes, "love teaching in general" and they experience a sense of joy when teaching others; as Beth explains, "I love when people come and ask me for help with something because it makes me feel proud of myself when they understand the concept after I have explained it to them." Eliza adds, "I am a very passionate and patient person, which seem to be two strong characteristics of a well-grounded teacher. I've always wanted to become a teacher and hope to achieve my dream of educating little ones to the best of my ability." Continuous learning in the field is another characteristic that some pre-service teachers who are passionate share. For example, Alice explained, "It is something I am very passionate about and a career that will constantly push and challenge me. It is a career that will help me to learn every day and allow me to mold and shape young children to also want to constantly learn and grow." Intrinsically motivated pre-service teachers indicate a genuine love for teaching others and feel enjoyment when they are successful at helping others learn.

**Working with children.** Anyone who enters the teaching profession understands that the job entails working with children. A common theme that developed from pre-service teachers' open-ended responses about why they entered the teaching profession centered around their enjoyment of working with children. For Valentina, the "experience of being with kids and watching over them and having the trust of others to be around their kids" influenced her to choose a teaching profession. Veronica writes that "the amazing part is seeing them grow and accomplish more than they thought they could," and in essence, that is the major responsibility of all educators, "empowering them with knowledge to help make the world better." Intrinsically motivated pre-service educators understand that working with children is a major responsibility, but they chose the profession because they enjoy working with children.

**Experience/true calling.** Choosing a career can be a difficult task for many people; however, for others, it comes easy because they have always known what they want to do with their lives. Another intrinsic motivation indicated by pre-service teachers was that they felt it was their calling to teach, and often, this calling was attributed to past experiences they had. For

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example, one pre-service teacher, Cindy, referred to having a "knack for it" and explained, "I have many younger siblings and as the older sibling I practically raised them, looked out for their studies, and taught them when I had the chance." Sara explained, "By the time I reached high school, I took on leadership roles in clubs and enjoyed when people would ask me for help and I loved providing answers and solutions. By then I knew for a fact I wanted to become a teacher." It is evident that pre-service teachers' innate understanding of their abilities and their educational/familial experiences influenced their decision to enter the teaching profession.

### *Altruistic/Intrinsic Relationship*

Correlational analysis was performed using Spearman's rho to determine the strength of the relationship between intrinsic and altruistic motivations for entering the teaching profession. As seen in Table 2, there is a correlational relationship between the reason for choosing to be an educator to make a difference (altruistic) and the intrinsic factors of being good at working with children ( $rho = .394, p = .032$ ) and being able to explain to others ( $rho = .478, p = .015$ ) which is statistically significant. The result indicates that as the level of agreement for choosing to teach for altruistic reasons increases, so does the intrinsic motivation for why they chose to become an educator.

**Table 2**  
*Intrinsic/Altruistic Motivation Correlations (N = 29)*

			6. "I want to make a difference in a child's life."	7. "I am good at working with children."	8. "I enjoy working with children."	9. "I am good at explaining and showing others how things work".
Spearman's rho	6. I chose to become an educator because I want to make a difference in a child's life.	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.400*	.349	.449*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.032	.064	.015
		N	29	29	29	29
	7. I chose to become an educator because I am good at working with children.	Correlation Coefficient	.400*	1.000	.589**	.502**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.032	.	<.001	.006
		N	29	29	29	29
	8. I chose to become an educator because I enjoy working with children.	Correlation Coefficient	.349	.589**	1.000	-.009
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.064	<.001	.	.963
		N	29	29	29	29
	9. I chose to become an educator because I am good at explaining and showing others how things work.	Correlation Coefficient	.449*	.502**	-.009	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.015	.006	.963	.
		N	29	29	29	29

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

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### ***Experiences with Educators***

In the survey, pre-service educators were asked if they chose to become educators because of a positive or negative experience with an educator. In the Likert scale portion of the survey, 72.4% of pre-service teachers generally agreed that a positive experience with an educator influenced their decision to enter the teaching profession. While 41.3% of pre-service educators generally agreed that a negative experience with an educator influenced their career choice. When they were asked how educational experiences (either positive/negative) influenced their decision to enter the teaching field, 16 pre-service teachers (55%) indicated a positive experience, while 12 pre-service teachers (41.3%) indicated a negative experience as an influential factor. Pre-service teachers' experiences were thematically coded to identify specific influential factors that contributed to the choice to enter teaching. During the coding phase of pre-service educators' open-ended responses to experiences with educators, several themes emerged: encouragement/teacher support, teacher pedagogy, and sense of belonging.

**Encouragement.** The most common theme (16 of 29 pre-service teachers) that emerged from qualitative analysis of respondents' open-ended responses to experiences with teachers that had influenced their career choice was encouragement. Whether the experience was positive or negative, encouragement or lack thereof was a significant factor in respondents' experiences with teachers. Teachers can have a positive impact on their students; as Sylvia explained, "I had a really strong support from my teachers. Until this day, it amazes me how I was able to learn a whole new language with the help and dedication of my ESL teacher." Lydia adds, "I carry with me the invaluable lessons learned from Mrs. Prado's example of dedication, empathy, and belief in the potential of every student. As a naturally reserved student, I struggled with confidence, particularly in my writing. Yet, Mrs. Prado saw potential in me that I didn't even recognize myself. I'll never forget the day she encouraged me to enter a poetry contest, despite my reservations about sharing my work with others." On the other hand, there are pre-service teachers whose experiences were not as encouraging, especially when they were Spanish-speaking immigrants enrolling in public schools in the United States. As a recent arrival on the border from Mexico, Eliza recalls having trouble acclimating to the learning environment in the school system, writing, "My first-grade teacher didn't improve things as she lacked patience and empathy and was quick to point out my mistakes in front of my peers, developing internal insecurities and doubts and making me feel dumb." Belinda further elaborates on a similar experience, stating, "The teacher I had knew little to no Spanish which made it very difficult for me to learn the new material of the class lessons." Karen, who identified herself with a learning disability recalls being "bullied by students and educators saying I would never comprehend anything." Encouragement of students is a major responsibility that educators are tasked with doing, and when they fail to provide it, it can leave a lasting impact on students, as the participants in this study indicated.

**Teacher Pedagogy.** Another common theme (11 of 29 pre-service teachers) that characterized pre-service teachers' experiences referred to the pedagogical practices of the teacher. An educator's philosophy to teaching can impact student learning, as described by Victoria: "My 5th grade teacher [s] philosophy was play to learn. It made learning more fun as well as easier" and also challenged them to think critically as Elena said, "Dr. Nelson...she would encourage us to answer our own questions". At times, educators go beyond teaching required content to teach important life skills. As Sara explains, "My pathway teacher...she taught me essential skills like how to present myself professionally and speak professionally. Not

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only did she teach her students, how to act professionally, but she also taught us life skills". Pre-service teachers who indicated a negative reference to teachers' pedagogical practices included lack of instruction, as described by Iliana: "She would not offer her students help nor teach in the classroom but only play YouTube videos for lecture" and "they just showed up to class, gave an assignment of the day, and sat at their desk for the rest of the day or only lectured for a short period of time" (Beth) and an unwillingness to provide instructional clarification as Brenda (native Spanish speaker) described "whenever we ask her for help or to repeat the instruction, she will mumble under her breath and make a face of annoyance." Teacher pedagogical practices affect the learning dynamics of the classroom and can also contribute to students' sense of belonging.

**Sense of Belonging.** The last theme (7 of 29 pre-service teachers) that emerged from pre-service teachers' experiences was feeling like they belonged because "school was a safe space" (Kimberly) and "the classroom felt like a second home" (Kayla). However, that was not always the case, as Eliza describes her experience upon initially arriving in the United States from Mexico and having difficulty adjusting. She explains, "My first-grade teacher didn't improve things as she lacked patience and empathy and was quick to point out my mistakes in front of my peers, developing insecurities and doubts and making me feel dumb." Brenda, also an immigrant, described how a third-grade teacher's "classroom never felt like a safe learning environment, which caused me to never ask for help in classes as the years passed." Esther adds that her negative experience "was when the teachers were rude to students and would humiliate them." Creating a sense of belonging is a teacher's responsibility and it is their actions that can nurture a child's overall social and emotional well-being to help them thrive or silence them to exist invisibly as the years go by.

There is a correlational relationship between pre-service teachers' self-analysis of influential experiences for choosing to enter the teaching profession and the level of agreement that a positive experience influenced their career choice ( $\rho = -.460, p = .014$ ), indicating that as the level of disagreement decreases the influence of the positive experience increases which is statistically significant. In addition, as the level of agreement that a negative experience influenced their career choice increases, so does the influence of a negative experience ( $\rho = .596, p < .001$ ), which is statistically significant. The results indicate that educational experiences, in some part, influenced the career choice of pre-service teachers.

## Discussion

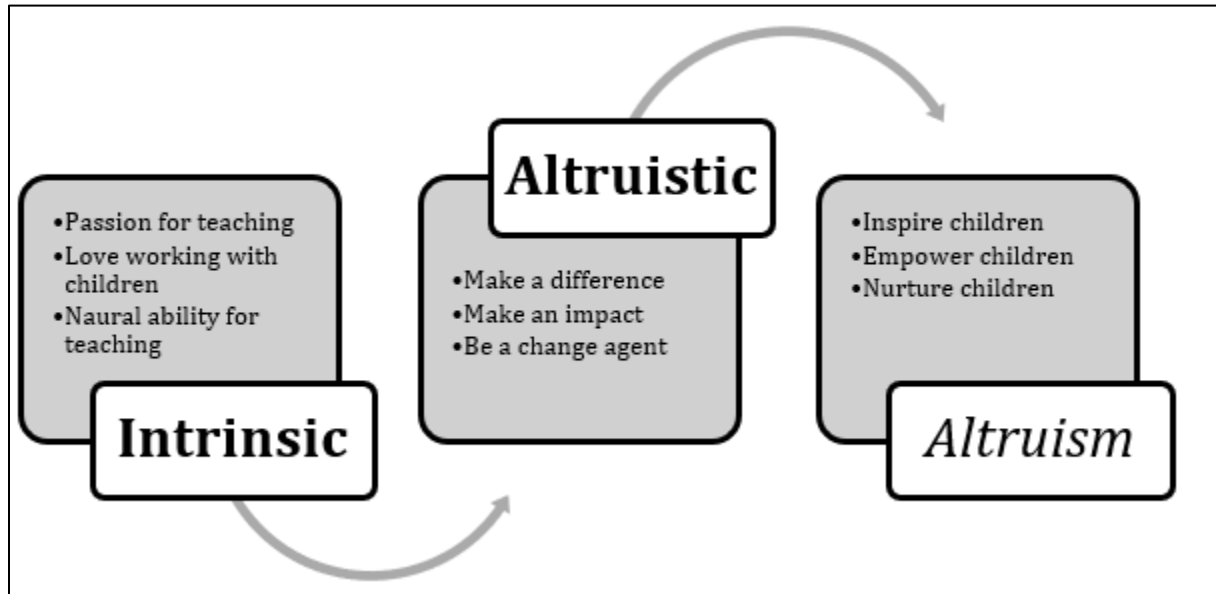
This survey research aimed to investigate the motivational factors of why pre-service teachers chose to enter the teaching profession and how their past educational experiences influenced their career choices. Specifically, this research focused primarily on Mexican-American women studying at a border university in South Texas. The results from this study confirmed prior research findings (Chong & Low, 2009; Reeves & Lowemhaut, 2016) that the most common reasons why people enter teaching are due to either an intrinsic or altruistic reason. This research study, however, goes beyond prior research, which primarily focused on the motivations of white pre-service teachers because the participants were female Mexican-Americans. Regarding altruistic reasons for entering the teaching profession, 89.7% of pre-service teachers indicated wanting to make a difference, and 79.3% because it was a worthwhile profession. As for intrinsic reasons, 79% believed they possessed self-efficacy in working with children, while 86.2% indicated they enjoyed working with children. Kwok et al.'s (2022)

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research findings revealed that in terms of altruistic reasons, some pre-service teachers pointed to nurturing students' social and emotional well-being by "creating a safe classroom environment" (p. 586). In this research study on pre-service teachers' motivations for entering teaching, 44.8% of pre-service teachers indicated an altruistic reason for entering teaching. The thematic reasons that emerged from qualitative coding included being a role model, creating a safe space, and making a difference. The results add to Kwok et al.'s findings as participants desired to create a safe learning environment because "school is the only place that they feel safe and loved" (Denise), and "without the sense of safety, children cannot learn" (Kimberly).

Furthermore, analysis of pre-service teachers' open-ended results indicated a combination of both altruistic and intrinsic factors for choosing teaching as a profession, suggesting that the lines between identifying clear altruistic and intrinsic factors may often become blurred. Instead, what emerges is this notion of "altruism," which indicates that altruistic individuals may be driven by intrinsic motivation. Correlation results indicated there was a statistically significant correlational relationship between the reason for choosing to be an educator to make a difference (altruistic) and the intrinsic factors of being good at working with children ( $\rho = .394, p = .032$ ) and being able to explain to others ( $\rho = .478, p = .015$ ). As seen in Figure 3, intrinsic motivation for teaching involves a genuine desire to work with children because of a love of teaching. In comparison, altruistic motivation is a desire to make an impact on the lives of children. Specifically, to teach them important life skills, build the leaders of the future, and empower them with knowledge. Pre-service teachers indicated they "love teaching" and want "to mold and shape young learners" but also want to "empower with knowledge" and help "make the world better" by "watching over them." Interconnecting these desires for their future learners creates a sense of altruism. Altruism suggests that pre-service educators who want to make a difference in the lives of children are often driven by intrinsic motivational factors for entering the teaching profession. Though some may indicate that they desire to make a difference or impact, deep down, that desire must be fueled by an intrinsic desire to do so. Noor et al.'s (2012) research findings indicated that the most common reason people select teaching as a profession is because they want to make a difference, which is altruistic, but they are also highly motivated, indicating intrinsic motivation. Why is this important? As Van den Borre et al. (2021) argue, teachers who entered the profession for intrinsic reasons or altruistic reasons, such as to make a difference, will more likely stay in the profession longer. For school leaders, this indicates that it is necessary to feed the teacher's soul and continue to nourish their intrinsic and altruistic spirit early on during initial entry into the field, as Shuls and Flores (2020) recommend using induction programs to help retain teachers. However, it is necessary to redesign induction programs that focus on the altruistic and intrinsic reasons why they entered the teaching profession to ensure sustainment over time.

Figure 3  
*Path to Altruism*



Note: Author created figure

The results from this study indicated that educational experiences, in some part, influenced the career choice of predominately Mexican American female pre-service teachers. In this research study, 72.4% of respondents indicated that a positive interaction with a teacher influenced their decision to enter the teaching profession, and 41.3% generally agreed that a negative experience with an educator influenced their career choice. The results indicate that an individual's educational experiences play a role in their choice to become an educator. Specifically, the correlational analysis indicated that the level of disagreement that they had a positive experience with an educator decreased ( $\rho = -.460, p = .014$ ). As the level of agreement that a negative experience influenced their career choice increases, so does the influence of a negative experience ( $\rho = .596, p < .001$ ). The findings from this research confirm Yu's (2015) and Ye et al.'s (2021) findings, which indicated that some pre-service teachers were motivated to become teachers by interactions or experiences they had with a teacher. Factors such as encouragement/lack of pedagogical practices and a feeling of a sense of belonging emerged as influential themes in participants' responses. As Ryan and Deci (2000) argue, motivation is "volitional" (p. 4), and the results indicate that while an experience with an educator influenced their decision to become an educator, the reason was different for all participants. While some recounted memories of support, encouragement, and patience, others recalled experiences of bullying, humiliation, and unwelcomeness. Despite the influential experiential differences, what unites the participants is a shared peripheral experience from the exteriority. Olsen (2008) writes that "teacher development is circular even as it is also forward-moving: a teacher is always collapsing the past, present, and future into a complex *mélange* of professional beliefs, goals, memories, and predictions while enacting practice" (p. 24). In revisiting their narrative experiences, these female Mexican-American pre-service educators collectively recalled and confronted their past educational experiences, validated their existence, and empowered themselves to not remain in the exteriority but instead propel themselves to the center of the totality. Their experience will fuel their future actions in the classroom, and their intrinsic drive

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will be altruistic to avoid a reliving of the past and ignite a transformative educational journey that school leaders are tasked with maintaining.

### **Contributions to the Field**

Prior research into teacher motivation (Chong & Low, 2009; Reeves & Lowenhaut, 2016; Kwok et al., 2022; Van den Borre et al., 2021; Ivanec, 2020; Heinz, 2015; Gore, 2018; Tang et al., 2018) indicated that individuals chose to enter the profession for intrinsic and altruistic reasons. However, the participants in prior research were predominantly white and non-Hispanic. The findings from this research confirmed that Mexican American pre-service educators' motivations for entering teaching are also both intrinsic and altruistic. The data analysis for this study is unique because pre-service teachers' responses to Likert scale items were cross-referenced with open-ended responses regarding their past educational experiences. The written narratives of pre-service educators helped to illuminate their voices regarding their choices and motivations for entering the teaching profession. Thus, the perspectives of Mexican-American women living along the U.S.-Mexico border are now represented in the larger scope of pre-service teacher motivation. Kwok et al. (2022) argue that some research literature indicates that pre-service teachers' motivations for entering the teaching profession are influenced by culture and specific circumstances. Hence, this case study situates the experiences of predominately Mexican American pre-service teachers living along the U.S.-Mexico border, which represent motivational voices from the exteriority. While prior research on teacher motivation has been performed in both national and international contexts of both Westernized and non-Westernized nations, the perspectives of minority women, particularly Mexican-Americans, have not been significantly studied. Specifically, some of the pre-service teachers in this study were immigrants whose educational experiences described difficulty in the classroom due to a language barrier and an unsupportive learning environment. Educator preparatory programs in border universities must take note of this finding and take steps to include coursework in teaching in a culturally and linguistically diverse classroom with an emphasis on nurturing the social and emotional well-being of students. The findings from this study indicate that for some pre-service teachers who happened to be immigrants, their educational experiences played a significant role in their choice to become educators. While this case study is on a small scale, it does help to expand the literature to look at the cultural motivational factors that influence pre-service teachers on the U.S.-Mexico border to enter the teaching profession. Future research is needed to investigate if initial motivations for entering the teaching profession remain after entering the profession. It would be noteworthy to investigate if educators entering the profession for intrinsic reasons stay longer as opposed to those for altruistic reasons and if the results vary by school level (elementary as opposed to secondary).

### **Conclusion**

Teacher retention is a worldwide problem that is well-documented in the research literature (McInerney et al., 2015; Reeves & Lowenhaut, 2016; Ingersoll et al., 2018; Le Velle, 2019; Shuls & Flores, 2020; Casley-Hayford et al., 2022). The findings from this research indicate that those who choose to become educators do so because they are genuinely interested in teaching children and making a difference in their lives. Whether the reason is intrinsic or altruistic, they are not in it for the money. They are in it for the satisfaction of shaping the young

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minds of tomorrow's leaders and teaching them something worthwhile because they love children.

Moreover, it is that love that school leaders need to nourish to ensure that these heroes remain in the field. School leaders must triangulate recruitment from all angles, pay a good wage, nurture the teaching soul, and provide the necessary support. Examining the motivations of pre-service teachers helps to demystify the experiences that helped shape the identity of the altruistic and intrinsically motivated pre-service teacher. Many have had a positive experience with an educator who illuminated their path to teaching, while others who were silenced, ignored, or humiliated chose to be different. Our goal as educators is to support our field from within and encourage reflective practices and motivational support to retain educators who selected teaching as their profession for the right reasons: because they have the motivation to teach young minds and make a difference.

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## Appendix

### Pre-Service Teachers' Motivations for Entering Teaching Profession Survey

**Instructions: Read each question carefully and select the answer that best represents you.**

1. What is your gender?
  - (a) Male
  - (b) Female
  - (c) Prefer not to say
2. What is your classification?
  - (a) Freshman
  - (b) Sophomore

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- (c) Junior
- (d) Senior
- 3. What is your specialization?
  - (a) Special education
  - (b) Bilingual education
  - (c) EC-6 generalist
  - (d) other
- 4. Do you have a family member that is an educator?
  - (a) Yes
  - (b) No
- 5. Which group of children would you prefer to work with?
  - (a) Pk-1<sup>st</sup>
  - (b) 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup>
  - (c) 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>
  - (d) 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>
  - (e) 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>

### ***Motivations***

*Select the response for each question that best represents the influence of each factor on your decision to enter the teaching profession.*

- 6. I chose to become an educator because I want to make a difference in a child's life.
  - (a) Strongly disagree
  - (b) Disagree
  - (c) Neither agree or disagree
  - (d) Agree
  - (e) Strongly agree
- 7. I chose to become an educator because I am good at working with children.
  - (a) Strongly disagree
  - (b) Disagree
  - (c) Neither agree or disagree
  - (d) Agree
  - (e) Strongly agree
- 8. I chose to become an educator because I enjoy working with children.
  - (a) Strongly disagree
  - (b) Disagree
  - (c) Neither agree or disagree
  - (d) Agree
  - (e) Strongly agree
- 9. I chose to become an educator because I am good at explaining and showing others how things work.
  - (a) Strongly disagree
  - (b) Disagree
  - (c) Neither agree or disagree
  - (d) Agree
  - (e) Strongly agree
- 10. I chose to become an educator because I think the job of teaching seems easy to do.

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- (a) Strongly disagree
  - (b) Disagree
  - (c) Neither agree or disagree
  - (d) Agree
  - (e) Strongly agree
11. I chose to become an educator because it is a well-paid and stable career path.
- (a) Strongly disagree
  - (b) Disagree
  - (c) Neither agree or disagree
  - (d) Agree
  - (e) Strongly agree
12. I chose to become an educator because of the work schedule (ex., weekends off, holidays off, long summer break).
- (a) Strongly disagree
  - (b) Disagree
  - (c) Neither agree or disagree
  - (d) Agree
  - (e) Strongly agree
13. I chose to become an educator because I think working with children is easy.
- (a) Strongly disagree
  - (b) Disagree
  - (c) Neither agree or disagree
  - (d) Agree
  - (e) Strongly agree
14. I chose to become an educator as a stepping stone to later becoming a counselor, school administrator, or librarian.
- (a) Strongly disagree
  - (b) Disagree
  - (c) Neither agree or disagree
  - (d) Agree
  - (e) Strongly agree
15. I chose to become an educator because teaching children is a worthwhile profession.
- (a) Strongly disagree
  - (b) Disagree
  - (c) Neither agree or disagree
  - (d) Agree
  - (e) Strongly agree
16. I chose to become an educator because of a family member.
- (a) Strongly disagree
  - (b) Disagree
  - (c) Neither agree or disagree
  - (d) Agree
  - (e) Strongly agree
17. I chose to become an educator because of a positive experience I had with an educator.
- (a) Strongly disagree
  - (b) Disagree

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- (c) Neither agree or disagree
  - (d) Agree
  - (e) Strongly agree
18. I chose to become an educator because of a negative experience I had with an educator.
- (a) Strongly disagree
  - (b) Disagree
  - (c) Neither agree or disagree
  - (d) Agree
  - (e) Strongly agree

### ***Open-Ended***

*Please respond to these questions with as much detail as possible and to the best of your ability.*

19. What experience (s) (positive or negative) influenced in some part your decision to become an educator?
20. You have chosen to become an educator. Why do you think the teaching profession is for you?

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