

## PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' NARRATIVES: A CASE STUDY OF UNPACKING THE COMPLEXITIES OF MOTIVATION TO BECOME EFL TEACHERS

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### ARTICLE INFORMATION    ABSTRACT

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This qualitative study examines the experiences of 55 participants enrolled in English-teachers preparation program at Foreign Languages Department at Vinh University in Vietnam and analyzes reflections on their motivation to become EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers. Multiple measures of data with triangulation have been collected from coursework, including reflection essays from 55 pre-service teachers and a semi-structured interview with the pre-service teachers. The data are analyzed with thematic analysis and Key-word in context in order to find categories of factors that influence the pre-service teachers' motivation to choose to be EFL teachers. The findings suggest that the incentives making pre-service teachers pursue the career of English teachers consist of personal, professional, and social aspects, in which teachers' influences - one of the factors of social aspects - has been considered the most dominant factor influencing the desire of pre-service teachers to become EFL teachers. Some pedagogical implications are suggested to improve the strategy of training teachers and career orientation education for students.

**Keywords:** EFL pre-service teachers; motivation; narratives.

### 1. Introduction

It can be said that motivation to choose the teaching profession as a future career plays an important role in professionalism and commitment to the teaching profession (Asriani, I. E., Apriliaswati, R., & Riyanti, D., 2022). Accordingly, a number of studies have proven that driving forces behind the career choice to be teachers has a close relationship to the attachment to the teaching career. This identifies the motivational factors that influence pre-service teachers' decision towards their career choice emerge to be a pressing issue (Prabjandee, 2020). In addition, teacher identity, which is an integration of personal, contextual, and professional factors (Yean & Lee, 2014), has been considered a strong factor in teacher motivation (Hahl, K., & Mikulec, E., 2018). However, it does not begin in the teacher preparation program, but rather with the person's desire to enter the teaching profession (Zaree-ee & Ghasedi, 2014).

Furthermore, regarding Vietnamese context, a number of prospective teachers showed little interest in entering teaching careers after graduation. According to Vietnam's Ministry of Finance (MOF, 2017), graduates of the Teacher Education programs choose to follow other occupations than teaching (Duyen, T. T., & Hong, C. T., 2020). This trend leads to the decrease in the number of teachers, especially teachers of English. Consequently, some regions in Vietnam witness a shortage of teachers. Thus, it is vital to identify incentives to become EFL teachers among pre-service teachers to deal with this situation.

When it comes to scientific study on teachers' motivation, there has been little work done on pre-service teachers' incentives. This study has been carried out in order to investigate what factors motivate pre-service students pursuing English pedagogy as their future profession.

This study is aimed at investigating factors having effect on the decision to pursue English teaching as future careers from pre-service teachers' perspective. Additionally, considering the study results, the researchers suggest implications to reinforce the motivation towards pedagogy major in particular, and English teaching career in general by innovation and improvement in the curriculum.

This study examines the pre-service teachers' motivation to become EFL teachers, with the following guiding question: *What factors affect Vietnamese EFL pre-service teachers' decisions to become English teachers?*

This study concerns the motivation to pursue English teaching as their majors of pre-service teachers at Foreign Languages Department at Vinh University in Vietnam.

## **2. Literature review**

According to Dornyei (2001), teacher motivation is not only to do with the motivation to teach; it also has something to do with "motivation to be a teacher as a life-long career". In other words, pre-service teachers' motivation has an impact on their career decision.

Motivation to be a teacher fitted into three main categories: intrinsic, extrinsic, and altruistic motives (Kavanoz & Yüksel, 2017; Misfud, 2018; Lestari & Arfiandhani, 2019; Başöz, 2021). Intrinsic motives relate to inherent aspects of teaching including passion, love, and interest to teach. Extrinsic motives are concerned with external factors and do not refer to the profession itself such as salary, social recognition, and holidays. Altruistic motives encompass the general aim of teaching as providing greater benefit to the community and society, helping people improve and grow. The decision to become teachers is socially motivated (Castaeda, 2014), and it has been influenced by family, previous and current teachers, as well as economic concerns.

Another study illustrates that altruistic factors (for example, teaching allows people to influence the next generation) appear to be the most influential factor affecting them to choose English teaching as their careers, followed by intrinsic factors (for example, teaching suits my personality) and extrinsic factors (for example, teaching has many fringe benefits) (Abraham Bakar, Shamsiah Mohamed, Ramlah Hamzah & Suhid Asmawati, 2014).

Mofrad (2016) demonstrated that schooling, training, work experience, environment, students' biographical backgrounds and stories, teacher role models, and family members were considered as some additional crucial variables that influence the development of one's professional identity and decisions to become an English language teacher (Lamote & Engels, 2010).

However, it has become more difficult to recruit and retain young individuals in the teaching profession throughout the world (Watt & Richardson, 2007). In addition, Watt & Richardson (2016) noted that teachers who were altruistically motivated, aspired that their teaching profession could be utilized to contribute to a larger society by shaping children's future, making social contributions and enhancing social equity.

In Vietnam, Tran (2018) showed that the most attractive factors drawing teachers to the career were job security, and social status, while teachers' income and working time were the least appealing features

Based on self-determined theory and interactionist theory, the research has categorized the factors affecting pre-service teachers' motivation into intrinsic, extrinsic and altruistic aspects (Lestari & Arfiandhani, 2019). The former theory explained human motivation by focusing on the importance of human inner resources for development and behavioral regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Additionally, self-determined theory contained intrinsic motivation, which included "satisfaction of needs and interests, emotional payoffs and the internal desire for personal growth, intellectual fulfillment and meaningfulness often found in educational settings" (Hiver, Kim and Kim, 2018). Latter, according to symbolic interactionism, individuals might develop their personalities through social connections, and various aspects of identity, emerged in multiple environments. Therefore, interactionist theory comprised altruistic and extrinsic motivation.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research design**

The research question that plays the role as a guidance for this study is "*What factors affect Vietnamese EFL pre-service teachers' decision to become teachers?*". The research team applied a qualitative approach, which was used to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics with the aim to investigate individuals' perspectives. Qualitative research is "a way of knowing" and learning about different experiences from the perspective of the individual Visnewski, T. and Beanlands, H. (2004). Thanks to the flexibility of the qualitative approach, we could collect participants' other interesting ideas related to the research subject, which would not be revealed in a quantitative study because the research could not predict them while developing the survey questions and carried out the research. In this study, we tried to figure out the answers for the research topic by participants' interpretations (Bryman, 2016).

#### **3.2. Participants**

This research took place at Vinh University at first semester of the 2022-2023 academic year. A total of 55 sophomores and juniors, 50 females and 5 males, participated

in the study. All the participants had an average of 12 years of formal English learning experience, and they were following the same English program at Vinh University to earn a BA degree in English language teacher education. Those participating in this study learned the program in the approach of CDIO (conceive, design, implement, operate), which helped them to conceptualize, design, implement and develop English curriculum high school level. In addition, they were able to use English level 4 (B2) according to the 6-level foreign language competency framework in Vietnam. The following table shows the personal characteristics of the sample (see Table 1).

**Table 1:** *Participants' demographic characteristics*

| Characteristics | Quantity | %    |
|-----------------|----------|------|
| <b>Class</b>    |          |      |
| Sophomore       | 40       | 72.7 |
| Junior          | 15       | 27.2 |
| <b>Gender</b>   |          |      |
| Female          | 50       | 90.9 |
| Male            | 5        | 9.09 |

As can be seen from the table, while a majority were female prospective teachers (90%) only 5 of them (9%) were male student-teachers.

### 3.3. *Research instrument*

#### a. Reflection paper

The study used an open narrative about Language Learning History (LLH) (Barkhuizen et al., 2014) entitled “Why did you *decide to study English teaching as a major?*” to gather qualitative data. We gave some suggestions (as illustrated in the appendix) so that the participants could get to answer the question given more easily, the data collected oriented and avoided discursive expression. Using reflection papers helped to collect data towards participants' answers in terms of motivates, influences, reasons and vision towards the English teaching profession. To ensure the data collected properly and effectively, the researchers asked for the help of teachers at Foreign Languages Department to distribute and collect the reflection papers from pre-service teachers. The answers were categorized into three main factors (personal, social and professional factors). Based on the information on the papers collected, we put it into appropriate categories, processed analysis and did research.

#### b. Interview

As the reflection papers were distributed, we started to interview student-teachers randomly by a face-to-face interview. The interview was conducted to gain more insights into participants' perspective and detect pre-service student's motivation to become EFL teachers. Due to the time constraints, the interviewees were 10 students out of 55 students. The interviews were conducted in 10-15 minutes for each interviewee, recorded by the interviewer by taking notes. The interviewees were free to choose to use either their mother

tongue, which was Vietnamese or English in the interview so that they could express their opinion in the most comfortable and confident way. Each interviewee discussed the research questions having the content of “*Why did you choose English teaching as your major?*”, and “*What affected your decision to pursue the career of EFL teachers?*” to collect more specific data. However, to make it more comfortable, the interviewers lead the interview process to operate naturally. After the interview process, the data was gathered, and processed by analyzing, and categorizing into relevant themes.

### 3.4. Data collection

**Table 2:** *Factors affecting the decisions of pre-service teachers to become EFL teachers*

| <b>Personal factor</b>   | <b>Social factor</b>  | <b>Professional factor</b>  |
|--|---|---|
| 1. Life history<br>2. Biographical background<br>3. Career choice<br>4. Personality<br>5. Self-ability | 1. Family<br>2. Teachers influences<br>3. Popularity of English<br>4. Friends' influences<br>5. Economy | 1. Teacher training<br>2. Schooling experiences<br>3. Teaching practice<br>4. Participation in community<br>5. Life-long learning |

In this study, we had student-teachers expressed their opinions towards the research question in the reflection papers. After piloting the reflection papers, there were a total of 55 samples in return. After that, we analyzed participants' answers following criteria in three themes including personal, social and professional factors as illustrated in table 2. This had the potential to overcome the poor response rates of a questionnaire survey (Austin, 1981). In addition, we carry out semi-structured interviews with 10 out of 55 student-teachers. Each interview lasted 10-15 minutes. We applied semi-structured interviews for the reason that we can find out what interviewees had experienced by guiding them around the question from the research schedule (Miles, J. and Gilbert, P. (2005)). Moreover, interview results were collected by noting participants' answers. To conduct descriptive statistics, the data assembled from the reflection paper and semi-structured interview were analyzed by putting into relevant categories. The findings of the reflection papers were used for further investigation in the interview as a framework.

### 3.5. Data analysis

For analyzing the responses to semi open-ended questions, the research applied the content analysis technique. From the content in reflection papers, we combined the use of thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and key-word-in-content method (Kwic; Fielding & Lee, 1998) to come up with qualitative analysis. Those showed the motivation of pre-service teachers based on each motivation related to their belief, experience and expectation towards English teaching.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

### 4.1. Findings

For the purpose of interpreting the data, the motivation was divided as follows:

**Table 3:** Factors affecting student-teachers' decision to become EFL teachers

| <b>Factors</b> | <b>Personal factors<br/>(Intrinsic/Altruistic)</b>  | <b>Social factors<br/>(Extrinsic)</b>  | <b>Professional factors<br/>(Intrinsic/ Altruistic)</b>  |
|----------------|---|--|--|
|                | 1. Life history<br>2. Biographical background<br>3. Career choice (motivation)<br>4. Personality<br>5. Self-ability | 1. Family orientation<br>2. Teachers' influences<br>3. Popularity of English<br>4. Friends' influences<br>5. Economy | 1. Teacher training<br>2. Schooling experiences<br>3. Teaching practice<br>4. Community participation<br>5. Life-long learning |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>76</b>   | <b>106</b>   | <b>64</b>  |

As can be seen from Table 3, among three factors, social factors referring to extrinsic motivation ranked the highest with 106 segment retrieves in total whereas professional factors (intrinsic and altruistic motivation) had the least segment retrieves, with only 64. Meanwhile, personal factors, which related to both intrinsic and altruistic motivation, showed a significant gap in comparison with social factors with 30 segment retrieves less than social factors.

a. Personal factors

**Table 3.1:** Personal factors affecting pre-serviced teachers' motivations to become EFL teachers

| <b>Personal factors</b> | <b>Segment retrieves</b> |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Life history            | 10                       |
| Biographical background | 7                        |
| Career choice           | 20                       |
| Personality             | 25                       |
| Self-ability            | 14                       |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>76</b>                |

The public narrative investigated the participants' reasons for deciding to work in English teaching in the future, as well as how these personal accounts influenced their decisions. From the responses of participants, a total of 76 segment retrieves were collected.

There were a number of experiences in a person's life that led them to decide on a major, and those differed from person to person. The data collected shows that in terms of intrinsic factors, the number of segment retrieves opting to study English pedagogy due to their personality was the highest with 25 segment retrieves. They considered that their characters were suitable for the academic field and revealed the desire of dedication to society. It is in line with the interview results:

*"I had a chance to go to a mountainous area to visit my father's workplace and I experienced the education there. From that moment, I made my life decision, I want to be*

a teacher to impart knowledge to students regardless of difficulties in geographical sites or living conditions...” (Excerpt 1, Written narratives, participants 12)

“The reason why I want to become a teacher is that I can make a real difference in children's lives. I take the task of developing young people into kind, thoughtful and contributing adults very seriously. As an English teacher, I can teach them a lot of good things, not only teaching in books or documents, but also in life.” (Excerpt 2, Interview, participants 2)

Additionally, career choices with 20 segment retrieves were indicated to have strong influences on student-teachers’ decision to become EFL teachers in the future. They supposed that the reason why they chose English pedagogy as their future jobs was linked to their potential of English teaching career. Furthermore, a number of 14 participants expressed that because they had good English abilities, they wanted to share with others, help them overcome language barrier and study effectively. It is in correspondence with one interviewee:

“English is my favorite subject, and I study it very well. That is the reason why I want to spread the knowledge, help others develop an interest in studying English and be confident with their English background”. (Excerpt 2, Interview, participants 7)

Little showed that EFL pre-service teachers in Foreign Language Department, Vinh University were passionate about being a teacher because of their life history with only 10 segment retrieves or biography background 7 segment retrieves respectively.

#### b. Social factors

**Table 3.2:** Social factors having influences on student-teachers’ motivation to pursue English teaching career

| Social factors        | Segment retrieves |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Family                | 20                |
| Teacher as role model | 45                |
| Popularity of English | 32                |
| Friends' influence    | 6                 |
| Economy               | 3                 |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>106</b>        |

In this study, social components were defined as external factors that influenced EFL pre-service teachers' decisions to become English teachers. The key themes identified from the reflection papers and interview results include schooling experiences, family, teachers, and economic influences. From the participants' responses, a total of 106 segments were extracted. As the collected data revealed, social aspects were the most dominant factor in pursuing English teaching of pre-serviced teacher in Foreign Languages Department, Vinh University.

It can be seen that the teachers’ influences were the highest among other extrinsic elements, with 45 segment retrieves. Student-teachers mentioned their teachers as a role model that they want to become in the future. Moreover, teachers were considered to be the inspires that transmit the motivation of engaging in the field of knowledge as educators

in general and English teachers in particular. Similarly, one participant revealed in his reflection paper:

*“I first thought of wanting to become an English teacher when I met my high school English teacher. Her dynamism and enthusiasm made me determined to become a teacher like her.” (Excerpt 1, Written narratives, participants 6)*

Another factor having significant effect on the motivation to become EFL teachers by pre-serviced teachers was the popularity of English. In the context of integration, English was more popular than ever, thus, English teaching was considered to enable pre-serviced teachers to have good job opportunities (32 segment retrieves). Furthermore, the fact that family members, such as parents' or relatives' career as English teachers, was assumed to affect student-teachers' career choice to be EFL teachers. This was illustrated in the reflection paper:

*“To be honest, it wasn't until my last year of high school, when faced with choosing a career for the future, that I seriously thought about teaching. It was my aunt next door, also a teacher, who convinced me to pursue this profession.” (Excerpt 1, Written narratives, participants 18)*

With 3 segment retrieves, teaching English for financial purposes ranked the lowest. Few answers supposed that their motivation to study English pedagogy was to be able to earn better income in the future.

c. Professional factors

**Table 3.3:** Professional factors affecting student-teachers' motivations to become EFL teachers

| Professional factors     | Segment retrieves |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Teacher training         | 10                |
| Schooling experiences    | 6                 |
| Teaching practice        | 16                |
| Participate in community | 18                |
| Life-long learning       | 14                |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>64</b>         |

From the perspective of professional factors, their portion to motives for EFL pre-service teachers to choose an English teaching career include teacher training, schooling experiences, teaching practice, participation in community and life-long learning. In the concept of motivated description, a total of 64 segments were discovered in this theme.

Participating in the community's activities is the main cause of students choosing pedagogy. They claim that through these experiences, they assist the community in learning a new skill, exploring a new section of information, and contributing to their development. Therefore, this becomes the most crucial feature that stimulates them to opt for the EFL profession. The analysis indicates from data collection, 18 out of 64 participants responses sharing about this experience.

In addition, teaching practice ranked second in pre-teachers' motivation to be an EFL teacher. This could be considered to be an element that strongly affected the



professional decisions (16 segment retrieves) of pre-service teachers for the reason that after having practical experiences as a teacher, making lesson plans and teaching students, the love for pedagogy was nurtured and arisen. This was in line with the interview:

*“At first, I thought I was not suitable with this major, but when I experienced being a teacher, I found out that this is not like my previous thinking, I gradually realized I am in love with teaching students and I want to stick with this career.” (Excerpt 1, Interview, participants 3)*

A sum of 14 participants assumed that the desire to improve and complete themselves in conquering knowledge was the motivation for their training to be EFL teachers. It was in correspondence of the interview results:

*“Getting exposed to studying with the aim to impart knowledge, I feel that it is necessary to study every time, every moment because studying is not only for myself but also for teaching my students.” (Excerpt 1, Interview, participants 16)*

Meanwhile, the process of training (10 segment retrieves) was considered to have an effect on career choice as an English teacher. It was because the knowledge and skills they gained from their education were said to create their passion for teaching. The factor that affected career choice as an EFL teacher the least of the five was schooling experiences (6 retrieves).

#### **4.2. Discussion**

The study investigated the factors affecting career choice as English teachers from student-teachers' perspective. As the data suggested, the main motivation for pre-service teachers in Vinh University to choose English Pedagogy to be their career path in the future involved personal (intrinsic, altruistic), social (extrinsic) and professional (intrinsic, altruistic) aspects. It had significant parallels with the research of Garza-Rodríguez, N. (2022). This study identified the influences of personal, social and professional aspects on pre-serviced teachers' decision. Additionally, mirroring the findings of Bakar, A.R. *et al.* (2014) which assumed that three possible main reasons why people choose certain occupations consisted of 3 main factors (extrinsic, intrinsic, and altruistic).

Furthermore, the study results pointed out that the major social motive affecting pre-service teachers in Vinh University decision to become EFL teacher was teacher's influences. In the interview, the teacher-students confirmed how previous teachers, both English and non-English teachers, impacted positively participants' lives, and eventually they were inspired to become English teachers (Hennesey & Lynch, 2016; Arfiandhani & Lestari, 2019). It was for the reason that more altruistic (individuals' interest to contribute to the society) and intrinsic (desire to teach and interest) rather than extrinsic (interested in economy such as salary, holiday or tuition fee (Kavanoz & Yusel, 2017; Misfud, 2018).

Economic factors seemed to have few influences on the student-teachers in Vinh University's motivation to become EFL teachers. It was broadly consistent with the findings of (Başöz, 2021; Arfiandhani & Lestari, 2019; Hennesey & Lynch, 2016) that economic elements had little to do with the career choice as English teachers from pre-service teachers' perspective.

Moreover, the popularity of English was a considerable factor that pre-service teachers' took into consideration when choosing English Pedagogy as their major. Also, the combination between biographical and teachers' preparation experiences, which were

in correspondence with the results by Leserth (2013) & Fajardo (2014), helped them create initial ideas about the profession, thus, form and develop teachers' identities in the future. In addition, the interview results revealed that participants experienced second thoughts in their decision to become English language teachers before and during different moments of teacher preparation. Furthermore, participants expressed that they had selected a different major before entering the English teaching program, and English teaching was considered to be a fallback career. Last but not least, participants indicated another intrinsic factor that had an effect on their decision to be an English teacher, which was the attitude of the society towards teachers that people had the tendency to show great respect with the ones having pedagogic jobs.

Applying qualitative approach, it was this research's objectives to find out the motivation to become EFL teachers of student-teachers in Vinh University in terms of personal, professional and social aspects, aligned to intrinsic, extrinsic, and altruistic reasons. Comprehending pre-service teachers' motivation was taken into consideration as a fundamental element as it played an important role in constructing teachers' identities in the future.

## **5. Conclusions**

The study's findings lead to some basic conclusions and educational implications. By applying a qualitative approach, this research's objective was to inquire into the motivation of pre-service teachers to pursue their teaching career. The main motivators of Vietnamese EFL pre-service teachers to choose English teaching as a profession were personal, social, and professional reasons, which continued evolving during the teacher preparation program. Of all 15 factors, the one ranked the highest was teachers' influences, which revealed that teachers' images had significant effects on student-teachers' career choice as English teachers. The results illustrated that with pre-service EFL teachers at Vinh University, social motivation, also referred to external factors, affected the decision to become EFL teachers the most. As this kind of factor was generally associated with better levels of success and passion in the practice of teaching. This could be viewed as a significant asset for the training of future student-teachers.

## **6. Implications**

By considering results, we came up with the following implications. As teachers' influences were the factor having the most effect in terms of social factors, it was necessary for teachers to improve and innovate the curriculum to build up strong moral fiber among students and reinforced the motivation towards the educational program. They should make good examples for students to follow, as teachers' images had significant effects on students. The professional factors suggested that school administrator, especially in high school, had better create more career guidance, and counseling according to students' expectation to help them have clearer vision towards their career choices. Similarly, for the university, activities exchanging experiences between students and former students should be organized to enable pre-service teachers to gain proper sight for their future direction. Last but not least, student-teachers need to reflect themselves on the affective domains that encompass the profession so that they could clearly identify their motivations

for teaching, their love, and passion with the teaching career, which enhanced the quality and spirit of the educational program.

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## TÓM TẮT

### **TRẦN THUẬT CỦA GIÁO VIÊN SƯ PHẠM TƯƠNG LAI: NGHIÊN CỨU TRƯỜNG HỢP CỤ THỂ VỀ SỰ PHỨC TẠP TRONG ĐỘNG LỰC TRỞ THÀNH GIÁO VIÊN TIẾNG ANH**

**Đặng Thị Nguyên, Phan Khánh Huyền, Hoàng Khánh Linh,  
Phạm Xuân Lâm, Trịnh Xuân Tú, Nguyễn Thị Quỳnh**  
*Khoa Sư phạm Ngoại ngữ, Trường Đại học Vinh, Việt Nam*  
Ngày nhận bài 15/02/2023, ngày nhận bài 31/3/2023

Nghiên cứu định tính được tiến hành với sự tham gia của 55 sinh viên chuyên ngành Sư phạm tiếng Anh tại khoa Sư phạm Ngoại ngữ, trường Đại học Vinh, Việt Nam. Dữ liệu được thu thập dựa trên trải nghiệm và sự phản chiếu bản thân liên quan đến động lực trở thành giáo viên tiếng Anh. Dữ liệu được phân tích dựa trên chủ đề và từ khóa trong ngữ cảnh nhằm phân loại các yếu tố ảnh hưởng đến động lực trở thành giáo viên tiếng Anh. Kết quả cho thấy các yếu tố đó bao gồm các khía cạnh mang tính cá nhân, nghề nghiệp và xã hội, trong đó ảnh hưởng của giáo viên - một yếu tố mang tính xã hội - có ảnh hưởng nhiều nhất đối với động lực trở thành giáo viên tiếng Anh. Dựa trên kết quả thu được, một số gợi ý mang tính sư phạm được đưa ra nhằm cải thiện chiến lược định hướng đào tạo giáo viên.

**Từ khóa:** Giáo viên tiếng Anh tương lai; động lực; trần thuật.