

Exploring Social Motivation for Selecting English Language Teaching as a Profession

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Abstract

Social motivation plays a significant role in selecting the English language teaching as a profession in Nepal. The study aimed to explore social motivation and social factors that shape individuals to choose the English language teaching profession. It examined the motivation provided through social norms, values, expectations, and aspirations to influence English language teachers' profession choices and identities. The study employed a narrative inquiry method that used the in-depth interview method to collect data. The study participants were three English language teachers from secondary-level schools of a municipality of Rupandehi. They were purposively selected from three secondary schools in the selected municipality. We used the thematic analysis method in the analysis of the data. This study found that the decision to select teaching English as a profession in Nepal is significantly influenced by social motivation rather than purely personal or economic interests. Additionally, the study revealed that English language teaching is a platform for social identity, mobility, where teachers and students get access to networks of local, national and global participation and progress. The implication of the study is to respect the social and civil roles of English language teachers for community engagement and social mobility in EFL context of Nepal.

Keywords: *English language teaching, motivation, professional choice, social motivation, social values*

Introduction

Motivation is the basic force that directs and sustains human actions. It is a state of mind, filled with energy and passion (Fox, 1997), that is associated with human behavior toward attaining a certain goal (Spasova, 2010). Motivation determines individuals' choices, persistence, and effort in pursuing activities, shaping both their engagement and the intensity of their performance (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). It stimulates a set of forces, from biological, emotional, social, to cognitive, to trigger a certain human behaviour (Fekete, 2023). It promotes someone to do something that starts, moves, directs, energizes, and retains human behavior (Harmer, 2007). Motivation is the inner drive and energy that activates, directs, and maintains individuals' choices, perseverance, and dedication in their activities (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Brown, 1994). Thus, motivation is the essential internal force that activates, directs, and sustains human behavior. It associates desire, energy, and determination, influencing individuals' choices, persistence, and effort in pursuing goals.

Representing biological, emotional, social, and cognitive factors, motivation shapes engagement, performance, and ultimately, success in life.

Motivation is strongly connected to choosing a profession and significantly affects whether people stay in it, leave it, or take part in professional development activities (Seker, Deniz & Gorgen, 2015). Selecting a profession is seen as a career decision shaped by one's perceived abilities, which greatly affects an individual's lifestyle (Ayçiçek & Toraman, 2020; Baloch & Shah, 2014). It involves focusing on tasks that align with one's strengths and provide the most satisfaction (Ozpancar, Aydın & Akansel, 2008), as well as making efforts to evaluate and develop career opportunities according to personal skills, experiences, and interests (Ayçiçek & Toraman, 2020). Professional choices are interconnected factors that strongly shape a person's career path, affecting their decision to enter, remain in, or leave a profession, as well as how they align job opportunities with their skills, interests, and goals. Though each profession holds distinct characteristics and values, the teaching profession has constantly been regarded as an essential determinant of a nation's level of development. Teachers are crucial for the accomplishment of educational objectives, preparing future generations, and supporting student success, highlighting the importance of developing qualified teachers with skills like verbal proficiency and subject knowledge (Dündar, 2014; Ayçiçek & Toraman, 2020). Thus, motivation plays a role of decisive role in determining individuals' professional selections and sustaining their commitment to a profession.

Motivational factors influence professional choice as important factors of professional commitment, effectiveness, and overall success (Koklu, 2023; Booysen & Nel, 2019; Canrinus et al., 2012). Several factors motivate anyone to select the teaching profession that include the desire for continuous learning, personal growth and the commitment to make a positive social impact, and the search for consistency and security (Mansfield, Wosnitza, & Beltman, 2012). Recognizing the varied motivations for selecting English language teaching as a profession is essential for policy makers, teacher educators, as it supports them to find the underlying reasons and motivations for selecting teaching as a profession (Bruinsma & Jansen, 2010; Richardson & Watt, 2005; Hanushek & Pace, 1995). Choosing a career in teaching can be influenced by a variety of factors, including personal skills, interests, beliefs, needs, and priorities, along with the advice and views of family and friends (Koklu, 2023; Hariko & Anggriana, 2019; Han & Yin, 2016; Gottfredson, 2005). Recently, researchers have been diving into what drives people to pursue English language teaching as a profession. Studies focusing on both pre-service and in-service teachers highlight the importance of understanding these motivations, as this knowledge helps policymakers and teacher educators offer better support for teacher development (Pandey, 2020; Bruinsma & Jansen, 2010; Richardson & Watt, 2005). Research (Bergmark et al., 2018; Brookhart & Freeman, 1992; Rinke, 2008; Watt & Richardson, 2005) indicates that the choice to become a teacher is primarily shaped by three interconnected motives: extrinsic (like salary, job security, and status), intrinsic (such as passion, subject knowledge, and intellectual satisfaction), and altruistic (including a commitment to students and society). Similarly, other studies (Azman, 2013; Watt et al., 2012; Sinclair, 2008) suggest that professional choices are typically influenced by a mix of these extrinsic, intrinsic, and altruistic factors. Additionally, Stiegelbauer (1992) identified five key themes that underpin the decision to enter the teaching profession: (a) the desire to make a meaningful impact on students and society, (b) the goal of being a role model, (c) the pursuit of mutual growth and lifelong learning, (d) the eagerness to share knowledge, and (e) the commitment to creating a positive learning environment.

English language teaching has become a vital component of the education system in Nepal, shaped by its status as a foreign language and its growing significance in educational, professional, and social contexts (Panthee, 2021). English acts as a global lingua franca,

influencing various policies and programs (Bista, 2011; Khati, 2013). English has become deeply rooted in daily life, playing a critical role in shaping career scenarios and economic opportunities for the young generation (Giri, 2014; Panthee, 2024). Furthermore, English has gained significant status and is recognized as a resourceful language, extensively used in different sectors like education, medical, media, tourism, technology and diplomacy. English was first introduced to Nepal in the mid-seventeenth century (Sharma, 2006). Formal English language teaching was initiated in 1854 when Prime Minister Janga Bahadur Rana traveled to England and Europe in 1850 and impressed by their educational systems and the universal importance of English, established Durbar High School on palace grounds for the Rana family (Aryal et al. 2016; Panthee, 2021; Whelpton, 2005). At present, English language teaching holds a prominent place in Nepal at present. English serves as a professional field of practice and an academic requirement. English itself functions as a global language. English has grown within the education institutions functioning as a compulsory subject and as a medium of instruction from Grade 1 onwards in Nepal (Panthee, 2024; Sharma & Phyak, 2017). English language teaching in Nepal has established itself as a critical component of the education system, functioning as both a compulsory subject and a medium of instruction from pre-primary to higher education. It is regarded as a prestigious and multifunctional foreign language that not only broadens academic, professional, and economic opportunities but also serves as a global *lingua franca* across varied domains.

In Nepal, English language teaching holds growing importance for its impact on academic achievement, personal growth and social mobility. However, despite rising demand, the motivations for choosing this profession and the strategies teachers use to sustain their career remain unexplored, particularly at the secondary level. Similarly, teacher motivation has been extensively explored in general education; research focusing on the motivations of English language teachers, particularly at the secondary level in Nepal, remains limited, with only a few studies addressing language teacher motivation (Dörnyei, 2003; Pandey, 2020). Although numerous studies have examined teacher motivation across various contexts, there remains a lack of a reliable framework to specifically assess the social motivation underlying secondary-level English language teachers' choice of the profession. Despite growing interest in second language teacher motivation, research remains limited, as existing studies have not sufficiently examined the social motivational factors influencing individuals' decisions to pursue careers in English language teaching (Seker, Deniz & Gorgen, 2015; Pandey, 2021; Panthee & Aryal, 2025). Although numerous studies have investigated preservice teachers' reasons for entering the teaching profession (Fekete, 2023; Koklu, 2023; Başöz, 2021; Jennifer & Mbato, 2020; Bergmark et al., 2018), research involving practicing teachers remains limited, particularly in exploring the social motives and drives that influenced their decision to pursue a career in English language teaching. Dörnyei (2003) and Pandey (2021) emphasized that research on language teacher motivation remains inadequate, and existing studies on second language teacher motivation fail to provide a comprehensive understanding of why individuals pursue second or foreign language teaching as a profession. The purpose of this study was to explore the social motivations and the leading force that help individuals to select English language teaching as a profession. The study tried to uncover how social values, beliefs, and aspirations shape their professional choices and professional identities. To address the given purpose, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What social motives and drives influence secondary-level English teachers to choose English language teaching as their profession?
2. How do secondary-level English teachers' experiences reflect the role of social values, expectations, and aspirations in shaping their career choices and professional identities?

Conceptualizing the Motivation for Choosing English Language Teaching as a Profession

In recent years, considerable attention has been given to the motivations behind choosing English teaching as a profession, with numerous studies exploring both pre-service and in-service teachers' reasons for enrolling in teacher education programs (Pandey, 2021). Motivation, as an initiative of goal-directed activity, is central to understanding who chooses teaching, how they remain in the profession, and the depth of their engagement in both teacher training and professional practice (Müller et al., 2009; Schunk et al., 2014; Sinclair et al., 2006). Teacher motivation plays a vital role in fostering teachers' personal fulfillment and job satisfaction, both of which are closely linked to the selection of teaching as a profession (Htang, 2019; de Jesus & Conboy, 2005). Based on research conducted across Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, the Netherlands, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom, the OECD (2005) reported that the main motivation for choosing teaching as a profession is the opportunity to work with learners who seek intellectual growth while also contributing to society. Research indicates that individuals are motivated to enter English language teaching by a range of intrinsic, extrinsic, and sociocultural factors, including personal growth, the desire to impact others, social contribution, job security, salary, and manageable workload (Klassen et al., 2011; Chong & Low, 2009; Rinke, 2008; Watt & Richardson, 2008; Richardson & Watt, 2005). English language teaching as a career is associated with a higher status associated to teaching other subjects, particularly in multilingual societies where English signifies modernity, progress, or upward mobility. The motivation toward English language teaching comes from various sources such as social and intellectual inspiration, student interactions and the chance to apply innovative ideas, collegial relationships, and opportunities for professional development (Agaj, 2023). The preeminent initiative for selecting English language teaching as a profession is the opportunity to work with learners, foster intellectual growth, and contribute meaningfully to society. Motivation for English language teaching as a profession has been categorized into three domains: altruistic motives related to a commitment to social contribution, intrinsic motives derived from the essential satisfaction of teaching and subject engagement, and extrinsic motives associated with external rewards such as status, salary and working environments (Erten, 2014; Kyriacou et al., 1999). The specific context of English language teaching adds a level of social importance and professional respect. Teachers of the English language may be valued and respected because they enable students to connect with wider national and global communities.

Theoretical Framework

Teacher motivation is shaped by the goals educators pursue, which include social prestige, striving for professional growth, demonstrating competence, avoiding failure, or minimizing effort (Butler, 2007). These goal orientations are central to understanding what drives teachers to select English language teaching as a profession (Khanal & Phyak, 2021). A range of theoretical frameworks including Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), Expectancy Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2000), Super's Self-Concept Theory (1953), Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1986), Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1974), Goal-Setting Theory (Locke & Latham, 2002), Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), the Factors Influencing Teaching (FIT) Theory (Wong, 2015), and Social Motivation Theory (Rachmad, 2023) offer valuable lenses for examining and strengthening teacher motivation. In this context, we discuss about FIT-Choice theory and the theory of social motivation. The FIT-Choice theory states that what teachers decide is based on if they think they'll succeed and how important teaching is to them (Watt & Richardson, 2007). The FIT-Choice theory identifies twelve motivational factors, including intrinsic factors such as teaching ability and prior experiences (Sali, 2013), personal utility factors like job security and work-life balance, and social utility

factors including influencing students' futures and contributing to society (Watt & Richardson, 2007). The English language teaching profession is influenced by elements like the education system, the quality of teacher development, the availability of resources, and students' motivation.

The theory of social motivation, introduced by Yoesoep Edhie Rachmad (2022) explains how social elements impact individual behavior that can affect performance, relationships with others and well-being. This theory addresses areas for motivation that enhance and inhibit individual motivation in multiple contexts, including education. This theory theorizes that individuals' professional choices are strongly shaped by external social influences such as support, recognition and group expectations (Rachmad, 2023). This perspectives supports the research conducted on what motivates teachers' professional choices, suggesting that many people enter the teaching profession due to the enthusiasm of family, friends, or previous teachers, as well as regard for the social status of teaching and social validation, or to engage in community development (Kyriacou et al., 1999; Manuel & Hughes, 2006; Richardson & Watt, 2006). Social Motivation Theory advocates that individuals are encouraged to select English language teaching as a profession through external influences like community contribution and societal respect often play an influential role in motivating teaching career choices (Rachmad, 2023). Social Motivation Theory helps to explain English language teaching as a socially shaped career choice where recognition, support, and communal expectations strongly influence teachers' decisions. This study explores social factors for selecting English language teaching as a profession through the experience of secondary-level English teachers in Nepal.

Methodology

This study used a narrative inquiry method to examine teachers' narrative stories about why they select to teach English language as a profession. Narrative inquiry is a way to do qualitative research that focuses on people's life stories. It involves gathering and looking at personal accounts, such as in-depth interviews, diaries, or life stories. This method helps us grasp what these experiences mean to each teacher (Creswell, 2016; Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Clandinin et al., 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). It sheds light on a person's experiences over time and looks at how personal experiences and cultural background interact (Clandinin & Connelly, 2012).

Research Site and Participants

The research was carried out in a municipality of Rupandehi District, situated in the semi-urban area of Lumbini Province, Nepal. Three secondary schools within the chosen municipality were selected as the sites for the research. Three English teachers from selected secondary schools participated in the study. The participants were selected purposefully. All three teachers share similar sociolinguistic characteristics, as they are all native speakers of Nepali. Each of the participants has over five years of experience in teaching English at the secondary level and is between the ages of 30 and 45. Regarding their educational background, all participants have earned a Master's degree in English Education (M.Ed.) from Tribhuvan University in Nepal.

Research Tools and Methods

Narrative inquiry research merges storytelling and research by employing stories as research data or utilizing storytelling as a method for gathering, analyzing, or presenting data findings (Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik, 2013). In-depth interviews were utilized as the primary methodology for data collection tools, undertaken with the selected English teachers and meticulously audio-recorded to ensure accuracy. Interview guidelines were developed as research tools, encompassing extensive thematic areas related to the social influences and motivational factors that drive individuals toward a career in English language teaching, as well as the personal narratives of practicing secondary-level English teachers. These in-depth

interviews, as teachers' narrative stories, tried to elucidate how societal norms, values, expectations, and aspirations influenced the professional decisions and identities of English language teachers. To elicit information, the interviews were conducted as informal talks, predominantly in Nepali, fostering a calm environment that encourages participants to disclose more genuine, real-life stories.

Data Analysis

The data collected from participants were analyzed using both thematic and descriptive methods, focusing specifically on participants' experiences and their social motivations for pursuing a career in English language teaching. At the beginning, the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed. Guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework for thematic analysis, the transcripts were systematically coded, after which the codes were organized into categories, themes were generated, and the findings were interpreted in relation to participants' narratives and the relevant literature.

Results and Discussions

The results of the study were organized thematically and discussed in relation to existing literature on social motivation underlying the choice of English language teaching as a profession. Focusing on qualitative analysis of narrative in-depth interviews, the data were descriptively interpreted, resulting in the identification of key themes that capture participants' socially driven motives and experiences. For confidentiality, the three participants were assigned codes as TP1, TP2, and TP3.

Navigating Social Values in the Professional Choice of English Language Teaching

Social motivations, personal beliefs, and individual aspirations play a crucial role in influencing the choice of English language teaching as a career in the Nepali context (Pandey, 2021). Social motivation for pursuing English language teaching as a profession encompasses the aspiration to contribute to society and to get the social value. In this regard, participant TP1 stated that

I chose English language teaching as my profession mainly because it gives social status. In our country, you know, people think English is a language of educated and smart people. When you say, you are an English teacher; society looks at you differently, with respect. English is connected with good opportunities and it also helps us link our local context to the global. Interview transcription TP1.

The participant's narrative suggests that the choice to teach English in Nepal is driven by social prestige and recognition than by personal interest or pedagogical passion. In the context of Nepal, English proficiency often signifies modernity, education, and upward mobility (Phyak, 2016). Therefore, teaching English becomes both a means of achieving social values and a way of gaining respect within one's community. Similarly, the participant's characterization of Nepal as a "third-world country" reflects an awareness of postcolonial hierarchies wherein English functions as both a language of power, a marker of prestige and a connection of social advantage (Chakraborty, Sweet & Emon, 2025). English in postcolonial societies is often seen as a vehicle for global connection and socio-economic advancement (Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 2017). His perception of the English language as prestigious and full of opportunities reflects the socio-linguistic reality in which English operates as linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) that provides access to employment, education and global recognition.

English Language Teachers as Agents of Social Change and Cultural Mediation

English teachers in Nepal are viewed not only as language instructors but also as facilitators of social empowerment and cultural exchange. These teachers earn respect because they allow students to link up with national and global communities. English language teachers act as agents of social change and cultural mediators. In this context, participant TP2 argued that

I selected English language teaching as a profession because English teachers connect and boost culture, enabling worldwide communication with broad chances outside the classroom. We can push for social changes and give students power through their language skills, which lets them speak up in society and the world Interview transcription TP2.

The data shows that English language teachers extend their influence beyond linguistic instruction, functioning as cultural bridges, communicators, and advocates for social transformation. English language teachers hold a multidimensional social role that transcends classroom teaching and bridges of cultural and communication gaps, aligning with Canagarajah's (2005) idea of English as a means of intercultural negotiation, where teachers mediate between local and global contexts. Similarly, TP2 focused on the social role of ELT teachers, stating that *English teachers play a crucial role beyond the classroom by developing students' language skills, inspiring them as role models, and empowering them for educational, professional, and social opportunities* Interview transcription TP3. This participant highlighted that teachers contribute to resolving personal and societal issues, supporting social dissemination and community problem-solving. This view reflects the broader understanding of English teachers as agents of social change, social recognition and prestige (Silwal, 2025). The data reveal that English teachers are perceived as mediators of social connection, facilitating communication between local and global communities, aligning with Canagarajah's (2005) notion of English as a tool for intercultural negotiation and Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital, which provides access to education, employment, and social mobility. Both narratives stress that English teachers in Nepal are not only language teachers but also active actors of shaping social, cultural, and community growth beyond the classroom.

English Language Teaching as a Social Service

English language teaching functions as a form of social service that fosters economic advancement and facilitates global communication, particularly empowering marginalized communities in Nepal. English teachers are motivated to adopt this profession because they perceive it as a form of social service, given the language's leading role across diverse sectors such as education, medical, media, business, information and communication technology, and tourism (Panthee & Aryal, 2021). In this regard participant TP1 stated that

I was motivated to choose English language teaching when I saw one of the English subject teachers in our school back in the past, who used to talk to tourists who were asking him for ways to go to certain places, which made me feel that teaching English was a socially meaningful profession that could provide social service for international people Interview transcription TP1

The data highlights English language teaching as a socially meaningful and service-oriented profession. The belief and experience of the participant support that teaching English goes beyond classroom teaching and implies a form of social service that fosters intercultural understanding. The data reflects an awareness of English as a resource for serving others, augmenting cross-cultural communication and community engagement. This social motivation is rooted in altruistic values, viewing English teaching as a pathway to help others and represent the nation positively (Pennington & Richards, 2016). In the same way next participant TP2 stated that

I decided to choose English language teaching as a profession because teaching English provides social service for the benefit of students, communities and the nation by building their higher level confidence making them skillful, knowledgeable, and creative; promoting critical thinking, raising social awareness and well-being, through which they can drive progress and innovation and participate internationally, being educated and skilled for the sake of their countries Interview transcription TP3.

The data positions that English language teaching as a form of social service contributes to the development of students, communities, and the nation. It is viewed that teaching English as a means to empower learners, enhancing their confidence, creativity, and critical thinking skills, while fostering literacy and social awareness. English teachers are seen as promoters for social progress and innovation, preparing individuals to engage effectively in global communication and contribute to national development, as Kumaravadivelu (2012) emphasizes teachers' responsibility in shaping socially aware and critically engaged citizens. English teachers act as agents of social change who bridge local and global worlds, fostering inclusive development and intercultural dialogue. It revealed that teaching English language exceeds the boundaries of classroom instruction, positioning teachers as agents of social service.

English Language Teaching as a Social Impact and Mobility

English language teaching can provide access to better jobs, networks, and social mobility, not just for teachers themselves but for the students they teach. English operates in multifaceted functions in forming social mobility, employment conditions, and cultural exchange (Sadaf, 2025). In this regard participant TP2 said

I chose English language teaching as a profession because English teachers can empower students who succeed academically and professionally. Educated students play a vital role in community development and social mobility; they not only make plans but also implement them well Interview transcription TP3.

The data illustrates that English language teaching in Nepal fosters both personal growth and community development. It empowers students to succeed academically and professionally, enabling them to contribute to social progress and local development. This type of result aligns with the broader understanding of English language teaching as a vehicle for social mobility, providing learners with linguistic capital that enhances access to education, employment, and global communication (Block, 2012; Bourdieu, 1991). English proficiency is closely related to socioeconomic opportunity in the context of Nepal. English language teachers play a vital role in facilitating upward mobility and social inclusion in Nepal (Phyak, 2013). The study showed that when students understand how English education affects national and local growth, they are able to lead social change.

Conclusion

The selection of English language teaching as a profession reflects individuals' aspirations for social status, respect, and mobility. In the context of Nepal, this study indicates that such career choices are primarily influenced by social motivations rather than personal or economic factors. English language teachers perceive their profession as a means of attaining social recognition, value and opportunities for advancement. Teaching English language as a socially meaningful endeavour allows teachers to contribute to the growth and development of people, communities, and the nation related to global connectedness. English language teachers see themselves as activists for social change, increasing student's language competence while promoting critical thinking, creativity, confidence and judgment as citizens. In addition to promoting intercultural communication and enabling learners to access wider educational and vocational opportunities, English language teachers also promote social and economic development in marginalized communities. Moreover, English language teaching is utilized as a platform for social recognition and mobility, in order to access networks of global participation and global progress. The findings of the study underscored that English language teaching in Nepal functions as a form of social service, engagement, nation-building and global connection. Though this study was limited to explore the social motivations and the leading force that help individuals to select English language teaching as a profession with the narrative inquiry methods with three EFL secondary level teachers, the

study suggest to emphasize the social and civic responsibilities of English language teachers to prepare them to empower students, promote critical thinking, and stimulate community development in Nepal. Moreover, educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders need to acknowledge and advocate for English teaching as a site of social mobility and nation-building, ensuring teachers are resource to engage locally and globally.

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