International Journal of Community Engagement Payungi

IJCEP International Journal of Community Engagement Payungi

Vol. 5 No. 3 December 2025
https://journal.payungi.org/index.php/ijcep

Exploring Motivational Differences Teacher and Non-Teacher in Pursuing Master in ELE : Study Of Relative Autonomy Index (RAI)

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Abstract

The expansion of Master's programs in English Language Education (ELE) in Indonesia has created highly heterogeneous cohorts, combining active Teacher students driven by professional requirements and Non-Teacher students seeking academic specialization. While the quality of academic motivation is a critical predictor of persistence, existing Indonesian literature rarely compares the distinct motivational profiles of these two groups. This study aimed to systematically investigate the differences in motivation between Teacher and Non-Teacher ELE master's students by analyzing the Relative Autonomy Index (RAI). Using a quantitative descriptive design, the study surveyed 84 students (38 Teachers and 46 Non-Teachers) across various Indonesian universities. Data, collected via an adapted Academic Motivation Scale, were used to compute the RAI, which measures the net influence of autonomous versus controlled motivational drives. The findings revealed a sharp divergence in motivational quality: Non-Teacher students (RAI: +2.16) exhibit a strong dominance of Autonomous Motivation, rooted in intrinsic interest and personal value, aligning with exploration-driven goals. In stark contrast, Teacher students (RAI: -0.49) are driven by Controlled Motivation, suggesting their academic pursuit is primarily instrumental, tethered to external regulations like institutional obligations, certification requirements, or career promotion. This study fills a critical gap by providing empirical evidence that professional background fundamentally shapes the quality of postgraduate motivation, underscoring the need for tailored academic support and program policies in heterogeneous ELE environments.

Article Info

Article History
Received: October 16, 2025
Revised : November 28, 2025
Accepted : December 15, 2025

Keywords:
Relative Autonomy Index (RAI), Academic Motivation, Teacher, Non-Teacher, English Language Education.

Published by Yayasan Payungi Smart Madani
Website https://journal.payungi.org/index.php/ijcep
ISSN 2776-4303

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, Master's programs in English Language Education (ELE) in Indonesia have undergone rapid and significant expansion. This growth is primarily driven by national demands for enhanced teacher qualification, institutional accreditation requirements, and the increasing social and professional value attached to postgraduate degrees (Citrawan et al., 2018 ;Tanjung & Kurniawan, 2024; Nordin et al., 2021). This development has resulted in heterogeneous ELE classrooms. A substantial proportion of these students are practicing English teachers who pursue the degree to address professional needs, upgrade pedagogical competencies, secure upward mobility, and comply with institutional demands (Al-Shibani & Athawadi, 2025; Choemue & Mbato, 2020; Al Habahbeh, 2014; Al-Shredi, 2024). Concurrently, ELE programs also attract non-teacher students including recent graduates and professionals from diverse backgrounds seeking academic specialization, career reorientation, or broader opportunities in English-related fields (Figuera Gazo et al., 2020; Kristiana & Kuswandono, 2024). Consequently, teacher and non-teacher students share the same academic space but inherently enter with distinct expectations, responsibilities, and motivational orientations rooted in their professional identities.

Despite this clear diversity characterizing Indonesian ELE postgraduate cohorts, research has seldom acknowledged or systematically examined this demographic split. Current motivational studies (Choemue & Mbato, 2020; Kristiana & Kuswandono, 2024; Mauliya et al., 2020) conceptualize postgraduate motivation in generalized terms without distinguishing whether motivations originate from the professional identity of an in-service teacher or as a non-teacher learner (Perera, 2022). Early

contextual evidence already suggests that these groups navigate postgraduate study differently. Teachers often balance coursework with demanding teaching loads and administrative obligations, resulting in motivations centered on career progression, institutional compliance, and pedagogical enhancement (Tanjung & Kurniawan, 2024; Nghia, 2019). Conversely, non-teacher students typically frame postgraduate study as a space for intellectual enrichment, identity formation, or strategic career exploration (Figuera Gazo et al., 2020; Susilo et al., 2024). Despite these clear contextual distinctions, no Indonesian study has empirically compared the motivational tendencies of teacher and non-teacher students within the ELE Master's context.

This oversight exists even within the international literature, which emphasizes that postgraduate motivation is shaped by a complex interplay of socioeconomic aspiration, career mobility, competitive environments, and employment insecurity (Amani et al., 2022; Abdullah & Saeid, 2016; Hegarty et al., 2012; Jung & Li, 2021; Kotera et al., 2023; Wen & Sha, 2014). Studies rarely explore these differences based explicitly on professional background, suggesting the oversight is global in scope (Ho et al., 2016). In Indonesia, these structural pressures are intensified by specific Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements (Richards & Farrell, 2005) and the necessity for degree alignment with institutional expectations (Tanjung & Kurniawan, 2024). Since motivation is fundamentally linked to professional identity and commitment (Han & Yin, 2016; Ma, 2022), the assumption that teacher and non-teacher postgraduate students hold distinctly differentiated motivational profiles is robust. Therefore, understanding motivation through the lens of professional identity becomes a critical foundation for improving program design, supervision practices, and student support systems.

To address this critical gap and refine our understanding of postgraduate learners, this study investigates and compares the motivational orientations of teacher and non-teacher ELE Master's students in Indonesia. By examining the quality of motivation through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) which defines motivation along a continuum from extrinsic to intrinsic (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and utilizing the Relative Autonomy Index (RAI), this research provides timely empirical evidence on precisely how professional background influences motivation (Woody, 2021). The findings are expected to inform the development of more responsive and equitable policies in ELE postgraduate programs, particularly amidst rapidly expanding student diversity.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative explanatory design to examine the autonomy orientation of students' motivation using the Relative Autonomy Index (RAI) grounded in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The Academic Motivation Scale (AMS; Vallerand et al., 1992) was administered to quantify different forms of motivation intrinsic motivation, identified regulation, introjected regulation, external regulation, and amotivation. These subscales were subsequently converted into an RAI score to determine the degree to which students' motivation reflected autonomous versus controlled regulation. The use of the RAI allowed the researcher to generate a single weighted index that represents the continuum of motivation, providing a more nuanced interpretation of students' motivational tendencies. The design enabled the analysis of how autonomy-driven motivation manifests among postgraduate students and to what extent their motivation aligns toward internal or external regulatory orientations.The participants of this study were master's students enrolled in English Lang uage Education (ELE) programs across universities in Indonesia. This population includes individuals with diverse professional backgrounds, specifically those with teaching experience and those without, enabling meaningful comparisons of motivational patterns. As noted in teacher identity and teacher professionalism literature, there is no universal definition of who qualifies as a "teacher", as the classification depends heavily on research purposes and contextual factors .Therefore, the present study establishes its own operational definitions to ensure clarity and alignment with the research objectives.

Convenience sampling was applied due to the accessibility of participants and the geographical spread of ELE programs. A total of 84 students participated in the survey, consisting of 38 teacher students and 46 non-teacher students. Teacher students in this study are defined as individuals who are currently employed or have previously been employed as full-time English teachers with formal teaching responsibilities in recognized educational institutions (e.g., schools, madrasahs, vocational schools), involving instructional duties, curriculum delivery, and student assessment. Meanwhile, non-teacher students refer to individuals who have never held a formal teaching position with regular instructional responsibilities in any educational institution. These distinctions were constructed to allow systematic examination of how professional background shapes students' motivational orientations at the master's level.

Table 1. Research Participants

Group	Number of Participant	Operational Definition
Teacher	38	Currently or previously employed as full-time teachers in formal educational institutions
Non Teacher	46	Have never worked as full-time teachers in any formal educational institution
Total	**84**	

The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) developed by Vallerand et al. (1992), which conceptualizes academic motivation within Self-Determination Theory (SDT) through seven sub-dimensions: three forms of intrinsic motivation (to know, toward accomplishment, and to experience stimulation), three types of extrinsic motivation (identified, introjected, and external regulation), and amotivation (Fishbach & Woolley, 2022). These dimensions represent the continuum from autonomous to controlled motivation and have been widely applied across higher education research (Turner & Reed, 2022; Javaeed et.al, 2019). In adapting the instrument, several modifications were made to ensure contextual relevance for Master's students in English Language Education. First, the wording of multiple items was refined to reflect postgraduate-level learning experiences for example, references to "college work" were replaced with descriptions related to advanced academic tasks, research engagement, and professional development in English Language Education. This adaptation process follows recommendations by Vallerand et al. (1992) that AMS items may be adjusted as long as the underlying motivational constructs remain intact. Additionally, this study adopted a 5-point Likert scale instead of the original 7-point format. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

The AMS was selected because it effectively measures the multidimensional nature of motivation and has been widely utilized in studies relating to academic motivation in international context (Yuan & Liu, 2025 ; Howard et.al, 2021; Ferrer et.al, 2022; Namaziandost & Rezai, 2024) and also adapted and validated in Indonesian context (Marvianto & Widhiarso, 2025; Susilo et al., 2024; Natalya, & Purwanto, 2018; Natalya, 2018; Marvianto, & Widhiarso, 2019; Marvianto & Widhiarso, 2018; Susilo et.al.,2024) Because the scale was modified to suit the academic and professional context of Master's studTnts in English Language Education (ELE) programs in Indonesia, a rigorous validation process was conducted to ensure that the adapted items remained theoretically aligned and contextually appropriate. To achieve this, the instrument underwent expert evaluation by two specialists: one in linguistics and one in psychology. This selection was intentional; the linguistics expert assessed the conceptual and linguistic accuracy of the items in both English and Indonesian, while the psychology expert examined whether the instrument remained aligned with established motivational theory, particularly the AMS framework. During the validation, the experts evaluated each item based on clarity, relevance, construct alignment, and language precision. The overall assessment categorized the questionnaire as "Valid," indicating that it was suitable for use with only minor revisions. Specifically, the experts noted that while the items were sufficiently clear, several dimension labels within the AMS required refinement to enhance respondent comprehension. After implementing these revisions, the questionnaire was pilot-tested with 30 Master's students outside the main sample to assess reliability. The pilot yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.879. According to George and Mallery's (2019) reliability guidelines, this falls within the "good" range. This result indicates that the questionnaire items consistently measured the intended motivational constructs and were appropriate for use in the main data collection.

Table 2. Intrument Blueprint

No.	Motivation Type	Sub-Dimension	Item Numbers	Number of items
1	Intrinsic Motivation	To know	1,2,3,4	4
		Toward accomplishment	5,6,7,8	4
		To experience stimulation	9,10,11,12	4
2	Extrinsic Motivation	Identified regulation	13,14,15,16	4
		Introjected regulation	17,18,19,20	4

		External regulation	21,22,23,24	4
3	Amotivation	Lack of intention	25,26,27,28	4

The phase involved administering a questionnaire adapted from the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) to Master's students enrolled in English Language Education programs across universities in Indonesia. The questionnaire was created using Google Forms and distributed online through several channels, including postgraduate academic groups, WhatsApp communities of ELE students, and the researcher's personal academic networks. Additional responses were obtained by sharing the link with colleagues who were enrolled in postgraduate programs at other universities, allowing the survey to reach a broader and more diverse population of ELE students.

Before participants proceeded with the questionnaire, they were provided with an online informed consent form that explained the purpose of the research, voluntary participation, confidentiality protections, and their right to withdraw at any time. The questionnaire was accessible for approximately two weeks to ensure adequate response time. An important feature of the survey included a dedicated section in which participants were required to identify their background as either *teacher* or *non-teacher*. This step was crucial because the study compared motivational differences between these two groups, and the self-selection mechanism ensured accurate classification before the analysis began. Once responses were collected, the data were separated based on these two categories to facilitate the examination of motivational profiles across teacher and non-teacher students.

To determine students' level of autonomy-driven motivation, the quality of motivation was assessed using the Relative Autonomy Index (RAI), a composite indicator grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The RAI converts the mean scores of the motivational subscales into a single continuum score that reflects the extent to which an individual's motivation is autonomous (indicated by positive values) or controlled (indicated by negative values).

This study employed the RAI formula proposed by Ryan and Connell (1989), which assigns differential weights to the four core regulation types external, introjected, identified, and intrinsic regulation. By combining these weighted components, the formula provides a comprehensive measure of the relative autonomy underlying participants' motivational orientations. The calculation for the RAI is as follows:

$$\mathbf{RAI=(2\times IM)+(1\times IR)+(-1\times IntroR)+(-2\times ER)}$$

Note :
IM : Intrinsic Motivation
IR : Identified Regulation
IntroR : Introjected Regulation
ER : External Regulation

(Ryan & Connell, 1989)

To classify the motivational drive of teacher and non-teacher students, the table below outlines the interpretation of the RAI values :

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Table 3. RAI interpretation

RAI Score Range	Motivational Drive (Dominance)
>0.00	Autonomous
0	Equilibrium (Balanced)
<0.00	Controlled

(Deci & Ryan, 1985)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following table presents a summary of the mean scores for the various motivational dimensions measured using the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS). The scores are based on a 5-point Likert scale, where 5 indicates the highest level of agreement.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistic

Type of Motivation	Dimension	Teacher	Non-Teacher
Intrinsic Motivation	To Know	3,57	4,28
	Toward Accomplishment	3,31	3,97
	To Experience Stimulation	3,26	3,95
Extrinsic Motivation	Identified Regulation	4,14	3,69

	Introjected Regulation	3,61	2,89
	External Regulation	3,89	3,39
Amotivation	Lack of Intention	1,57	1,76

A motivational difference was observed between student groups: non-teacher students consistently displayed a substantially higher level of intrinsic motivation across all three dimensions when compared to the cohort of teachers. This gap was most pronounced in the "to know" dimension, with non-teachers averaging a score of 4.28 versus the teachers' 3.57. This disparity clearly points to a greater, inherent drive among the non-teachers to engage with academic content for its own sake driven by a desire for understanding, the pure exploration of ideas, and the expansion of their personal knowledge base. For these students, the act of learning itself is an invigorating, enjoyable, and mentally stimulating process. In contrast, while teachers certainly retained a degree of interest, their intrinsic profile was noticeably more moderate, suggesting their involvement was more functional and tethered to practical, tangible professional goals rather than springing from an innate, internal pleasure in academic pursuits.

The data for extrinsic motivation presented a complete reversal of this pattern. Teacher students consistently surpassed non-teachers across every component of extrinsic regulation. Teachers' peak score was found in identified regulation (4.14), which signifies a strong recognition of the personal importance of obtaining their Master's degree, viewing it as intimately linked to their professional identity and responsibilities. Teachers also registered a higher score in introjected regulation (3.61), which reflects internal pressures and feelings of obligation, perhaps stemming from a need to uphold professional standards or reputation. Furthermore, a high score in external regulation (3.89) indicated the presence of distinct external pressures, such as mandatory workplace requirements or direct career incentives. Taken together, the extrinsic data characterizes the teacher group as being primarily driven by a more instrumental, duty-bound, and responsibility-oriented form of motivation.

Finally, scores for amotivation were remarkably low for both groups, a finding that confirms students generally entered the program with clear intent and definite goals. Teacher students recorded the absolute lowest level at 1.57, reflecting exceptional clarity and certainty regarding their professional objectives, which are often reinforced by established career tracks and responsibilities. While non-teachers had a marginally higher score at 1.76, this figure remains very low, and the small difference is congruent with their professional identities being in a less solidified state of development.

Following the descriptive presentation of the mean scores for all seven motivational dimensions, the next step in the quantitative analysis involved calculating the Relative Autonomy Index (RAI). The RAI is the core metric used in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to determine the overall quality of motivation, placing each participant group on the continuum from controlled to autonomous.

Table 5. Relative Autonomy Index (RAI).

Group	**RAI Score**	**SDT Interpretation**
Teachers	-0.49	Controlled Motivation
Non-Teachers	+2.16	Autonomous Motivation

With a high positive RAI score of +2.16, Non-Teacher students demonstrate a strong dominance of Autonomous Motivation. Their motivational profile is firmly anchored in intrinsic interest, personal involvement with learning, and a strong drive for intellectual engagement. Theoretically, their motivation is integrative, exploration-driven, and intrinsic. Their primary source of drive is internal enthusiasm for academic development, pure curiosity, and the enjoyment derived from the academic challenge itself. Critically, their extrinsic motivation, such as Identified Regulation, plays a supportive role (lending instrumental value) and not a controlling one in their overall orientation. Conversely, the negative RAI score of -0.49 indicates that the Teacher cohort is driven by Controlled Motivation. This negative score reflects a strong alignment with structured goals and external responsibilities, a pattern evident in their high extrinsic motivation scores. Their motivation is primarily instrumental, goal-oriented, and driven by responsibility. Their primary sources of drive are established professional necessities and external demands linked to their employment, such as requirements for certification, job promotion, or avoiding professional sanctions. Although highly engaged with the Master's program, their involvement is strongly connected to concrete outcomes related to their professional role.

D**ISCUSSION**

Motivational profile analysis indicates that there are clear and consequential differences between Master's students working as teachers and non-teaching students. This reflects a well-established trend

in the international literature on postgraduate education. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides the best understanding of these differences. SDT posits a continuum from intrinsic (autonomous) to external (controlled) motivation. Non-teaching students focus on identified regulation and intrinsic motivation. Their enrollment is driven by a desire for personal improvement, intellectual growth, and long-term self-improvement (Amani et al., 2022; Al-Shibani & Athawadii, 2025; Wiegerovaa, 2016). This internal locus of causality is crucial for improving learning quality, as autonomous students are more likely to engage in higher-order processing, use elaborative learning strategies, and demonstrate higher-order learning. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides the best understanding of these differences. SDT posits a continuum from intrinsic (autonomous) to external (controlled) motivation. Non-teaching students focus on identified regulation and intrinsic motivation. Their enrollment is driven by a desire for personal improvement, intellectual growth, and long-term self-improvement (Amani et al., 2022; Al-Shibani & Athawadii, 2025; Wiegerovaa, 2016). Analysis of motivational profiles indicates that there are clear and consequential differences between Master's students who work as teachers and those who do not. This reflects an established trend in the international literature on postgraduate education.

In stark contrast, teacher students tend to exhibit controlled motivational patterns, heavily In contrast, student teachers tend to exhibit a controlled motivation pattern, heavily influenced by institutional and career demands . For practicing teachers, pursuing a Master's degree is often a strategic response to external pressures specifically, the need for professional promotion, certification upgrades, or salary increases (Amani et al., 2022; Al-Shibani & Athawadii, 2025; Duong et al., 2023). This pattern is particularly strong in the Indonesian context, where certification directly influences motivation and performance (Suheri et al., 2021; Yasa et.al, 2023) and leads teachers to prioritize degrees as a means to career advancement (Royani, 2023). The dominance of external regulation in this group carries inherent risks to the quality and sustainability of their academic engagement. When motivation is externally controlled, students may tend to use surface learning strategies and invest only the minimum effort necessary to secure external rewards (Ballesteros et.al ,2023; Gao et al., 2025 ; Yan et al., 2020). Furthermore, a purely external orientation can lead to higher levels of burnout and a potential decline in commitment once external goals (e.g., obtaining a degree) are achieved (Dörnyei, 2020; Howard et al., 2021).

These fundamental motivational differences have significant implications for the design and delivery of Master of English Language Education (ELE) curricula. Programs must move beyond simply acknowledging these differences; they must intentionally design learning environments to support the internalization of motivation, shifting students from externally regulated to more identifiable forms. Curriculum changes should prioritize making the material's internal relevance explicit. Rather than focusing on abstract theory, pedagogy should embed academic content in authentic professional challenges. For student teachers, this involves integrating elements such as Reflective Practice Portfolios and Action Research Projects that require them to connect theoretical coursework directly to classroom problems, allowing them to personally endorse the value of these academic endeavors for enhancing their professional competence and identity (Prabandari, 2020).

While providing valuable insights, this study acknowledges several limitations. First, the small number of participants limits the statistical power and generalizability of the findings. Second, the study's reliance on a simple teacher-non-teacher dichotomy may have obscured unique motivational patterns within diverse non-teaching groups (e.g., lecturers, tutors, or career changers). These limitations naturally lead to several avenues for future research. Future studies should aim to recruit a much larger sample and move beyond binary classifications by analyzing motivational profiles based on more detailed professional backgrounds. Furthermore, longitudinal studies would be invaluable in tracking how students' motivation changes throughout a Master's program, providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of specific curricular interventions designed to foster the crucial shift toward internalizing motivation.

CONCLUSION

Motivation is a fundamental yet dynamic force in postgraduate education, particularly within the Master of English Language Education (ELE) program in Indonesia, which hosts a unique mix of professional teachers and non-teacher students. These two distinct groups bring different backgrounds, expectations, and constraints into the same learning space. This study aims to investigate the distinct motivational profiles of teacher and non-teacher students and how different values and costs shape their academic persistence. Using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach, quantitative data were obtained from the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) to calculate the Relative Autonomy Index (RAI). Based on the analysis, the motivational orientation defined by Self-Determination Theory, the findings indicate a sharp divergence between the two groups. Non-teacher students exhibit a strong dominance of

autonomous motivation, Their engagement is fueled by the enjoyment of learning itself and the goal of becoming academic professionals. In contrast, teacher-students demonstrate a prevalence of controlled motivation, where their academic pursuit is largely instrumental. Their drive is tethered to external regulations, such as professional certification requirements, career promotion, and institutional obligations. While they value the degree, their motivation is heavily influenced by the necessity to fulfill professional duties rather than pure intrinsic interest.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This is a short text to acknowledge the contributions of specific colleagues, institutions, or agencies that aided the efforts of the authors.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The Author Contributions Statement can be up to several sentences long and should briefly describe the tasks of individual authors. Please list only 2 initials for each author, without full stops, but separated by commas (e.g. JC, JS). In the case of two authors with the same initials, please use their middle initial to differentiate between them (e.g. REW, RSW). The Author Contributions Statement should be included at the end of the manuscript before the References. The Author Contributions Statement can be up to several sentences long and should briefly describe the tasks of individual authors. Please list only 2 initials for each author, without full stops, but separated by commas (e.g. JC, JS). In the case of two authors with the same initials, please use their middle initial to differentiate between them (e.g. REW, RSW). The Author Contributions Statement should be included at the end of the manuscript before the References.

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