

Pre-Service Primary School Teachers' English Language Professional Development: Teachers' Learning Motivations and Developments

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Abstract

English language teaching is one of the requirements for many Bachelor of Education programmes in Taiwanese education colleges and universities. In Taiwan, English language is considered one of the general education requirements (usually eight credits) for all undergraduate students. Although additional English language courses are not required for graduation, many universities require final-year students to achieve satisfactory grades on the TOEIC (The Test of English for International Communication) exam for graduation. The purpose of this study is to understand the motivations and reasons for the decision of a group of Bachelor of Education (Primary) students to study additional English courses beyond their curriculum. An online-based semi-structured interview tool was employed to recruit and collect data from 20 participants in the School of Education at a Taiwanese university. In line with the Social Cognitive Career and Motivation Theory, two themes were captured: 1) preparation for the TOEIC exam and 2) career promotions and opportunities. This study provides ideas for programme managers, department heads, and government departments for English language training beyond university requirements. Also, the outcomes indicate that exams played important roles in learners' motivations, particularly in English language learning.

Keywords: bachelor of education, case study, English as an additional language, English language learning, primary school teaching, social cognitive career and motivation theory, Taiwan, TOEIC

1. Introduction

Teaching is a meaningful occupation. Teachers usually require multiple skills and interdisciplinary knowledge to manage their classroom environments and provide professional teaching to their students (Weiner, 2012). Although many teachers have their own areas of expertise and specific subject matters, primary school teachers usually need to handle interdisciplinary subject matters for their young-age learners in interactive classroom environments. Unlike secondary school teachers, who work as trainers and tutors to expand the knowledge horizons of their teenage students, primary school teachers tend to help early-age students to explore their world and expand their proximal zones to new knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978, 1981). As primary school teachers want to expand the proximal zones of their students, teachers should be equipped as experts on multiple different subject matters (Cushman, 2010).

The expectations and requirements for qualified Kindergarten to 12th grade (K-12) teachers in Taiwan are high (H.-L. Lin & Gorrell, 2001). In order to gain the registration from the appropriate government department, pre-service teachers need to gain their Bachelor of Education (Primary) or Bachelor's degree in other subject matters and appropriate training in teachers' registration with an internship, such as postgraduate training, and pass the relevant exams (C.-S. Wu et al., 2020). Although universities with the coordination from the Ministry of Education could manage their curricula and course planning for their Bachelor's degree programmes, some colleges and universities require their undergraduate students to complete at least eight credits in English language courses in order to graduate with their Bachelor's degree (Chen, 2020).

Unlike secondary school teachers, who usually teach one subject, primary school teachers usually need to teach more than one subject (Vrikki et al., 2019). In other words, primary school teachers need to understand additional subject matters beyond their area of expertise. Furthermore, primary school teachers need to handle and arrange different school activities, such as administrative responsibilities, afterschool clubs, monthly parents' days, etc.. The

responsibilities of primary school teachers are heavy, regardless of location, school, class-size, and background (Arnup & Bowles, 2016; Vrikki et al., 2019).

Due to globalisation and international development, many foreign professionals have decided to come to Taiwan for career promotion (M. Wu et al., 2022). As a result, some foreigners with children may send their children to local primary schools for education. Therefore, primary school teachers, such as homeroom teachers and administrators, need to use English or other foreign languages to communicate with foreign parents (W. Lin & Lee, 2018). Without effective language skills, teachers cannot share their students' experiences and achievements with foreign parents. Also, in-service K-12 teachers need to complete a certain number of Continual Professional Development hours in order to renew their license and registration (Tuan & Lu, 2019). Although relevant departments and school leaders may arrange some workshops for in-service teachers, English language development and communicative skills in foreign languages are not only desirable but essential for teachers who want to receive promotion during their mid-career pathway. As a result, English language development may become a popular tool for mid-level teachers' professional development (Chen, 2020).

1.1 Purpose of the Study

Once pre-service teachers in the Bachelor of Education (Primary) programme complete their minimum requirements in English language and literature, no additional foreign language requirements are needed (Chen, 2020). However, some pre-service teachers continue to learn and enhance their English language skills and proficiencies for different purposes (i.e. beyond their demanding curriculum and timetable). The purpose of this study is to understand the motivations and reasons for the decision of a group of Bachelor of Education (Primary) students to study additional English courses beyond their curriculum. In line with the social cognitive career and motivation theory, the current study was guided by one research question:

- 1) What are the motivations and reasons for the decision of Bachelor of Education (Primary) students to study additional English language courses and training beyond their curriculum in a Taiwanese university?

2. Theoretical Framework and Relevant Literature

2.1 Social Cognitive Career and Motivation Theory

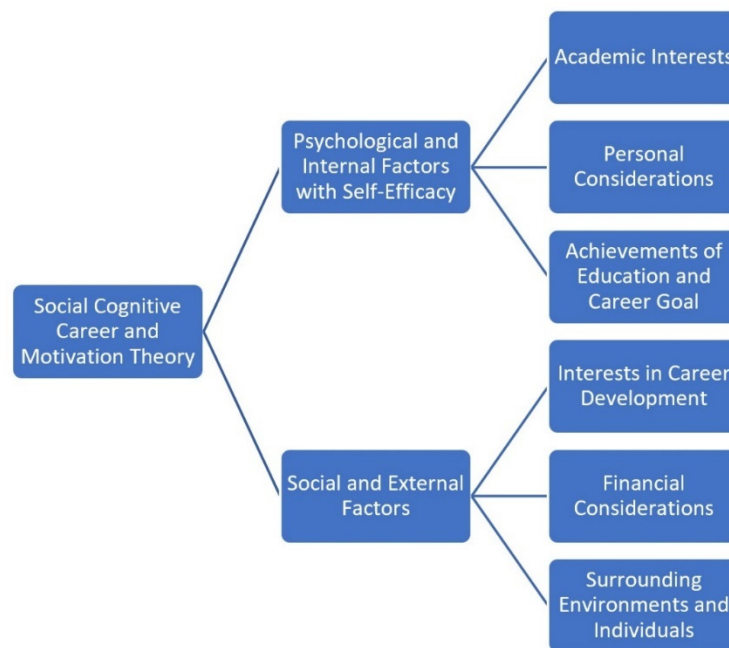


Figure 1. Social Cognitive Career and Motivation Theory (Dos Santos, 2021a, 2021b, 2022; Kwee, 2021)

The social cognitive career and motivation theory (Dos Santos, 2021a, 2021b, 2022; Kwee, 2021) was employed to investigate the current research and the research question. The social cognitive career and motivation theory was developed based on the social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994; Lent & Brown, 1996) and the self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1988). The social cognitive career and motivation theory argues that individuals' motivations are influenced based on internal and external factors. Decision-making motivation is a complex process in which individuals may need to observe, listen, and follow different peers, models, and partners for their behaviours and developments (Bandura, 2008). As a result, the social cognitive career and motivation theory categorises two directions and six sub-directions. The psychological and internal factors with self-efficacy refer to the internal motivations and reasons that can impact and influence the career decisions, motivations, and decision-making processes of individuals. Three sub-directions have been categorised, including academic interests, personal considerations, and achievements of education and career goal. The social and external factors refer to the impacts of external sources and social context. Three sub-directions have been categorised, including interests in career development, financial considerations, and surrounding environments and individuals. Figure 1 outlines the social cognitive career and motivation theory (Dos Santos, 2021a, 2021b, 2022; Kwee, 2021).

2.2 Collectivism and Group Behaviours

Collectivism (Han, 2017; Triandis, 2001) refers to strong relationships between individuals and groups. Such relationships can be built up based on their family, tribe, nation, nationality, etc. Individuals need to satisfy the needs and desires of their communities. In other words, the interests of groups and communities overweigh personal interests and desires. Therefore, people in collectivist communities usually care about the relationship between other people and groupmates due to in-group expectations (Triandis, 2001).

Collectivism is not uncommon in the East Asian region. A recent study (C. Wu et al., 2021) indicated that individuals and in-groupmates tended to follow the trends of other groupmates in order to demonstrate relationships and avoid arguments stemming from their uniqueness. Some scholars (Mok et al., 2021) have also indicated that in-groupmates and individuals usually adopt their family members' goals and expectations as their own in order to meet the social expectations of their teams and groups. Although some decisions, goals, and behaviours may not meet the needs and wants of individuals, people still need to exercise the expected activities in order to demonstrate the relationships with and meet the expectations of their groups and groupmates (Hong et al., 2018).

2.3 English Language Learning in Taiwan

In Taiwan, pre-service teachers need to take the nationwide exam in order to gain their license and registration from the Ministry of Education. Although English language tests and exams are not required for the governmental exam, potential employers and school leaders may ask potential employees for their English language exam scores as part of the initial requirements (C.S. Wu et al., 2020). Besides the requirements of potential schools and employers, many colleges and universities require all undergraduate students to take the TOEIC (The Test of English for International Communication), TOEFL (Test of English as Foreign Language), IELTS (The International English Language Testing System) or equivalent exam in order to graduate (Lee, 2018). Unless an undergraduate degree is listed as one of the English medium programmes, the instructional language of the programme should be Chinese. In addition, most secondary schools offer their curriculum and instruction in Chinese Mandarin as the main medium language, with English as a foreign language course (i.e. as one of the subject matter courses). As local Taiwanese students only enjoy a few hours of English language courses and learning in the school classroom environment, their English language proficiency may not meet university graduation requirements (Lee, 2018).

2.4 Teachers' Professional Development

Teachers need to attend conferences, training, and meetings for their professional development in order to renew their license and registration (Tuan & Lu, 2019). In some countries, besides non-credit professional development hours, postgraduate credits and postgraduate degree programmes are also required in order to attain teaching licenses. In addition, school principals and department leaders may further require special degrees, coursework, and internships to attain their license. In the case of Taiwan, although not all pre-service teachers partake in long-term career development and schemes for principalship during their undergraduate voyage, common and compulsory training are still greatly needed for their license, registration, and employment after university. In this case, English language proficiency is one of the most important requirements and considerations (Lee, 2018), as many school principals and employers expect teachers to have advanced-level English language proficiency (Chen, 2020).

3. Methodology

The case study approach (Yin, 2012) was used to investigate the problem of this study. The case study is selected as the means because the researcher wants to understand the problem in a particular university, academic programme, and background of a group of individuals. Although many Taiwanese university students and Bachelor of Education (Primary) students may face a similar problem, such as language difficulties, the case study approach and investigation from a university could reflect the overall situation in Taiwan.

3.1 Recruitment and Participants

A total of 20 Bachelor of Education (Primary) students at a Taiwanese university were invited based on the purposive strategy. The purposive strategy allowed the researchers to collect qualitative data from a targeted site, in this case, a School of Education at a Taiwanese university. The researcher contacted the School of Education department head for the potential study. The department head allowed and forwarded the protocol, consent forms, and invitation statement to their Bachelor of Education (Primary) students for participation. As a result, a total of 20 participants decided to join and share their ideas and stories.

3.2 Data Collection

In order to collect useful information from the participant, one online-based semi-structured interview, focus group (Morgan, 1998), and member checking interview (Merriam, 2009) were employed to recruit and collect data from 20 participants in the School of Education at a Taiwanese university. First, the researcher invited each participant for an individual, private, semi-structured, and online interview session. Participants shared their stories based on the protocol. The interview sessions lasted from 45 to 66 minutes.

After all participants finished sharing their stories from the interview session, the researcher invited the participants to the focus groups. As there were 20 participants in the study, two focus groups were formed (i.e. each for ten participants). Each focus group lasted from 99 to 123 minutes. After the interview sessions and the focus group, the researcher invited the participants for the member checking interviews. For the member checking interview, the researcher sent stories to the participants and to confirm their stories. Last but not least, the participants agreed on their stories and allowed for the report. Although the participants were allowed to withdraw from the study, no participants withdrew from the study. Please note, during the data collection procedure, the researcher used a digital recorder to record the voiced messages from the participants. No visual data was collected. The participants allowed the arrangement.

3.3 Data Analysis

The two-step data analysis procedure was used (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). First, the researcher grouped all the stories and sharing to written transcripts. The researcher re-read the qualitative data multiple times for potential categories. The open-coding was used to study the qualitative data. From this stage, 21 themes and 20 subthemes were yielded. Second, the axial-coding was used to study the abovementioned themes and subthemes. As a result, three themes and two subthemes were merged.

3.4 Human Subject Protection

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and the protocol was supported by Woosong University Academic Research Funding Department. All the human subjects were informed of their rights and consents before the data collection procedure. The current study was supported by Wosoong University Academic Research Funding 2022.

4. Results and Discussions

Table 1 outlines the findings of this study. Based on the qualitative data from a group of 20 Bachelor of Education (Primary) students at a Taiwanese university, rich and meaningful themes and subthemes were yielded. Education is one of the vocational-based degree programmes which requires internships and is packed with coursework, so Bachelor of Education (Primary) cohorts are some of the busiest student communities in the university. In this case, the students expressed that there were no free electives for any additional English language courses. All students took English courses beyond their graduation credit-hour requirements. Therefore, the results of this study outlined the motivations and reasons for the desire of this group of students to increase the pressure on their schedules and learning capacities to take English language courses.

Table 1. Themes and Subthemes

Themes and Subthemes	
4.1.	Preparation for the English Language Exams
4.1.1.	Peer Pressure
4.2.	Career Promotions and Opportunities: Good School Networks
4.2.1.	Expectations of International Parents
4.3.	Financial Considerations

4.1 Preparation for the English Language Exams

...my department actually needs us to have at least 600+ for the TOEIC exam in order to graduate...it is very hard actually because we are not native English speakers...I did not attend an English secondary school in my teenage...I need to pay special attention...otherwise, I may fail my TOEIC exam requirement...(Participant #15)

English language proficiency is one of the graduation requirements in many Taiwanese colleges and universities (Lee, 2018). Although not all students study English language and literature in their university academic programme, English language proficiency and relevant exam scores are required for their graduation (Sims & Chen, 2019). Therefore, many undergraduate students need to join different training courses to upgrade their English language proficiency and exam skills for English language exams, as one participant said:

...it can be hard for Bachelor of Education students...we completed our coursework requirement and internship in Chinese Mandarin...but we need to have the TOEIC exam grades for university graduation...but I think it is important for Taiwanese students...to have good English skills...but I need to do something to improve my English... (Participant #12)

In line with the social cognitive career and motivation theory (Dos Santos, 2021a, 2021b, 2022; Kwee, 2021), university exam requirements played a significant role in the participants' decisions and decision-making processes. Although the participants had no interests in English language development and English language teaching, the university requirement drove their learning motivation (Lee, 2018). This is uncommon in many educational fields, as students usually select their courses and modules based on their interests (Brown & Lent, 2017; Kwee, 2021). However, in some exam-driven countries and regions, students and learners may need to satisfy social expectations as well as the requirements of universities and potential employers (Brown & Lent, 2019), particularly the general public members and employers significantly expect advanced English language levels. It is worth noting that the motivations and reasons for English language learning are geared toward exams, particularly the TOEIC exam required for university graduation (Lee, 2018). Although a few students expressed their willingness to upgrade their English skills for personal purposes, all participants believed the TOEIC exam and university graduation requirements played the most important role in their motivations, reasons, and decision-making processes.

4.1.1 Peer Pressure

It is important to note that peer pressure played a significant role in the participants' motivations and decision-making processes. Like in many East Asian countries and regions, people in Taiwan follow collectivism in their social expectations of daily practices and activities (Han, 2017). In this case, many believe that other people's and in-groupmates' expectations should be met in order to build up relationships with others. In this case, many participants expressed that they needed to study the same series of courses and programmes in order to demonstrate the harmony between the group and society, as one participant said:

...I decided to join the school TOEIC and English courses...because we need to have the passing grade for graduation...our classmates also joined the English courses...because we all need to have the grade...unless some students have prior background in English education or so...otherwise, all Bachelor of Education students need it...(Participant #1)

In line with the collectivist approach (Han, 2017; Triandis, 2001), although many expressed that they did not want to learn English, they needed to follow the trends and goals of their families, in-groupmates, and other people in the community in order to demonstrate harmony. In collectivist societies, such as Taiwan, individuals should not go against the social expectations and behaviours of the society, in this case, English learning behaviours and upgrading their English with additional courses (Lee, 2018). Although some previous studies argued that individuals usually select their own courses based on personal interests and career development, the current findings showed that individuals tended to desire to meet social expectations and in-groupmates' goals as the main motivations in their

decision-making processes.

4.2 Career Promotions and Opportunities: Expectations of Schools

...although I do not work in any English companies or so...many schools may ask me to provide an English exam or English level certificates...I completed my internship recently...my supervisor told me that if I do not have good English skills...it can be very hard to find a good teaching position in the city...many school leaders want to see recent graduates with good English skills...(Participant #3)

All participants expressed that although English language exams are not required for their teacher's license and registration (C.-S. Wu et al., 2020), only a few top-tier primary schools (both public and private) would hire teachers and school staff with low English language exam scores due to the high expectations of school leaders. Due to urbanisation over the past few decades, a large number of residents from regional communities have come to the cities for career and financial development. Therefore, in line with the collectivist approach (Han, 2017; Mok et al., 2021; Triandis, 2001), large-size companies and other potential employers with career vacancies in urban metropolitan areas have their own expectations due to social trends, social expectations, and goals for in-group communities when their human resources departments select candidates (Cuervo & Acquaro, 2018). Two stories were captured:

...I don't want to go to the regional areas for my career...if I want to stay in the metropolitans [The Taipei City and New Taipei City]...I have to have good English skills...many schools and principals do expect a good English speaking teacher for their children...although I may not need to teach English in my classrooms...principals do expect a lot...there are just too many candidates...(Participant #5)

...it is not uncommon...because the schools in the Taipei city...want to have teachers with good English proficiency...we do not need to speak English for our internship...but the school leadership expected us...this is the Taiwanese tradition...we need to have good English skills for jobs in the urban cities...(Participant #11)

In short, in line with the social cognitive career and motivation theory (Dos Santos, 2021a, 2021b, 2022; Kwee, 2021), career promotion and opportunities played a significant role in the motivation, reasons, and decision-making processes for this group of participants. Like in many countries and regions in East Asia, urbanisation has encouraged residents from the countryside and rural communities to move to metropolitan areas (Maher & Prescott, 2017; Yu & Lee, 2015). Although university and internship experiences influence potential employment, excellent and advanced English language proficiency is still one of the most important factors in gaining career advantages (Bekteshi & Khaferi, 2020; Dos Santos, 2018; Sims & Chen, 2019).

4.2.1 Expectations of International Parents

In addition to the expectations of school leaders, many participants expressed their concerns about parents' expectations (Dos Santos, 2019). Taiwan is an attractive destination for international expats and professionals for career and personal development, particularly for experts in the field of information technology. Besides the social expectations and goals regarding English language proficiency, many schools and potential employers further expect their teachers, workers, and staff to have advanced level English language proficiency and communication skills (Ke, 2010). The researcher captured the following two stories:

...many city schools and schools in the good locations...required their teachers to teach English in the classroom...or at least...we can listen and answer English questions from parents and students...nowadays, many parents can speak good English...parents do expect...their children's teachers can speak good English too...(Participant #7)

...I recently completed my internship...during the internship...we joined the parents' day activity...some parents do not speak Chinese actually...not all teachers in our school can speak English...my principal asked me to speak to the parents...and the parents do expect a lot from us...also from their children...it is a good time to take this role as the English speaking teacher...I want to be the bridge between school and parents...(Participant #9)

In line with the social cognitive career and motivation theory (Dos Santos, 2021a, 2021b, 2022; Kwee, 2021), the surrounding environment, particularly social expectations of advanced English proficiency, played a significant role in this case. All participants said that junior-level teachers are fully expected to have advanced English speaking skills and to be able to communicate with international parents. Although hiring advertisements do not indicate any requirements for bilingual proficiency, candidates who cannot handle English or cannot provide requested English language exam scores will be rejected by human resources departments (Tong et al., 2021).

In line with the collectivist approach (Han, 2017; Triandis, 2001), as many in-service teachers and school staff need to complete a series of professional development schemes and hours for their registration, many decided to take English language courses as one of their options. As many in-service professionals continue to build up their backgrounds and skills, junior-level teachers and pre-service teachers are also expected to do this as it is the norm in the teaching profession (C.-S. Wu et al., 2020). More importantly, many university graduates are well-prepared for bilingual education and communication between students and parents. Pre-service teachers might experience pressure from their peers and supervisors regarding language development. Therefore, as the participants wanted to meet social expectations (i.e., to achieve advanced English proficiency), they continued to upgrade their English language skills regardless of their career decision and decision-making processes (Lee, 2018).

4.3 Financial Considerations

Financial cost also played a significant role in the participants' motivations, reasons, and decision-making processes. Currently, many afterschool programmes, courses, and schools are available to fill the gaps in the education and learning industry. In fact, the Taiwanese government and Taiwanese organisations require different types of registrations and licenses for many professions and positions (C.-S. Wu et al., 2020). Therefore, private learning academies and afterschool centres provide training to learners with different purposes. Although many schools offer English language courses, the tuition fees for these English language courses are not cheap. As the university-run courses are included in the semester-based tuition fees, many participants decided to take the English language courses offered by the university language centre (Lee, 2018). Two stories were captured about concerns regarding tuition fees:

...there are many TOEIC exam preparation courses in different schools in the city...but they are very expensive...if the university offers these courses...they are covered by our tuition fee...why don't we take it at the university...(Participant #14)

...I do not have enough money for the TOEIC preparation courses outside...the University has free courses...it can be filled very soon...because it costs nothing...so I want to take these courses for my exam...(Participant #18)

Several participants expressed that they were willing to pay for one or two self-funded courses. However, English language exams usually assess reading, listening, speaking, and writing (i.e. four papers). Therefore, the participants indicated that they could not afford the full series of courses. Besides English language courses, many participants also needed to take other exams, such as mathematics, for different purposes. Therefore, financial considerations were one of their biggest concerns. One story was captured:

...the TOEIC courses...I think I need to take at least three series for the passing score...but I cannot afford the costs...so I want to take some English courses at school...so I can have a better preparation with a reasonable price...many of the costs are covered by the university tuition fees...we should take these courses to upgrade our English...because these English courses can meet some requirements at school...(Participant #4)

In line with the social cognitive career and motivation theory (Dos Santos, 2021a, 2021b, 2022; Kwee, 2021), financial considerations played an important role in the motivations, reasons, and decision-making processes of the participants. Although many said that they wanted to study at private academies, the expensive tuition fees limited their options. Therefore, they chose university-run English language courses (Huang et al., 2021).

5. Limitations and Future Research Developments

First, the current study only captured the qualitative data from a group of Bachelor of Education (Primary) students at a Taiwanese university. However, many undergraduate students may also take additional English language courses for personal and academic development. Therefore, future research studies may capture the voices and stories of undergraduate students from other academic programmes and departments for further development.

Second, although English is one of the famous foreign language options, other foreign languages, such as Japanese, Korean, and Spanish, have become some of the foreign language options for many undergraduate students. Therefore, future research studies may investigate students taking other foreign languages for their personal and academic development.

Third, although Taiwan played as the means in this study, other countries and regions, such as Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and China, also face similar problems, particularly in East Asia. Therefore, future research studies may capture and collect data and stories from other countries and regions for a comprehensive study.

6. Contributions to the Practice and Conclusion

English language scores and exams have become the graduation requirement of Taiwanese university students. However, due to the educational background and K-12 language curriculum, most Taiwanese secondary school graduates and university students face challenges with English language exams, such as TOEIC. University leaders and administrators may use this study as a reference to provide additional English language courses and training to students who want to upgrade their language backgrounds and exam-taking skills.

Although the Bachelor of Education (Primary) programme does not require English language exams and training for the graduation requirement, potential employers, school principals, and leaders expect advanced-level English language proficiency for both pre-service and in-service teachers. Therefore, school leaders should use this study as a reference to reform and upgrade the current curriculum for their learners' English language backgrounds.

Due to globalisation, many international families decided to come to Taiwan for personal and career development. Taiwanese professionals should be equipped with advanced-level English language proficiency. School of Education leaders and administrators may encourage their undergraduate and postgraduate students to take additional English language courses for potential promotions and in-school services.

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