

## The Rationality of Surabaya State University Students in Choosing Teaching Majors: An Analysis of Max Weber's Social Action

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### Abstract

In everyday life, society views educational activities are unsuitable for men, so women must take over this activity. This perception has gradually led to a clearer division of roles between men and women. During a six-month observation at Surabaya State University, an interesting phenomenon of gender dominance was discovered when the education department had a larger female student population than male students. This study aimed to analyze the reasons given by students for choosing the education department by adopting a qualitative research method. The data sources used are secondary data and primary data. Secondary data comes from books, journals, theses, and documents that still have an appeal to the research topic. Then the primary data is obtained through non-participant observation and unstructured interviews. Furthermore, it is explained using the interactive model data analysis technique from Miles and Huberman. The results of the study indicate that male students decisions to choose the education major were made after considering future job prospects (instrumental rationality), referring to religious values (value rationality), referring to feelings (affective action), and continuing the family tradition of pursuing a career in education (traditional action). Unlike previous studies focusing more on external factors (economic support), this study highlights more complex internal reasons.

### Keywords

Choosing; Rationality; Students; Teaching Department

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education plays an important role in determining the success of a country's national development. Quality human resources can be produced through education, encouraging progress in various sectors. Good education improves knowledge and skills and shapes individual character that supports sustainable development. Therefore, investment in education must be a top priority for every country that wants to achieve progress (Kusmiran, K., Husti, I., & Nurhadi, 2022). Education is a deliberate effort made by one generation to another to pass on culture (BP, A. R., Munandar, S. A., Fitriani, A., Karlina, Y., & Yumriani, 2023). According to Ki Hajar Dewantara, an Indonesian education figure, education is a process of guiding the growth and development of children according to their potential so that they, both as individuals and as part of society, can achieve the highest safety and happiness (Pristiwanti, D., Badariah, B., Hidayat, S., & Dewi, 2020). Education is the main pillar of human life. Therefore, humans must achieve lifelong education, as expressed in the saying "pursue knowledge to the ends of the world"



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and "pursue knowledge from the grave to the grave" (Sari, D. N., & Armanto, 2021).

Based on "Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System," it is explained that education is divided into three paths, namely informal education, non-formal education, and formal education (Shafrianto, 2023). Informal education (family) is education with independent learning activities that occur in the family. Non-formal education (skills courses) is education with a structure that is organized and organized to add to, replace, or complement formal education. Formal education (school) is education with a structured and tiered system consisting of basic education (SD), secondary education (SMP and SMA), and higher education (university) (Elice, D., Maseleno, A., & Pahrudin, 2024).

In everyday life, society views educational activities as unsuitable for men, so women must take over these activities. Over time, this view has led to a clear division of roles between men and women. According to (BPS, 2023) In December, more women than men were in civil service positions as teachers. Additionally, this perspective indirectly reinforces the stereotype that education is the domain of women. Surabaya is a metropolitan city that offers a variety of higher education institutions. Surabaya State University is one of the universities with the largest enrollment capacity in Indonesia in 2024 (Zulfikar, 2025). The campus has several faculties, including the Faculty of Education, Language and Arts, Physical Education and Health Sciences, Social Sciences and Political Sciences, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Economics and Business, Engineering, Vocational Studies, Medicine, Law, and Psychology. Additionally, UNESA is recognized as one of the top institutions in the field of education according to the Scimago Institutions Rankings (SIR) for 2024 (Saputra, 2024). During a six-month observation period at Surabaya State University (UNESA), researchers identified an interesting phenomenon regarding gender dominance, where the education department has a larger female student population than male students. Such conditions certainly require further study to prevent gender disparities in education in the future.

Research on the selection of education study programs has been widely discussed, such as the study by (Utami, A., Farid, M. G., Sujarwo, Hidayat, R., Yunaini, N., & Mareza, 2025) entitled "Factors Influencing Students' Decisions in Choosing Elementary Education Study Programs in Indonesia", which reveals that Indonesian students choose elementary education study programs due to five factors: socioeconomic conditions, career opportunities, personal interests, campus facilities, and university promotional activities. The second study, titled "Rational Choices of Students with Disabilities in Selecting Teaching Majors", shows that emotional encouragement from the surrounding environment is the main reason students with disabilities choose teaching majors. The final study by (Latifah, 2019), titled "The Rationality of Parents in Deciding Their Children's University Majors Through an Analysis of James S. Coleman's Rational Choice Theory (UNS)", highlights that family traditions, long-term investments, social status, and future job prospects influence parents' decisions regarding their children's university majors. However, no specific research has examined male students' decisions to pursue education programs using Max Weber's social action theory.

This study serves as a response to the shortcomings of previous research. Max Weber's social action theory attempts to describe the social dynamics behind an action. Therefore, the novelty of this study is expected to provide a new perspective in understanding how the construction of meaning, motives for action, and social interactions can influence male students' decisions to choose teaching as their major.

This study's research question is to understand why students at Surabaya State University choose to major in education. The objective of the study is to analyze the reasons given by UNESA students for choosing to major in education. The results of this study are expected to enrich the field of educational sociology and provide additional reference material for policymakers directly involved in the development of student interests.

## 2. METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research type with a phenomenological approach. Qualitative research aims to understand and describe in depth the problems that exist in society from the perspective of the research subject. In addition, the phenomenological approach seeks to explore and study human life experiences. This can help researchers to uncover the reasons behind human actions (Sadewo, 2017).

This research was conducted at the Faculty of Education, Surabaya State University. The study area selection was based on initial observations indicating that the number of male students in the area was relatively low. The study was conducted in August 2024. The research subjects were selected using purposive sampling techniques, with criteria including students majoring in education for at least one semester, and only five participants were selected because students in that semester were deemed to have sufficient knowledge and experience in the field of education. Additionally, the data collected had reached the saturation point, meaning it no longer provided new information related to the research focus (Sugiyono, 2018).

The data sources used are secondary data and primary data. Secondary data comes from books, journals, theses, and documents that still have an appeal to the research topic. The primary data is obtained through non-participant observation and unstructured interviews. Non-participant observation allows researchers to observe without directly experiencing the activities of teaching students. Meanwhile, unstructured interviews ask general questions about the problems to be studied, so informants are free to convey information (Fadli, 2021).

The collected data was then analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive data analysis technique as shown in Figure 1. This technique is cyclical, meaning that researchers can return to the reduction or data presentation stage if new information is found, making it very suitable for qualitative research because the data produced is narrative rather than numerical and often requires repeated analysis (Heri, 2025). Additionally, this technique consists of three stages, as follows:

### ***Data Reduction***

Data reduction is defined as the process of streamlining, directing, and selecting important data. This process is carried out to strictly select data from field notes so that conclusions can be drawn and applied. Researchers in reducing data are guided by the objectives to be achieved, so the research direction becomes more focused.

### ***Data Presentation***

Data presentation is changing data into more understandable information through narrative text, tables, or charts. This process is carried out to describe and explain in a structured manner the data obtained to help researchers avoid mistakes in conclusions.

### ***Drawing Conclusions and Verification***

Conclusion is defined as the process of interpreting the meaning of existing data. Verification is testing the truth, robustness, and appropriateness of research findings. This process is carried out to produce conclusions that are reliable and supported by accurate data (Hardani, Andriani, H., Ustiawaty, J., Utami, E. F., Istiqomah, R. R., Fardani, R. A., Sukmana, D. J., & Auliya, 2020).

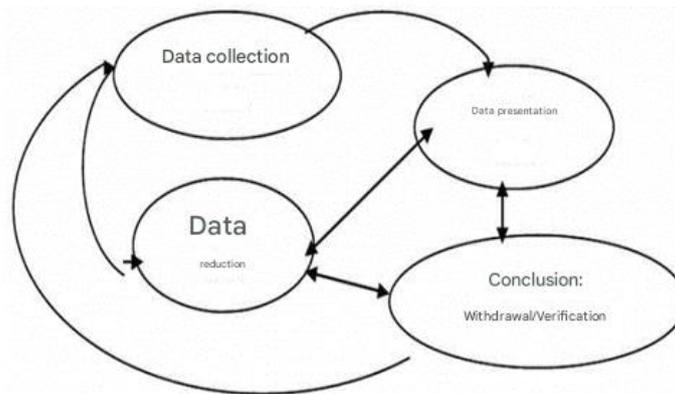


Figure 1. Miles and Huberman's Interactive Data Analysis Technique

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### Max Weber's Theory of Social Action

The main figure of the social definition paradigm, Max Weber, stated that sociology is a science that seeks to interpret, understand, and explain the causes and effects of social actions, which he often associated with social relationships. According to Weber, social actions are generally influenced by the subjective goals or meanings held by the actors. He emphasized five general characteristics of social actions, namely that human actions can be both real and subjective from the perspective of the person doing them; real actions can also occur entirely within the individual (internal); actions are oriented towards the actions of others in the past, present, or future; actions are directed at one or more individuals; and these actions always consider the existence of other people (Prastowo, 2018).

Max Weber's theory of social action emphasizes the goals and motives behind the actions of individuals or groups. Weber argues that the most appropriate way to explain social action is by understanding in depth the various reasons underlying such actions (Jones, P., & Saifuddin, 2016). He classifies social action into four types. First is instrumental rational action, which is based on considering the means used to achieve a goal. This type of action results from a conscious decision-making process in which individuals evaluate various possibilities, potential challenges, and set criteria to select the most effective and efficient means. Second, value-rational action, where actions are driven by an absolute goal that has become part of the individual's values and cannot be changed. In this case, individuals judge right or wrong based on their beliefs without considering alternative goals. Third, traditional actions are influenced by habits formed within individuals, rooted in the values, norms, and culture prevailing in society that guide individuals in achieving their goals. Lastly, affective actions are driven by emotional states such as caring, anger, ambition, or envy, where actions tend to be spontaneous and not based on consideration of others' responses, but rather on the individual's need to express those emotions (Nurchayati, E. V., & Fauzi, 2021).

Within Max Weber's framework are two main social action categories. First, irrational (not logical) actions include affective actions arising from momentary emotional impulses and traditional actions that are carried out based on customs passed down from generation to generation. Second, rational (logical) actions, which include value-oriented actions, where individuals act by their beliefs or principles, and goal-oriented actions, where actions are carried out to achieve specific results (Martono, 2015).

#### Social Action Theory Analysis of the Decision to Choose A Teacher Training Major

This research used five students as research subjects. The researcher determined this number by considering that the data collected had reached a saturation point so that information from the next

subject would not produce new findings. In addition, the subjects were selected based on predetermined criteria, namely male students from teacher education majors at Surabaya State University who had undergone lectures for one semester. Students in that semester are considered to have knowledge and experience about the world of education. The limited number of subjects will not automatically reduce the validity of the findings because, in the context of qualitative research, the main objective is the deepening of meaning rather than statistical generalization (Gainau, 2016). Based on Max Weber's social action theory, the reasons for the five subjects choosing to major in teaching can be classified as follows:

#### ***Instrumental Rationality Action***

This action is determined by expectations, which are used to achieve goals so that they are calculated rationally. This is seen in subject AA. He decided to major in teaching based on rational aspects such as job opportunities after graduation. The decision reflects that students consider long-term benefits consciously and planning.

#### ***Action Rationality Value***

These actions are fuelled by awareness and a strong belief in important religious values. In addition, these actions prioritize benefits over goals. Subjects MB and MH linked the choice of major to religious values and personal idealism to perform community service. MB called the teaching profession a field of charity and blessings. Meanwhile, MH emphasized the contribution of education as a provision for the afterlife. In these two cases, it can be seen that the main motivation of the subject is not practical benefits, but realizing the noble values they believe in.

#### ***Affective Action***

This action is determined by individual psychology, so it does not need to be calculated rationally. Subject AN decided to major in teaching because of emotional encouragement. He admitted that his decision to choose a major came from the encouragement of his family and partner. This shows that students consider aspects of emotions or personal feelings that arise spontaneously.

#### ***Traditional Measures***

A long-standing habit drives this action. Subject FA explained that his decision to study in the teaching department was due to a deeply rooted family tradition. The research subject believes that ancestral traditions must be maintained and preserved in the long term. This shows that the subject strongly considers customs and traditions in his decision-making.

#### **Students' Perceptions of the Teaching Profession**

Perception is the process by which individuals receive and interpret information from their surroundings through their senses, thereby forming meaning (Yuniarti, 2016). Etymologically, 'perception' comes from the Latin word *perception*, which means to receive or capture. Perception involves the activities of filtering, organizing, and translating various stimuli into useful information (Nitisusastro, 2015). In other words, perception is a person's perspective on their surroundings. Meanwhile, a student is an individual who is pursuing higher education at a university, institute, college, or academy. The word 'maha' indicates the highest level in a stage of life, so that a student can be defined as a learner at the highest level of education. According to Sarwono, a student is officially enrolled in a higher education institution and is generally between 18 and 30 (Priansa, 2017). Therefore, it can be concluded that student perception is the human process of selecting objects or events through the five senses, resulting in an understanding or conclusion.

The teaching profession plays a crucial role in shaping a nation's civilization. The quality of education depends heavily on the performance of teachers in carrying out their responsibilities, making teacher performance a key aspect of educational success. The way teachers teach and guide students also influences the development of their character and abilities. Thus, teachers make a significant

contribution to addressing societal needs. The role of a teacher is almost irreplaceable, especially in a diverse society. Therefore, teachers must be able to become professional individuals (Suryanti, E., Gusmin, E. M. S., 2024).

Working as a teacher remains one of the most popular choices for prospective students. This is because in Indonesia, there are relatively more job vacancies in this field compared to other types of jobs. A report from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology noted that in the 2022-2023 academic year, around 3.3 million teachers were teaching in public schools in Indonesia. However, it is projected that in 2024, there will be a shortage of around 1.3 million teachers due to the high number of teachers retiring (Habibah, 2023). The many job opportunities to become a teacher increase the number of male and female students at Surabaya State University yearly. According to a report from IDN Times, in 2021, the total number of UNESA students reached 27,838 people, with a composition of 64% female (17,807 people) and 36% male (10,031 people) (Hasana, 2022). However, not all students have a positive perception of the teaching profession. Some students consider the profession to be unpromising in terms of economic welfare. There is an assumption that teachers' salaries, especially in the primary and secondary education sector, are still not proportional to their workload and responsibilities. Subject MH conveyed this. He stated that many people in his neighborhood view teaching as a service rather than a professional job. This stigma sometimes creates doubts for students in choosing a teaching major.

Furthermore, subject MB revealed that although becoming a teacher was his dream since childhood, he had reconsidered his decision because many alums of education majors ended up working outside the teaching field. This shows doubts about the availability of jobs from the education that will be pursued. Data from 2025 reinforces this concern. This states that the unemployment rate among college graduates, including those from the field of education, is increasing. In addition, there is also a perception that the teaching profession does not have a career path, making it less flexible and progressive than other professions in the private sector or industry. However, these views do not completely erase students' belief in the noble value of the teaching profession.

Most subjects still believe that being a teacher is a noble form of service. Subject AN said that the teaching profession has a high value because it can transmit knowledge to the lives of others. This view aligns with Max Weber's thoughts on value-oriented rational action, where individuals choose to act not for material gain, but because they believe in the action. On the other hand, students' perceptions of the teaching profession are also influenced by life experiences during their daily activities. For example, FA subjects have an inspirational teacher figure, thus fostering an interest in following in those footsteps. This shows that perceptions of the teaching profession are formed through direct experiences imprinted in students' memories.

### **Factors Affecting the Choice of Major**

Various factors inevitably influence the choice of major for students. These factors are divided into two categories: external and internal. External factors include external influences on students to pursue higher education. These influences include the impact of parents, work, family, the surrounding environment, teachers, and other parties. As social beings, individuals naturally interact with their environment, which can shape their motivations to act. Shared interests and perspectives within a family regarding a particular career can also influence an individual's choices. During the career exploration phase, parents often express their hopes and views regarding certain professions (Rohmah, K., & Falah, 2016). Meanwhile, internal factors are motivations that originate from within the students themselves. These motivations include gaining knowledge, achieving goals, attaining success, developing oneself, and obtaining academic degrees. The desire to continue education is often driven by the desire to continue learning and enrich oneself with knowledge and skills. This aligns with findings indicating that the higher an individual's motivation to learn, the greater their desire to pursue higher education (Addnin, I. J., & Effendi, 2021).

In a study conducted by (Amaliya, 2019) It was explained that student decisions to choose a major are influenced by various aspects, including:

#### ***Career Prospects or Future Job Opportunities***

This is important to consider because university graduates may risk becoming unemployed if ignored, increasing unemployment rates. In Indonesia, the open unemployment rate based on educational attainment generally decreases. However, specifically for university graduates, there has been an increase in the number of unemployed. Based on data from BPS, in 2024 the unemployment rate among this group reached 5.63%, which then rose to 6.23% in February 2025 (Editorial, 2025).

#### ***Educational Facilities***

This relates to the completeness of the facilities and infrastructure available in a study program. Facilities and infrastructure are important elements that support the entire learning process in an educational environment. In addition, their existence plays a role in encouraging the achievement of learning objectives by the applicable curriculum (Amirin, 2016). Facilities are tools used directly in the educational process, such as classrooms, books, libraries, laboratories, etc. Etymologically, infrastructure refers to tools not directly used to achieve educational objectives, such as location, school buildings, sports fields, and so on (Zahroh, 2015).

#### ***Program Image***

This is crucial, as public perception can influence prospective students' views of the program. The image reflects the identity of an organization or company. It naturally forms based on the impressions captured by the public through knowledge and understanding. A high-quality program typically has a positive image in the public (Maulyan, F. F., Drajat, D. Y., Angliawati, R. Y., & Sandini, 2022).

#### ***Education Costs***

This is one of the important aspects that prospective students consider when choosing their education. Typically, students will align their decisions with their financial capabilities or those of their parents to cover expenses during their studies. Without adequate funding, the delivery of education cannot be optimally conducted (Suriyani, 2016).

#### ***Steps in Choosing A Major***

When deciding on a major, students usually go through several stages. The selection of a major in higher education can be explained using Chapman's model. This model divides the process into five interrelated behavioral stages: the pre-search stage, the search stage, the decision to apply, the decision to choose, and the decision to enroll (Angulo, F., Pergelova, A., & Rialp, 2020). Meanwhile, Hossler & Gallagher categorize the stages into three: predisposition (the individual decides to pursue higher education), search (prospective students begin gathering information and filtering options), and determination (the final decision about the university and major to choose is made) (Iloh, C., & Tierney, 2015). On the other hand, Eidimtas (2015) developed a decision-making model by adapting the stages in the consumer decision-making process. These stages will be explained in detail in the following section. The need search stage is when prospective students show interest in pursuing a particular field. At this stage, the motivation to continue education at a university has already been formed long before the student completes secondary education, indicating a clear goal orientation. The information screening stage reflects the individual's active efforts to gather relevant information about the desired program of study. This information is obtained from the immediate environment, such as family and friends, and external sources, such as alumni or official university media. The formation and assessment stages are where prospective students begin to compile, consider, and analyze various study options based on their obtained information. This process highly depends on the individual's attitude, personal preferences, and capacity to allocate time and resources to consider alternatives rationally and systematically.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that male students' decision to choose a teaching major at Surabaya State University is based on various forms of social action, as proposed by Max Weber. The decision was taken after considering future job prospects (instrumental rationality action), referring to religious values (value rationality action), referring to feelings of the heart (affective action), and continuing the family tradition of the majority having a career in education (traditional action). Unlike previous studies that focus more on external factors (economic support), this study highlights more complex and contextual internal reasons, so that in the future it is expected to be used as a reference for educational institutions to develop more inclusive policies.

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