



HOW DOES PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE BOOST TEACHERS' MOTIVATION? AN ECOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF EFL TEACHERS IN TASIKMALAYA

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Abstract

Teachers' professional experience encompasses various aspects, from education and language proficiency to cultural sensitivity and effective communication. The motivation of EFL teachers is also a complex and multifaceted aspect that significantly influences their teaching effectiveness and overall job satisfaction. This study uses an ecological perspective nested ecosystem model to explore various aspects of EFL teachers' professional experience that foster their motivation. Three EFL teachers have participated in this study. The data was gathered through in-depth interviews and classroom observation. The finding portrayed the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystem layers. It confirmed that innovation, training, reflection, analyzing problems, teaching support, cooperation, empathizing with students, a reduced workload and ratio, establishing limits and work-life balance, and fair monitoring aided teachers in motivating themselves in teaching.

Keywords: ecological perspective, EFL teachers, professional experience

Abstrak

Pengalaman profesional guru mencakup berbagai aspek, mulai dari pengalaman pendidikan dan kemahiran bahasa hingga kepekaan budaya dan kemampuan komunikasi yang efektif. Motivasi guru bahasa Inggris juga merupakan aspek kompleks dan beragam yang secara signifikan mempengaruhi efektivitas pengajaran dan kepuasan kerja mereka secara keseluruhan. Penelitian ini menggunakan model ekosistem bersarang dari perspektif ekologi untuk mengeksplorasi berbagai aspek pengalaman profesional guru EFL yang menumbuhkan motivasi mereka. Dua guru EFL telah berpartisipasi dalam penelitian ini. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam dan observasi kelas. Temuan ini menggambarkan lapisan sistem mikro, meso, ekso, dan makro. Hal ini menegaskan bahwa inovasi, pelatihan, refleksi, analisis masalah, dukungan pengajaran, kerjasama, empati terhadap siswa, pengurangan

beban kerja dan rasio, penetapan batasan dan keseimbangan kehidupan kerja, dan pemantauan yang adil membantu guru dalam memotivasi diri dalam mengajar.

Kata Kunci: Perspektif ekologi, Guru Bahasa Inggris, Pengalaman profesional

A. INTRODUCTION

Teachers are integral to language teaching and learning and are critical in influencing students' global learning experiences. The crucial component that has drawn more attention among the many variables affecting the efficacy of EFL instruction is the effect that professional experience has on teachers' motivation (Boran, 2018). Teachers' professional experience in boosting their motivation can be understood and analyzed through the lens of ecological nested ecosystems. This perspective highlights educational environments' complex and interconnected nature, emphasizing the interplay between various factors influencing teachers' motivation and well-being. Thus, this study analyzes the influence of teachers' professional experience on boosting their motivation in teaching from an ecological perspective.

Teachers' professional experiences involve several aspects seen as interconnected layers. Teachers' professional journey through the complexities of language instruction is marked by constant growth, adaptation, and acquiring various skills. An ecological framework can be used to understand the complex interplay of factors influencing the motivation of EFL teachers (Mohammadabadi et al., 2019). Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed the ecological theory comprising the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystem levels. The ecological perspective recognizes the complexity of the learning environment. It considers the classroom and the more prominent educational ecosystem, the cultural background, institutional support systems, and the changing field of language education policies (Mohammadabadi et al., 2019).

At the micro-level, the individual teacher is the focal analysis point within this ecological framework. Teachers' characteristics, beliefs, and experiences interact with their immediate work environment, including school leadership, organizational climate, and colleagues. Research has shown that teachers who perceive a positive and supportive school climate tend to experience higher levels of motivation and job satisfaction (Bolt et al., 2019). Moreover, when teachers have meaningful relationships with their colleagues and feel valued and respected by their peers, their motivation is enhanced (Kyriacou et al., 2018). Moving to the meso-level, the focus shifts to the broader educational institution(s) teachers belong to. Schools with effective leadership that provide clear goals, support, and recognition are known to promote teacher motivation and engagement (Morgeson et al., 2010).

At the Exo level, a study by Rönnberg and Roland-Lévy (2013) found that teachers' motivation was positively influenced by the presence of transformational leaders who inspire and motivate their staff through a shared vision and authentic involvement. At the macro level, societal factors such as educational policies, cultural values, and societal expectations significantly shape teachers' motivation. In systems where teaching is held in high regard and is considered a valued profession, teachers tend to experience greater intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction (Donnelly et al., 2021). Conversely, when teachers perceive an overall lack of societal support or encounter unfavorable working conditions, their motivation can be negatively affected (Büttner et al., 2012).

Several studies have discussed the links between professional experiences and teachers' motivation. Osman and Warner (2020) examined the importance of teachers' motivation to integrate professional development in their classrooms. They also

developed a scale to measure teachers' motivation to implement professional development in their classrooms. Meanwhile, Powell and Bodur (2019) analyzed teachers' perceptions regarding designing and implementing online professional development experiences. Moreover, Backfisch, Lachner, Hische, Loose, and Scheiter (2020) investigated the effects of teachers' professional experiences and motivational beliefs on integrating technology into lesson plan scenarios. Hence, this study focuses on studying the influence of teachers' experiences on boosting teachers' motivation.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Teachers' Professional Experience

Teachers' professional experience is crucial in their quest to become exceptional educators. Teachers are introduced to theoretical underpinnings and instructional strategies throughout their initial teacher training, which is a foundation for their professional progress. They obtain knowledge of the various facets of teaching, such as curriculum development, classroom management, assessment techniques, and a theoretical framework from this training (Habern, 2013). As a result, the practical component of the training offers understanding and allows teachers to use their knowledge in real-world classroom settings. Continuous professional development is also an essential part of teachers' professional experience. Professional development activities, such as seminars, conferences, and online courses, allow teachers to learn about new teaching methodologies, pedagogical approaches, and technological breakthroughs that might improve their teaching practices (Van Driel, 2014). Teachers are more equipped to adapt their teaching approaches to meet the changing requirements of students if they stay up-to-date on the newest research and trends in education.

The other aspect of teachers' professional experience lies in their opportunities for classroom observation and interaction with students. Observing experienced teachers allows novice educators to witness firsthand the application of best practices and effective strategies. This form of experiential learning enables teachers to reflect on their teaching methods and adjust to meet their students' diverse needs (Mahanty, 2019). Thus, observations can provide valuable insights into the different facets of teaching, such as classroom management, instructional techniques, and student engagement. Furthermore, active teaching experience shapes teachers' professional growth. Through their daily interactions with students, teachers gather a wealth of experience to refine their instructional strategies and enhance their teaching efficacy (Stenberg et al., 2018). Teachers learn how to adapt lesson plans to engage students better, differentiate instruction to cater to individual needs, and develop classroom management techniques to foster a positive learning environment.

In conclusion, teachers' professional experience is a dynamic and diverse journey that shapes their abilities, competence, and effectiveness as educators. Teachers obtain the knowledge, abilities, and insights needed to thrive through initial training, classroom observations, active teaching experience, and ongoing professional development. Teachers develop their teaching approaches, adjust to changing classroom dynamics, and fulfill the diverse needs of their students as a result of these experiences, ultimately nourishing their students' learning and progress.

2. Ecological Understanding of Teachers' Motivation

The nested ecosystem model emphasizes the interconnectedness of individuals and their environments, highlighting the influence of microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems on an individual's motivation. In the context of teaching, these systems include the classroom, school, community, and societal factors, respectively. At the microsystem level, the immediate classroom

environment plays a crucial role in teachers' motivation. Factors such as students' engagement, willingness to learn, and the quality of their relationships with teachers can significantly impact teachers' sense of efficacy and satisfaction (Bandura, 1997). Positive interactions and successful outcomes within the microsystem can foster teachers' intrinsic motivation and belief in the importance and value of their work.

Moving to the mesosystem level, the interplay between the classroom and the broader school community is vital. Supportive and collaborative relationships with colleagues, administrators, and parents can create a favorable teacher motivation ecosystem (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Engaging in professional learning communities or participating in decision-making processes within the school can also enhance teachers' sense of belonging and motivation (Louis, 2015). Conversely, lacking support or conflicts within the mesosystem can erode teachers' motivation and job satisfaction. The exosystem level comprises the surrounding community and its impact on teachers' motivation. Factors such as the availability of resources, community support for education, and the prevailing societal attitudes toward teachers can shape their motivation (OECD, 2011). For instance, communities that highly value education and recognize the importance of teachers may contribute to higher levels of motivation. On the other hand, teachers working in communities with limited resources or socio-economic challenges may face additional barriers that can impact their motivation.

Lastly, the macrosystem level encompasses societal factors and broader cultural influences. Societal perceptions and expectations of teachers and educational policies can significantly influence teachers' motivation (Kunter et al., 2013). For instance, a society that respects and values teachers as professionals provides a supportive macro-environment for teacher motivation. Conversely, negative societal narratives or policies that undermine the autonomy and status of teachers can have detrimental effects on their motivation. In conclusion, teachers' motivation can be understood through the lens of the nested ecosystem model. Considering the interconnectedness and influence of various systems, including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem, helps us comprehend the complexity of teachers' motivation and engagement. By recognizing and addressing factors at each level, stakeholders can create a positive ecological context that promotes teachers' motivation, job satisfaction, and educational outcomes.

C. RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative case study to analyze the influence of teachers' professional experiences on boosting teachers' motivation. A qualitative case study is a research method that involves an in-depth exploration and analysis of a particular case or multiple cases within their real-life context (Creswell, 2013). In this research, teachers' motivation as a phenomenon was investigated. Qualitative case studies often employ a variety of data sources, including observations and interviews, to provide a holistic understanding of the case under investigation (Yin, 2018). The participants are three EFL teachers in Tasikmalaya. Observations were conducted to see the classroom influence on teachers' motivation. Then, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant in this study. The interview was conducted for forty minutes through Google Meet and digitally recorded. In these interviews, researchers use a predefined set of open-ended questions to analyze the ecological factors of teachers' professional experiences that influence their motivation.

The thematic analysis was used to examine the data of this study. Thematic analysis is a widely employed qualitative research method designed to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within data, offering a nuanced understanding of complex phenomena (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through systematic coding and

categorization, thematic analysis enables researchers to describe meaningful insights into the interview data. The data of this study was coded to see the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem of teachers' professional experiences that influence their motivation in teaching. Furthermore, the results of this research are presented in a paragraph.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Microsystem

As proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, the ecological microsystem encompasses the immediate environments and interactions that shape an individual's development. In this study, it shaped the EFL teacher's motivation to teach English. The first is personal influence. T1 stated that his personal goal to make his students good at English and make himself a great teacher was what motivated him. Teachers' individual goals and aspirations influence their motivation for professional experiences. T3 expressed personal influence. She conveyed that as she could choose teaching methods, materials, and strategies for her class, she became more motivated in teaching as she could freely choose. Providing teachers autonomy in decision-making and classroom practices contributes to a positive professional experience. Thus, autonomy fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment, enhancing motivation.

The second factor is teachers' well-being. T2 asserted that her condition affected how she teaches. If she felt unwell, she would be demotivated to teach. Thus, finding a balance between personal well-being and professional obligations is crucial. An excessive workload or illness can severely impact teachers' experiences and motivation. Feedback and evaluation are the other factors that influence teachers' motivation. All participants conveyed that constructive feedback about their teaching method or strategies encouraged them in the teaching process. T1 added that a fair evaluation made him realize what was lacking in his teaching, which motivated him to improve. Thereby, constructive feedback enhances teachers' professional experiences. A strengths-based feedback system recognizes development, directs areas for improvement, and boosts motivation. Fair and open evaluation procedures also foster trust and confidence. Teachers' perceptions of fair and impartial evaluations positively impact their motivation and professional experiences.

2. Mesosystem

The mesosystem explores the interconnections between various components of the teachers' immediate environment. Several factors in the mesosystem affect teachers' motivation. The first is a supportive environment. T1 stated that his school allowed teachers to join workshops or teacher training to boost their professionalism. T1 further explained that he became more motivated in teaching as he gained knowledge. Here, teachers' motivation is enhanced by a school culture that is encouraging and supportive. Teachers' motivation is positively impacted when they see their professional development acknowledged and supported. T2 asserted that collaboration between teachers helped her to boost her motivation. T2 detailed that sharing experiences and knowledge between teachers kept her motivated in teaching. Thus, professional growth can be improved by providing opportunities for engagement with administrators and colleagues. A sense of belonging and participation in shared learning opportunities may boost motivation.

The second factor in the mesosystem is professional development programs. T3 said she became more motivated by joining teachers' training, as she got well-informed about educational policies, updates, and opportunities. Thus, matching professional development initiatives with teachers' demands and difficulties is critical.

Teachers tend to actively participate in the training when they recognize its practical application. Additionally, parental engagement is another factor that impacts teachers' motivation. T2 said that positive reinforcement and the relationship between her and the learners' parents also motivated her. She added that as parents gave her positive feedback regarding students' development, she became more motivated in teaching. A supportive mesosystem is created by having good interactions with parents and allowing them to participate in professional development activities. When teachers believe in learners' parent's appreciation and actively engage in their professional development, they become more motivated.

3. Exosystem

The exosystem encompasses external factors that indirectly impact teachers' motivation. The first factor is professional teachers' development and regulations. T1 stated that the school provided him access to professional development training to build his professional growth and skill development, which the PPG system provides. T1 detailed supportive policies provided by the government to improve his motivation in teaching. Thus, the government's policies concerning professional development opportunities and requirements substantially affect teachers' motivation. Supportive policies that encourage continuous learning may increase motivation. The second factor is recognition and reward. T2 and T3 conveyed that rewards such as in teachers' day gave them a sense of recognition and highly motivated them to teach. Thus, motivation may be increased by positive portrayals that emphasize the value of teaching. Rewarding instructors also helps to increase their motivation by recognizing their dedication. The third factor is positive student outcomes. T2 stated that seeing her students gain good exam grades motivated her in the teaching process. T2 added that she felt successful in teaching and would like to improve. Thus, teachers are motivated when they witness observable student improvements due to their professional development efforts. The correlation between their development and enhanced academic achievement bolsters the need for continuous training.

4. Macrosystem

The macrosystem represents the broader cultural and societal context in which EFL teachers operate. The first is the economic factor. T1 and T3 described that getting an appropriate salary that could support their lives motivates them to keep improving their professional skills. Therefore, motivation can be influenced by the financial aspects of teaching, such as benefits and salary. While financial concerns may impede motivation, fairly compensated teachers may be more inclined to make professional development investments. Furthermore, T2 stated that people's thoughts about being a teacher is a great job, as spreading knowledge and kindness gives many benefits. T2 detailed that by that idea, she felt motivated to keep teaching by spreading and transferring her knowledge to her students. Thus, society's appreciation for education and teachers can create a favorable environment. Teachers may feel more driven and encouraged in their professional development in societies where education is highly valued. Teachers' feelings of purpose and devotion can be strengthened by being acknowledged and respected.

B. Discussion

This study's findings comprise the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem factors on teachers' experience that may boost their motivation.

1. Microsystem

Teachers' autonomy and personal objectives are essential for increasing their motivation and sense of fulfillment in their work. The study's conclusions demonstrated that teachers become more committed to their work and perform better, positively affecting student learning outcomes when they can establish and pursue their own goals. According to Barni, Danioni, and Benevene (2019), teacher personal values serve as a source of inspiration and drive for them, making them invaluable assets in enhancing the quality of their teaching experience. Furthermore, because autonomy gives instructors a sense of control over their work and the freedom to behave in ways consistent with their values and beliefs, it is particularly important in creating intrinsic motivation. Reeve and Cheon (2021) state autonomous motivation favors job satisfaction and performance. According to research by Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk, Hoy, and Hoy (1998), there is a connection between teacher motivation and professional growth. Teachers are motivated to persevere when they have autonomy and personal goals.

This study found teachers' well-being and constructive feedback are critical aspects that significantly impact their motivation, job satisfaction, and overall effectiveness in the classroom. Physical, mental, and emotional health are all aspects of teachers' well-being. Teachers confront several stressors and problems on a daily basis, including hard workloads, administrative demands, student behavior issues, and inadequate resources (Roth et al., 2017). These pressures can lead to burnout and a reduction in teachers' overall well-being, influencing motivation and job satisfaction. Research has shown that constructive feedback has an impact on teachers' motivation. In a study, Van de Grift et al. (2017) investigated the relationship between feedback, self-efficacy, and motivation among teachers. According to their research, teachers who received professional development feedback showed stronger self-efficacy and motivation to improve their instructional practices.

2. Mesosystem

In mesosystem, a supportive environment and teacher collaboration can significantly boost their motivation and job satisfaction. Teachers collaborating in a supportive atmosphere may exchange ideas, problems, and experiences, promoting professional development and improved output. Teachers collaborate to promote the growth of collective efficacy or the idea that teachers can collectively influence students' learning outcomes positively (Voelkel, 2022). Teachers become more motivated when they engage with students well and witness increased achievement (DeWitt, 2019). This is because they have a feeling of collaborative efficacy. Teachers in a supportive environment can also rely on one another for emotional support and motivation. According to Huberman (1995), teachers may create a network of understanding and empathy by actively supporting one another, even if teaching can be challenging and isolating.

This study also found that in mesosystem professional development programs and positive feedback from students' parents can significantly boost teachers' motivation in the mesosystem. Effective professional development was found to favorably impact teacher efficacy in a study by Garet et al. (2001). Teachers reported feeling more motivated after receiving high-quality professional development because they felt more confident in their teaching ability. Furthermore, family input reflects a teacher's performance and competency. Teachers feel more at ease and optimistic after receiving this award, making them feel proud of their job. Moreover, positive parent feedback was consistently linked to higher levels of teacher motivation and a stronger belief in their abilities to make a difference in students' lives, according to a study by Simonsen and Ray (2018) on the impact of parental support on teacher motivation.

3. Exosystem

In the exosystem, government policies, rewards, and student outcomes boost teachers' motivation. Teachers are highly motivated by government programs that prioritize opportunities for professional development. Teachers feel committed to their professional development when they can participate in training programs, conferences, and workshops. They frequently have a strong desire to enhance their methods of instruction. A study by Mutua and Thamar (2018) found that teachers who participated in professional development events had greater motivation and job satisfaction. Moreover, acknowledging and celebrating their successes can significantly impact teachers' motivation. According to a study by Liu (2018), instructors who receive public recognition have higher self-esteem and are more inspired to pursue excellence in their work. Furthermore, excellent student outcomes extend beyond academic accomplishment. Teachers value students' personal growth and development as much as students do. When teachers see their students gain confidence, self-esteem, and social skills, they feel a feeling of accomplishment and pride. Positive student outcomes in these areas validate a teacher's position as an educator and guide in influencing the lives of their pupils (Amerstorfer and Freiin von Münster-Kistner, 2010). Teachers' positive influence on their students' lives fuels their enthusiasm and drive to strive for excellence.

4. Macrosystem

In the macrosystem, economic factors and societal appreciation for teachers can significantly impact their motivation levels. A research titled "Education at a Glance 2019" by the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) discovered a favorable relationship between greater earnings and teacher job satisfaction. According to the research, teachers are more motivated in countries where their pay is attractive and appropriate to their credentials and experience (OECD, 2019). Teachers felt more recognized and valued in these situations, which increased their motivation to provide outstanding lessons to their students. Furthermore, teachers' motivation is influenced by society's views and opinions about the value of education and the teaching profession. Educators' feelings of purpose and dedication can be strengthened by recognition and appreciation (Hartiwi, Kozlova, and Masitoh, 2020). Understanding and resolving these ecological macrosystem elements is critical for fostering a supportive and stimulating learning environment for teachers.

E. CONCLUSION

The ecological perspective includes micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems. In the microsystem, teacher autonomy, the pursuit of personal goals, and well-being significantly influence teachers' motivation, job satisfaction, and performance. Autonomy allows teachers to align their work with their values and beliefs, fostering intrinsic motivation. Well-being, encompassing physical, mental, and emotional health, is crucial as teachers face various stressors that can lead to burnout. Constructive feedback also impacts teachers' motivation, self-efficacy, and instructional practices. A supportive environment and collaboration in the mesosystem enhance teachers' motivation and job satisfaction. Teachers working together in a supportive atmosphere can exchange ideas, promote professional development, and build collective efficacy. Collaborative efficacy and positive student outcomes further motivate teachers. Professional development programs and positive feedback from parents also contribute to teachers' motivation and belief in their abilities.

Government policies, rewards, and student outcomes impact teachers' motivation in the exosystem. Teachers are motivated by opportunities for professional development and recognition of their successes. Excellent student

outcomes, including personal growth and development, fuel teachers' enthusiasm and drive for excellence. Lastly, economic factors and societal appreciation for teachers influence motivation in the macrosystem. Teachers are more motivated in countries with attractive and appropriate pay and feel more recognized and valued. Society's views on education and the teaching profession also impact teachers' feelings of purpose and dedication. By understanding and addressing these elements, educational institutions can foster supportive and stimulating learning environments for teachers.

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