Unveiling Growth: Do Master's Degrees Propel Professional Development for English Teachers at All Experience Levels?

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Abstract

Teachers, as professional educators, are supposed to keep improving their ability in the pedagogical field. The teacher development program is one of the best ways for teachers to maintain and enhance their professionalism. Motivation has become an issue that is considered crucial to teachers' involvement in teacher development programs (TPD). However, investigating novice and experienced EFL teachers' motivation in pursuing their master's degree as a form of development activity is underexplored. This research article aims to investigate novice and experienced English teachers' voices regarding their motivation in pursuing a master's degree at a postgraduate program in one of the state universities in Bandung and the comparison between the teachers in regard to their motivation. This study employed a qualitative research approach guided by a case study design with 2 novice English teachers and 3 experienced English teachers who are currently studying at a postgraduate program as the respondents. The instrument used in this study was an interview with 9 questions adapted from a conceptual framework proposed by Alghamdi (2020). The findings revealed that the EFL teachers have several types of factors in their motivation to pursue their higher education. The factors are primarily grouped into incentive and reward factors, school factors, CPD program factors, and within-teacher factors. In comparison, all respondents have quite similar motivations with no significant difference. However, one difference was found in the reward factor in which the role of the family is more motivating in novice teachers than inexperienced teachers.

Keywords: English teachers' motivation, professional development, teacher development program

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is recognized as a noble profession, with its practitioners aptly termed as educational professionals or teachers (Richards & Lockhart, 2005). The caliber of teachers plays a pivotal role in shaping the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process, underscoring the importance of continual professional enhancement. Johnston (2008, p.96) articulates that the success of schools, programs, and educational institutions is heavily dependent on their commitment to addressing the developmental needs of their faculty.

Echoing this sentiment, Galabawa and Agu (2001), as referenced by Mahmoudi and Özkana (2015), highlight teachers as the linchpin of classroom instruction, positioning Teacher Professional Development (TPD) as a crucial avenue for educators to refine their skills and professionalism. This process of development transcends mere subject knowledge, extending to the quality of education imparted to students (Cobbold, 2015), thereby emphasizing the multifaceted impact of teacher professionalism on the educational ecosystem.

Professional development encompasses a wide range of activities designed to enhance the skills, knowledge, expertise, and other essential attributes of educators, spanning from formalized training to more informal learning experiences (OECD, 2013). The concept of teacher development varies across regions and is influenced by different educational philosophies. According to Johnston (2008), in North America, teacher development is often viewed as structured programs led by professional trainers and educators, offering workshops, courses, summer institutes, and other forms of in-service training tailored for active teachers. In contrast, European perspectives on teacher development emphasize self-initiated learning, with a greater focus on the intrinsic motivation of teachers to seek out and engage in their own professional growth. Evans (2002) further elaborates that teacher development is a continuous process aimed at enhancing teachers' professionalism, suggesting that the ultimate goal of professional development is not just to refine teaching practices but also to significantly improve student learning outcomes. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) support this view, advocating for well-designed professional development programs that are capable of instigating meaningful changes in educational practices and elevating student achievement.

Extensive research on teacher development programs has consistently demonstrated the positive impact of professional development activities on teaching effectiveness (Kedzior & Fifield, 2004). Various studies highlight the multifaceted benefits of these programs for English teachers, illustrating significant advancements in their pedagogical skills and professional growth (Emilia et al., 2022; Yangambi, 2021; Mestry et al., 2009; Ajani, 2018). A pivotal element influencing teachers' engagement in Teacher Professional Development (TPD) is their motivation, which plays a crucial role in their commitment to continuous learning and enhancement of their professional expertise. Zhang et al. (2021) underscore the importance of teacher motivation in determining the effectiveness of professional development programs. Similarly, Al-Barakat et al. (2023) found that high motivation is a key driver for student teachers' participation in professional development activities, while Pant (2018) identified motivation as a vital factor for English teachers aiming to expand their teaching capabilities. Research in this field categorizes the motivations for participating in TPD into two main types: intrinsic, where the drive comes from personal satisfaction and interest, and extrinsic, where external rewards and recognition serve as motivators (Alghamdi, 2020; Chang et al., 2014; Kusmaryani et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2022), indicating the complex interplay of factors that encourage teachers to pursue professional development opportunities.Research has identified multiple motivations propelling teachers to engage in professional development programs. Deci and Ryan's seminal work (1985, 2000, 2008), as highlighted by Basikin (2020), delineates two fundamental types of motivation: (1) autonomous motivation, characterized by an individual's internal drive stemming from personal interest, and (2) controlled motivation, which reflects the external

compulsion to undertake an activity for reasons beyond personal interest. Echoing this dichotomy, Zhang et al. (2022) categorize motivations into (1) autonomous motivation, where teachers' participation is fueled by genuine interest or perceived benefits of the program, and (2) controlled motivation, influenced by external factors such as material incentives, recognition, or the avoidance of negative consequences. Furthermore, Alghamdi (2020) expands on the dimensions influencing teacher motivation in Teacher Professional Development (TPD), identifying four key areas: (1) policy and government directives, (2) the school environment, (3) specific features of the CPD program, and (4) intrinsic factors within the teacher. These studies collectively underscore the complexity of motivations behind teachers' participation in professional development, ranging from deeply personal aspirations to externally imposed pressures.

Several pivotal studies have delved into the motivations underpinning teacher engagement in professional development. Alghamdi (2020) conducted a comprehensive investigation into the factors driving teachers towards Continuing Professional Development (CPD), uncovering 48 critical domains that significantly bolster teachers' motivation for participation. These were organized into four principal themes: governmental and policy influences, school environment, CPD program characteristics, and personal motivation factors. Chang et al. (2014) focused on understanding the motivations of Singaporean teachers for engaging in professional development activities, revealing a nuanced balance between institutional mandates and the teachers' autonomy in selecting their professional development pathways. Furthermore, Basikin (2020) examined the motivations of EFL teachers in Yogyakarta for participating in professional development programs, finding that motivations linked to the perceived benefits of professional enhancement were predominant (53%), followed by intrinsic motivation (18%), extrinsic motivations (16%), and internalized external motivations (12%). These studies collectively highlight the complex interplay of external and internal factors that motivate teachers to pursue professional growth through development programs.

The literature review reveals that there has been limited exploration into English teachers' motivations for participating in Teacher Professional Development (TPD), specifically in the context of pursuing higher education through postgraduate programs. While numerous studies have focused on various professional development activities, such as workshops and programs offered by teacher associations, the specific drive behind teachers' decisions to engage in higher education as a form of TPD remains underexamined. Engaging in postgraduate studies is recognized by the OECD (2013) as a critical component of qualification programs within TPD, demanding a comprehensive grasp of essential English education domains, including teaching methodologies, curriculum design, pedagogical theory, linguistics, ICT integration in English language teaching, and evaluation techniques.

Furthermore, acquiring research skills is paramount for educators within these programs, as evidenced by the curriculum's emphasis on enhancing students' research abilities through courses in qualitative and quantitative data analysis, research project management, and applied statistics. This advanced training not only aligns with teachers' professional development agendas but also significantly contributes to their competency enhancement. Additionally, postgraduate education embodies the essence of continuous learning and professional growth through activities such as training, mentoring, collaborative projects, and participation in professional networks or communities. These

elements collectively support the overarching aim of TPD programs to elevate teachers' practices, ensuring they evolve as proficient practitioners in their field (Angus-Cole, 2021; Kedzior & Fifield, 2004). This study aims to delve deeper into these motivations, shedding light on the specific reasons English teachers pursue postgraduate education as a pivotal aspect of their professional development journey.

Moreover, understanding the distinction in motivations between novice and experienced teachers for engaging in teacher development programs is essential, given their differences in teaching tenure and various other characteristics. This differentiation suggests the possibility of divergent motivations between these two groups. However, there is a notable scarcity of research specifically comparing the motivations of novice versus experienced teachers within the context of pursuing postgraduate programs. While existing studies have explored the varied motivations behind general teacher professionalism programs, there remains a gap in literature specifically addressing the nuances of motivation for enrolling in postgraduate studies. This study aims to illuminate these distinctions, offering insights into how the length and experience of teaching potentially influence teachers' drive towards further professional development in a postgraduate setting.

This paper endeavors to bridge the existing gap in the literature by delving into the motivations of English teachers for participating in Teacher Professional Development (TPD), with a specific focus on their pursuit of higher education through postgraduate programs. The investigation centers on understanding these motivations from the distinct viewpoints of both experienced and novice teachers enrolled in an English Language Education program at a prominent state university in Bandung City. By capturing the essence of teachers' motivations for furthering their education, this research aims to discern whether these motivations are primarily internally or externally driven. Drawing upon the identified research gap, the objective of this study is to unravel the myriad factors that inspire English teachers to embark on their postgraduate journey within The English Education Study Program. Moreover, it seeks to compare and contrast the motivational spectra of novice versus experienced English teachers as they navigate their postgraduate educational path in The English Education Study Program, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of professional development in the realm of English education.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology with a case study design to delve into the motivations of English Language Teaching (ELT) professionals pursuing master's degrees. Following the principles of qualitative research, this study prioritizes an in-depth understanding of social phenomena from the participants' viewpoints, as highlighted by Gay (2011). It draws upon real-life, unaltered settings, allowing the researcher to immerse in the environment and interactions as detailed by Mack et al. (2005). Mahajan (2018) underscores the qualitative approach's strength in offering rich, textual descriptions of participants' experiences concerning the research topic. Furthermore, the case study design facilitates an exploration of behavioral conditions within specific scenarios, focusing on a concise geographical area and a select group of participants, as described by Zainal (2007). This approach was chosen to capture the nuanced perspectives of teachers on their journey toward obtaining a master's degree, acknowledging that the insights gained may not generalize beyond the studied context but aim to provide a detailed

and comprehensive understanding, in line with Cohen et al. (2007)'s emphasis on qualitative research's depth.

The participants comprised five English teachers, including three with extensive teaching experience and two newcomers to the field, all of whom are currently enrolled in a postgraduate program specializing in English education at a state university in Bandung. These participants, holding bachelor's degrees in English education, were selected through purposive sampling based on their teaching experience—categorized by Gatbonton (as cited in Mahmoudi and Özkana, 2015) as experienced (over five years) and novice (under five years) teachers.

To gather detailed information, semi-structured interviews were conducted, based on a framework by Alghamdi (2020) that outlines four main categories and eight sub-categories, translated into nine interview questions. These interviews, carried out via phone calls or Zoom meetings, allowed for direct inquiries into the participants' motivations, with each session lasting approximately 15-20 minutes.

Data analysis followed a qualitative approach, organizing responses according to Alghamdi (2020)'s motivational categories: government and policy (incentive and reward), school environment, personal (within-teacher), and professional development (CPD) factors. This analysis aimed to identify commonalities and distinctions between experienced and novice teachers, ultimately interpreting these findings within the discussion to address the research questions comprehensively.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION
Factors That Motivate English Teachers to Pursue Their Postgraduate Study at The English Education Study Program

To explore the motivations behind EFL teachers' pursuit of master's degrees in postgraduate programs, the researcher conducted interviews with five English teachers. This group consisted of three experienced teachers (Teacher 1, Teacher 2, and Teacher 3) and two novice teachers (Teacher 4 and Teacher 5). The findings reveal a spectrum of motivations driving their educational advancement, categorized into four primary factors: (1) incentives and rewards, (2) school environment, (3) teacher professional development (TPD) programs, and (4) personal aspirations and goals within the teacher's own professional and personal development context.

Incentive & Reward Factor

The research uncovers a compelling narrative on the motivations behind teachers' pursuit of postgraduate education, highlighting the significant role of both financial incentives and social recognition. Teachers unanimously cited incentives and rewards as pivotal motivations for furthering their studies, particularly emphasizing the financial benefits accorded by government programs and scholarships. For instance, Teacher 1 attributed his continuation of studies to the financial incentive received from a government program aimed at enhancing teacher professionalism. This financial support alleviated the burden of tuition fees, demonstrating the tangible impact of such incentives on teachers' educational pursuits. Teacher 5 similarly acknowledged a scholarship as a key motivator, enabling him to embark on his master's degree journey, while Teacher 3 viewed the potential for increased opportunities and better pay, as a result of obtaining a master's degree, as a critical incentive.

These personal accounts align with broader research findings, such as those presented by Alghamdi (2020), which affirm that both tangible and intangible rewards are influential in motivating teachers to participate in professional development. This is corroborated by studies from Shakir and Zamir (2014) and Yamoah (2013), which identified the substantial role of incentives and rewards in enhancing teachers' motivation towards professional growth. Furthermore, the lack of incentives was noted by Freeman et al. (2014) as a common barrier to teachers' participation in professional development programs, highlighting the necessity of such motivations.

In addition to financial incentives, the value of social recognition and familial approval emerged as significant motivators. Teacher 2 expressed that social recognition fueled his desire to advance academically, equating higher education with a form of intellectual superiority. Teacher 4, on the other hand, found motivation in the anticipation of compliments from his parents, underscoring the emotional and psychological rewards of academic achievement. Teacher 5's motivation was deeply personal, driven by a desire to alter societal perceptions of his family, being the only one among his siblings to reach university level education.

These findings echo the importance of intangible rewards, as suggested by Gemeda and Tynjälä (2015), who noted that EFL teachers with lower salaries exhibited less motivation in their profession and participated less in professional development, pointing to a correlation between financial incentives and engagement in professional growth. However, the study also recognized the significance of intangible rewards, such as social recognition and parental approval, in affecting teachers' emotional well-being and motivation.

This research narrative compellingly illustrates the complex interplay of financial incentives, social recognition, and emotional rewards in motivating teachers to pursue higher education. It underscores the necessity of acknowledging and addressing both the tangible and intangible factors that contribute to teachers' professional development and educational advancement.

School Factor (teacher workload, having an adequate amount of time, school relationships, and support)

The semi-structured interviews conducted in this study shed light on the pivotal role of the school environment in influencing teachers' decisions to pursue further education. Central to this discourse is the interplay between workload, time management, and interpersonal relationships within the school setting, which collectively impact teachers' ability to engage in postgraduate studies.

Teachers highlighted various strategies to balance their professional responsibilities with academic pursuits. Teacher 1, for example, underscored the importance of meticulous time management and proactive discussion with colleagues as a precursor to his enrollment in a postgraduate program. This approach allowed him to harmonize his teaching schedule with his academic commitments effectively. Conversely, Teachers 3 and 5 pointed out the necessity of reducing their workload to carve out sufficient time for their studies. Teacher 5's decision to resign underscores the extreme measures some educators take to prioritize their education, driven by an overwhelming workload that rendered balancing work and study unfeasible.

The influence of workplace relationships on teachers' motivation to continue their education also emerged as a significant theme. Teacher 1 reported a positive reinforcement

from his relationships with colleagues and the principal, which not only supported but also motivated his academic aspirations. This sense of support was echoed by Teacher 4, who felt a familial bond with his work environment, enhancing his mental and emotional well-being while studying. However, not all teachers found these relationships to be directly motivating towards continuing their education, suggesting that while positive, such support may not universally serve as a primary incentive for academic pursuit.

This narrative aligns with findings from Zhang et al. (2022) and Alghamdi (2020), which underscore the motivational impact of supportive principals and conducive school environments on teachers' engagement in professional development. Furthermore, the research by McMillan et al. (2014) and Alghamdi (2020) reinforces the value of positive colleague relationships in fostering an environment conducive to continuous professional development (CPD).

Moreover, the challenges of workload and time constraints are highlighted in the broader literature, with studies by Indraswari and Kuswandono (2018) identifying these factors as significant barriers to teachers' participation in professional development. The present study corroborates these findings, illustrating how teachers navigate these challenges by limiting their work responsibilities, thereby enabling a focus on academic improvement.

This study thus encapsulates the complex dynamics of school factors, including workload, time management, and interpersonal relationships, as critical influencers of teachers' decisions to pursue further education. It underscores the necessity of a supportive school environment that accommodates teachers' professional development aspirations while managing their work responsibilities, thereby facilitating a more seamless integration of academic and professional pursuits.

TPD Program Factor (credibility & relevance)

The investigation into the factors influencing teachers' decisions to pursue further education reveals the critical importance of the Teacher Professional Development (TPD) program characteristics, specifically the program's credibility and its alignment with the participants' needs. Teachers' motivation to enroll in postgraduate programs is significantly shaped by the accreditation status of the institution, the competency of the faculty, and the relevance of the program content to their professional aspirations and requirements.

Teachers 1, 4, and 5 particularly emphasized the accreditation of the university and the quality of its lecturers as primary motivators for their choice of postgraduate program. Teacher 1 was drawn to the program because of its high accreditation status, the institution's prestige as a state university, and the competency of its faculty, fulfilling a long-held ambition to study at such an esteemed institution. Teacher 4 echoed this sentiment, focusing on accreditation and faculty quality as decisive factors. Teacher 5 conducted thorough research into the targeted university, finding that the excellent accreditation and the program's course offerings were compelling reasons for his enrollment.

The relevance of the program content to the teachers' specific needs further influenced their decision to engage in postgraduate studies. Teacher 3 found the curriculum highly pertinent to his goal of improving teaching practices, highlighting the direct application of elective courses to his work. Teachers 4 and 5 saw the program as aligning with their ambitions of becoming researchers or lecturers, with the curriculum's emphasis on theory and research activities matching their career objectives.

This emphasis on program quality and relevance is supported by broader research findings. Truong and Murray (2019) reported that the quality of training programs, including materials and content presentation, is a significant factor in participants' engagement. Similarly, Alghamdi (2020) identified the credibility and relevance of TPD programs as crucial motivators for teacher participation, aligning with the assertions of Cordingley et al. (2015) that credible programs are characterized by experienced and knowledgeable facilitators. Furthermore, Karabenick and Conley (2011), as cited by Alghamdi (2020), argued that programs tailored to teachers' needs can significantly enhance their motivation to participate.

These insights collectively underscore the pivotal role of TPD program characteristics in influencing teachers' educational advancements. The findings highlight the necessity for TPD programs to maintain high standards of accreditation and faculty quality, and to ensure curriculum relevance to meet the evolving needs of educators. This alignment not only attracts teachers to these programs but also supports their professional development and career aspirations, reinforcing the essential link between program quality and teacher motivation.

Within Teacher Factors (professional factors & personal factors)

The exploration of factors influencing teachers' decisions to pursue postgraduate education reveals a nuanced interplay between professional aspirations and personal motivations. Central to this discussion is the concept of 'within-teacher factors', encompassing both the drive for professional enhancement and the fulfillment of personal goals.

Teachers express a keen desire to elevate their teaching proficiency and student outcomes as primary motivations for further study. Teacher 3 articulates this ambition, emphasizing a direct correlation between advancing his teaching skills and positively impacting student achievements. This sentiment is echoed by Teacher 5, who is propelled by specific challenges encountered in the classroom, seeking to broaden his understanding of teaching methodologies through postgraduate education. Teacher 4, on the other hand, envisions his academic pursuit as a pathway to becoming an expert within the English language education field, aspiring to roles beyond the traditional classroom setting, such as researcher or lecturer.

This pursuit of professional development is intertwined with teachers' personal ambitions. The respondents unanimously cite personal needs, particularly the aspiration to attain higher positions within the academic sphere, as significant motivators. Teacher 1 aspires to a dual outcome from his postgraduate journey: to become a more confident English teacher and to fulfill his ambition of becoming a lecturer. Similarly, Teacher 2's motivation is rooted in a desire to return to his alma mater as a lecturer, aiming to contribute to its development based on his experiences and insights.

The collective aspirations to enhance professional capabilities and achieve personal goals underscore the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations driving teachers towards postgraduate education. This dual motivation aligns with findings from Sadeghi and Richard (2021), who observed that English teachers pursue master's degrees with the aim of securing better career opportunities, particularly in higher education settings. Furthermore, research by McMillan et al. (2014) and Meens and Bakx (2019) highlights personal factors and intrinsic motivation as pivotal in teachers' participation in Continuous Professional

Development (CPD) programs. Alghamdi (2020) and Basikin (2020) reinforce this perspective, noting that within-teacher factors, encompassing both personal aspirations and professional development needs, are crucial in motivating teachers to engage in teacher development programs.

This synthesis of professional and personal motivations illustrates the multifaceted reasons behind teachers' pursuit of postgraduate education. It not only highlights the importance of CPD programs in supporting teachers' professional growth but also acknowledges the personal aspirations that drive teachers to seek advancement through further education.

Comparisons Between the Novice Experienced English Teachers' Motivation in Pursuing Their Postgraduate Study at The English Education Study Program

The study reveals a fascinating insight into the motivations driving teachers to pursue postgraduate education, indicating a convergence in the underlying reasons among participants, irrespective of their teaching experience. Predominantly, the 'within-teacher factor,' encompassing personal ambitions and dreams, emerges as a universal motivator across the board. This factor, coupled with the quality of the educational institution and a supportive school environment, underscores the decision to continue with higher education. Such findings resonate with Jamalizade and Rad (2022), suggesting that the length of teaching experience does not significantly alter the motivation for professional development among EFL teachers. This indicates a collective acknowledgment of the value of further education in enhancing professional competence, regardless of how long one has been teaching.

However, a nuanced distinction surfaces when dissecting the motivations related to rewards between novice and experienced teachers. Experienced teachers display a tendency towards valuing intangible rewards unrelated to familial approval. They downplay the importance of external validation, such as social recognition and compliments, in their pursuit of further education. For instance, Teachers 2 and 3 articulate motivations that extend beyond the familial sphere, with aspirations tied to personal achievement and societal status enhancement rather than direct familial praise.

Conversely, novice teachers, represented by Teachers 4 and 5, exhibit a stronger inclination towards rewards connected to their family or parents. Teacher 4 is motivated by parental praise, while Teacher 5 seeks social recognition to alter societal perceptions of his family, highlighting a desire to elevate the family's status through educational attainment. This divergence in motivation can potentially be attributed to the stage of career and life independence. Experienced teachers, likely established in their careers and with a degree of professional autonomy, prioritize personal and professional growth over familial validation. On the other hand, novice teachers, at the outset of their careers and possibly closer to their familial roots, draw significant motivation from family-related rewards.

This distinction sheds light on the complex interplay between professional aspirations and personal life stages in shaping teachers' motivations for engaging in postgraduate education. It suggests that while the pursuit of further education is broadly driven by a desire for professional improvement and personal fulfillment, the nuances of motivation—especially concerning rewards—vary according to the individual's career stage and life circumstances. Such insights underscore the importance of understanding the

multifaceted nature of motivation in educational advancement, acknowledging both universal drivers and individual differences.

CONCLUSION

The current study delves into the motivations of EFL teachers pursuing their master's degrees in English language education at a state university in Bandung, identifying four main motivational factors: incentive and reward, school environment, CPD program quality, and personal ambitions (within-teacher factors). Notably, personal ambitions, particularly aspirations to become lecturers or researchers and enhance professional expertise, stand out as the primary driving force. The study also highlights a lack of significant motivational differences between experienced and novice teachers, except in how they value family-related rewards, with novice teachers more influenced by familial encouragement. These insights underline the importance of considering teacher motivations in the design and implementation of professional development programs to ensure engagement and participation. The study suggests that future research should broaden its scope to include more participants and explore motivations for engaging in various forms of professional development, thereby offering a comprehensive understanding of EFL teachers' motivations for advancing their education and professional skills.

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