

What Demotivates In-Service University EFL Teachers? -- Evidence From Mainland China

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Abstract: This study investigates Chinese English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' demotivation at the university level with a particular focus on exploring demotivating factors. The research focuses on 120 Chinese English teachers working in universities in mainland China, adopting a mixed-methodology framework. The survey instrument is designed as a questionnaire combining closed-ended and open-ended questions, aiming to deeply explore and collect qualitative data on the reasons for the lack of professional motivation among English teachers. Subsequently, frequency analysis, mean calculation, and a series of statistical tests, such as the Wilcoxon signed-rank test and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), are employed to conduct an in-depth analysis and interpretation of the questionnaire data. The results show that there were significant differences in the participants' perceptions of their enthusiasm, interest, and dedication regarding teaching between the first years of teaching and the present. Factor analysis reveals that the teachers are multi-demotivated: student-related factors, research conditions and academic requirements, working conditions, opportunities for career development, as well as societal recognition are major demotivating factors. According to feedback from participants, poor working conditions, including rigid systems for teacher performance evaluation, students' negative attitudes towards English learning and misconduct in class, coupled with low salaries, are considered to be the key factors leading to the general decline in teacher morale.

Keywords: University, EFL Teachers, Demotivation, Demotivating Factors

1. INTRODUCTION

Motivation is crucial in second language teaching, and scholars such as Gardner have conducted extensive research on this topic. However, most of these studies have focused on learner motivation, while research on teacher motivation is relatively scarce (Dornyei & Kubanyiova, 2014).

Especially in ESL/EFL environments, research on L2 teacher motivation is particularly lacking (Aydin, 2012). It is the L2 or foreign language learners' demotivation that has dominated second language acquisition (SLA) motivation studies in recent years (Gao et al., 2022; Xie et al., 2021). The motivation of English teachers in Asian countries such as China and Japan is declining (Lu, 2004). Lu pointed out that the motivation of college English teachers in China is worrying: 80% of them are dissatisfied with their work (Lu, 2004), and 50% of them said they would not choose to teach English again if given the opportunity. The demotivation of EFL teachers will likely have a negative effect on their mental health, as well as on their students, whose learning motivation is believed to be closely related to that of their teachers (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). Teaching, as is well known, is a profession that induces stress (Bradley, 2010). Worse still, the shortage of EFL teachers has remained a serious issue worldwide and also in the Chinese context (Gao & Xu, 2014; Lee & Yuan, 2014; Swanson & Mason, 2018; Yuan & Zhang, 2017). This is detrimental to English language education in mainland China, where English education plays a crucial role and enjoys high status (Liu, 2022). All in all, previous studies point to a need to understand the demotivation of native Chinese EFL teachers, as the flip side of motivation (Dörnyei, 2014) and a crucial factor in SLA. However, Chinese EFL teachers' demotivation has not received adequate attention to date. The key research on English teacher motivation is mostly conducted in European countries and other Asian countries, rather than in mainland China. For example, many studies by Doyle & Kim et al. (1999-2022) are not based on mainland China (Doyle & Kim, 1999). This study delves into the factors that contribute to the lack of motivation among Chinese university English teachers, and investigates their motivational deficiencies during the university education stage. This is a first step to pinpoint the worries and problems EFL teachers at Chinese universities have, and to initiate a discussion on how teacher demotivation could be decreased and teacher morale increased. It is hoped that the proposed study can enrich relevant studies in EFL teacher education, in particular, in the Chinese context. In addition, the results of the current study are expected to benefit both state and university administrators, in raising their awareness of decreasing teacher motivation so that measures can be implemented to reverse the trend. By gaining insight into the root causes of their diminished motivation, teachers can strengthen their sense of responsibility and commitment to education, thereby enhancing their professional well-being. This paper summarizes the literature on teacher motivation, covering the overall elaboration as well as the extensive and

specific research on English teacher motivation. The methods adopted in the current study, together with the study's analyses and results, are accounted for in subsequent sections. The paper concludes with a discussion of limitations and implications of the study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview of Teacher Demotivation

The definition of demotivation is not unified, and Dörnyei views it as an external factor that weakens motivation (Dörnyei, 2014). Demotivation occurs not because all positive factors have disappeared, but because a negative force inhibits the current motivation. Kızıltepe, on the other hand, argues that teachers experience demotivation due to environmental factors (Kızıltepe, 2008), resulting in a loss of interest and commitment to teaching, and a complete lack of motivation. The two perspectives diverge in their understanding of teacher demotivation. According to Aydın, “the term teacher demotivation refers to the lack of effort, need, and desire in teaching process (Aydın, 2012). [sic]” All in all, no matter how researchers define demotivation, it shows a decrease or a drop in motivation. The causes of demotivation are diverse. Dörnyei emphasizes external factors while neglecting internal influences. Scholars such as Arai and Sakai refute this view, pointing out that internal factors like insufficient ability are also crucial contributors to demotivation. As the source of motivation remains unclear, research is focusing on multiple factors to delve into the roots of demotivation. In this study, teacher demotivation is manifested through a reduction in teaching enthusiasm and commitment, accompanied by less input, yet it is important to note that some positive motivations remain latent and can potentially be activated.

2.2 Studies on Teacher Demotivation in General

Although in recent years teacher motivation has been given some attention in educational research (see, e.g., (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021); There is a limited amount of literature on teacher demotivation research, including studies by Mercer & Kostulas and Ryan & Deci (Mercer & Kostoulas, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Bennell analyzed the needs of teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, pointing out that low morale and job satisfaction contribute to demotivation (Bennell, 2004). Kızıltepe discovered a general decline in teacher morale and demotivation at Istanbul University in Turkey (Kızıltepe, 2008), attributing it to five factors:

students, economics, structural environment, research, and working conditions. This provides a new perspective for understanding the sources of teacher demotivation. Addison and Brundrett's study on six primary school teachers in England suggests that children and workload factors are detrimental to teacher motivation (Addison & Brundrett, 2008). Mooij conducted a thorough analysis of the demotivation factors among teachers in Indian public schools. He discovered that several key factors contribute to and determine teachers' demotivation, including the increased burden of non-teaching tasks, difficulties in communicating with superiors, unfavorable student-to-teacher ratios, and a lack of community support. Khadka explored the perception of Nepali private schools' teachers and found that teachers were demotivated by the reward management operated by their school (Khadka, 2021).

2.3 Studies on L2 English Teacher Demotivation

Research on the demotivation of teachers of English as a second language (L2) predominantly revolves around pinpointing the underlying factors that contribute to such demotivation. Doyle and Kim conducted a study examining the motivation of ESL/EFL teachers, with a focus on demotivation (Doyle & Kim, 1999). They offered a list of factors that demotivate teachers who teach ESL at a community college in the United States and EFL at Korean universities, high schools and elementary schools. There are various reasons for low teacher morale, including inadequate government support, lack of promotion opportunities, unstable employment, heavy workload, suppressed innovation, and ineffective education systems. Johnson pointed out that English teachers in Mexico lacked motivation due to low salaries, a lack of teaching materials, heavy workloads, and rigid curricula (Johnson, 2000). Tziava found that low salaries were responsible for low morale among Greek teachers (Tziava, 2003). Scholars from many Asian countries, such as Japan, Turkey, and Iran, have also paid attention to and conducted research on this issue (Aydin, 2012; Öztürk, 2015; Sugino, 2010; Taqi et al., 2017; Yaghoubinejad et al., 2017). According to Sugino, factors like students sleeping in class and forgetting to complete homework were prominent demotivators for 16 Japanese language teachers (Sugino, 2010). Student-related factors were also discovered by Mifsud as demotivating factors in Malta. Aydin's case study on English language teaching in Turkish primary schools identified six key factors that affect the motivation of English teachers (Aydin, 2012): professional identity, curriculum design, working environment, attitudes of students and parents, support from colleagues and management, and

teachers' health. Taqi et al. found that student-related factors, working conditions, teaching facilities and recognition from the superiors were demotivating factors reported by EFL teachers in a Kuwaiti college (Taqi et al., 2017). The study conducted by Yaghoubinejad et al. on Iranian junior high school English teachers revealed that the primary demotivating factors were a shortage of social recognition and respect, inadequate rewards, insufficient support, and a substantial class size within a single English class session (Yaghoubinejad et al., 2017). Khanal et al.'s study on Nepalese secondary school EFL teachers suggests that teachers were demotivated by extrinsic factors, such as low payments, lack of continuing professional development, and students' disruptive behaviors (Khanal et al., 2021). Similar findings were reported in Tran and Moskovsky's study on Vietnamese university EFL teachers' demotivation, in particular that EFL teachers' demotivation was related to student-related factors (Tran & Moskovsky, 2022). Kim and Kim's study on Korean EFL teachers' demotivation indicates that students' negative attitudes towards English learning, a lack of teaching autonomy, and too many administrative tasks as well as a lack of recognition were reported to be demotivating (Kim & Kim, 2022). In addition, a recent study by Sato et al. shows that school-level EFL teachers in Chile were strongly demotivated by education policies for the subject of English in their country as well as the policy-making processes (Sato et al., 2022). In the Chinese context, despite the existence of research conducted in various other settings, the issue of demotivation among L2 university EFL teachers is still relatively unexplored and novel. Using the keywords "teacher demotivation", "EFL teacher demotivation" and "teaching demotivation", only a limited number of research papers that targeted EFL teachers at the university level can be retrieved within the time span of 2013–2021 from the search engine of the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database. Sino-Japanese comparative study pointed out that student-related and teaching research factors are the main demotivators of Chinese and Japanese EFL teachers. Socio-culturally, Chinese teachers are greatly demotivated by the lack of knowledge of the target language culture, while Japanese teachers are troubled by poor internal communication, which also serves as a demotivator. Sino-British comparison found that, among the four common demotivators—student-related, teaching environment, administrative support, and research conditions—student-related factors are the decisive demotivator for both Chinese and British EFL teachers. However, significant differences in demotivation exist between the two

groups of teachers. For Chinese EFL teachers, the most prominent demotivator is the lack of social recognition, which reflects China's values of respecting teachers and valuing education. In Chinese culture, teachers' self-esteem heavily relies on social recognition, and negative feedback can easily lead to demotivation. Numerous in-depth and meticulous studies have been dedicated to exploring the complexity of teacher motivation factors within China's diverse educational environments. Groundbreaking empirical research, in particular, zeroed in on the community of college English teachers in China's ethnic minority regions. Through exhaustive data analysis and interviews, it unveiled the primary challenges and sources of motivation faced by these teachers in their teaching endeavors. The study found that student-related factors, specific working conditions, and managerial support and guidance collectively constitute significant influences on these teachers' work enthusiasm and professional satisfaction. Concurrently, another large-scale survey shifted its focus to English teachers at four top-tier provincial universities in China. Through an intensive investigation of 192 respondents, the research unveiled a more comprehensive framework of motivation factors. Beyond student-related factors, widespread societal recognition of the teaching profession, effective administrative support, and favorable working environments and conditions were all identified as crucial elements that stimulate the work motivation of English teachers.

Notably, the survey results highlighted how students' negative attitudes towards English learning emerged as a significant barrier to teachers' enthusiasm, offering a fresh perspective and direction for enhancing the quality of English language instruction. Encouragingly, the aforementioned research conclusions regarding teacher motivation factors are not isolated findings. In a subsequent independent study of 65 English teachers at a Chinese university of science and technology, Zhou not only validated many of the key factors proposed in previous research but also further demonstrated their universality and applicability across different types of educational settings. In summary, previous studies lay a solid foundation for the current study on the dominant factors that lead to EFL teacher demotivation and shed light on research on L2 teacher motivation. However, these studies were limited in their comprehensiveness; in particular, very few studies targeted native Chinese EFL teachers at the university level across mainland China. Developed from Liu's study on native Chinese EFL teacher motivation and demotivation (Liu, 2022), the current study intends to bridge this gap by giving a more comprehensive picture of EFL teachers' demotivation in the Chinese context. It first

identifies negative motives and then makes suggestions that might improve teacher motivation. The research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

- (1) What are the factors contributing to the demotivation of university EFL teachers in the Chinese context?
- (2) What are the primary causes for the demotivation perceived by university EFL teachers in China?

3. METHODS

3.1 Participants

Altogether 120 in-service EFL teachers from universities across mainland China participated in the study on a voluntary basis. Figure 1 visually demonstrates the extensive and diverse geographical distribution of participants. The Northwest region of China leads the way with a significant proportion of 28%, showcasing its active participation and high regard for this event. Following closely are the Southwest and Central-South regions, each contributing approximately one-fifth of the participants, collectively forming an essential part of the event. Although the Northern and Eastern regions account for a combined 10% of participants, their presence is still noteworthy, illustrating the nationwide enthusiasm for educational exchanges and discussions. Particularly noteworthy is the active participation of 20 individuals from the Northeast region, further underscoring the event's comprehensive geographical coverage. Shifting focus to the data analysis presented in Table 1, a striking phenomenon emerges: female teachers dominate the participant pool, accounting for an impressive 80.83% of the total. This figure not only acknowledges the tireless efforts of female educators but also profoundly reflects the current situation of a higher proportion of female teachers in China's university foreign language teaching force, embodying positive advancements in gender equality within the educational sphere. Regarding teaching experience, Table 1 paints a vibrant picture of diversity. Participants span a wide range of experience, from novice teachers just embarking on their careers to seasoned experts with 37 years of teaching. Each stage glows with wisdom and enthusiasm. Notably, the majority of teachers (68.33%) find themselves in the prime of their careers, armed with 5 to 20 years of rich teaching experience. They serve as both stewards of disciplinary knowledge and catalysts for educational innovation. Insert Figure 1 here.

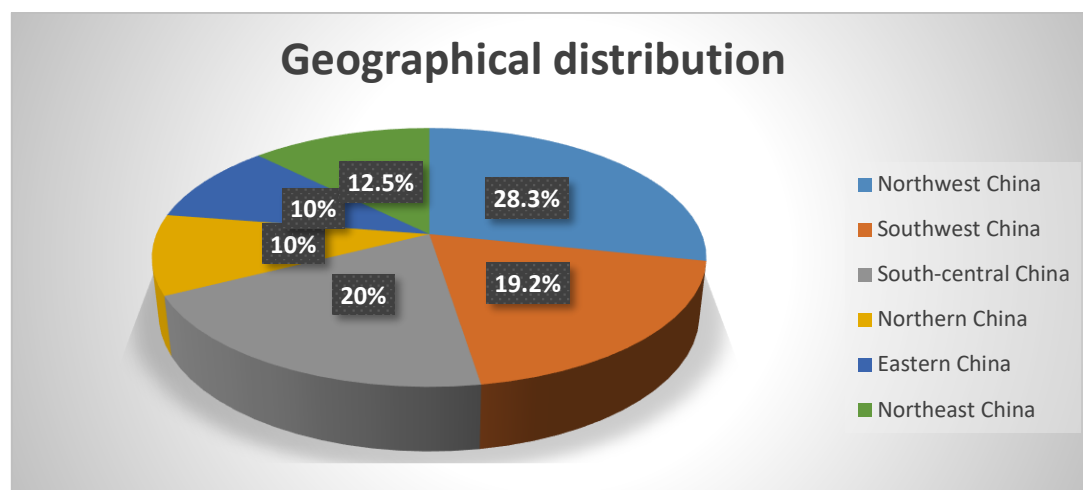


Figure 1: Distribution of the participants

Table 1: Demographic information on study participants (N=120)

Category	Items	Percentage	Category	Items	Percentage
Gender	Male	19.17%	Length of teaching	4 years or less	13.33%
	Female	80.83%		5-20 years old	68.33%
Age	20-30 yrs	14.16%		21+ years	18.33%
	31-40 yrs	52.50%			
	41-50 yrs	24.17%			

3.2 Instrument

The study mainly adopted a quantitative method using an online questionnaire with items focusing on potential demotivating factors. The questionnaire structure adopted in this study originates from the design of Liu (Liu, 2022), whose overall framework is divided into four main sections, beginning with basic demographic information such as gender, age, place of employment, and years of English teaching experience as the entry point. The following three parts were made up of closed and open-ended questions. Participants are required to report changes in their feelings as English teachers at the beginning of their careers and at the current stage, and to evaluate their personality traits using a six-point scale, with positive and negative vocabularies corresponding to each other, in order to analyse whether teachers' attitudes have changed over time. Thus, the responses can discern whether demotivation has occurred or not, which is the basic scene setting for the investigation of demotivating factors. The core focus of the survey is on the demotivating factors faced by Chinese native English teachers. The questionnaire draws on and improves upon multiple studies to reveal the common demotivating factors, such as student behavior, work environment, teaching challenges, economic pressure, and more. This study meticulously selects 19 key items

from Liu's research, guided by the phrase 'My demotivation is caused by...', and assesses participants' level of agreement through a six-point Likert scale (Liu, 2022). The fourth part consisted of one open-ended question on the major causes that led to EFL teachers' demotivation, which aimed to provide answers to the second research question.

3.3 Pilot Study, Data Collection and Analysis

Before distributing the questionnaire, the author conducted a pilot study to verify its validity. The content was reviewed to remove ambiguity and ensure clarity, and the layout was optimized to improve readability. Ten local English teachers working in Chinese universities were invited to try answering the questionnaire and provide feedback, which was crucial for refining the questionnaire design. Afterwards, the questionnaire was administrated. The study employed snowball sampling to identify six contacts for expanding the target group. Data were collected via an online platform, and questionnaires were emailed to these six individuals. English teachers were required to forward the questionnaire and complete it themselves. The data were then imported into SPSS for processing, where manual checks were performed to identify missing or abnormal data, as well as potential errors in data entry. Teachers' demotivation factors were quantified, and descriptive statistics were used to calculate the mean and standard deviation. Factor analysis was employed to explore the underlying structure of the questionnaire items related to demotivation, validating its effectiveness and setting a threshold of 0.5 for factor loadings. The author first conducted a qualitative content analysis (based on the method of Miles & Huberman, (Miles, 1994) on the data collected from open-ended questions to identify and extract the themes and patterns of feedback from teachers regarding their motivations and reasons. Seven codes for teaching demotivation were created based on previous studies. In the meticulous process of data organization, the author identified and extracted key excerpts, subsequently assigning a unique code to each excerpt. This step was repeatedly reviewed to ensure the accuracy of the data and the consistency of the codes. For complex concepts encountered during the coding process that were difficult to directly categorize, the author adopted a strategy of special annotation to highlight their uniqueness and importance. When encountering entirely new themes, the author created new codes to more comprehensively reflect the diversity and richness of the data. After completing the coding work, the author further utilized statistical methods to conduct a detailed analysis of the frequency and percentage of each code. This process not only provided a direct

understanding of the distribution of various reasons for demotivation but also delved into the intrinsic logic and underlying causes of teachers' demotivation through quantitative analysis. Ultimately, Figure 2 presents the methodological framework of this study in an intuitive and clear manner.

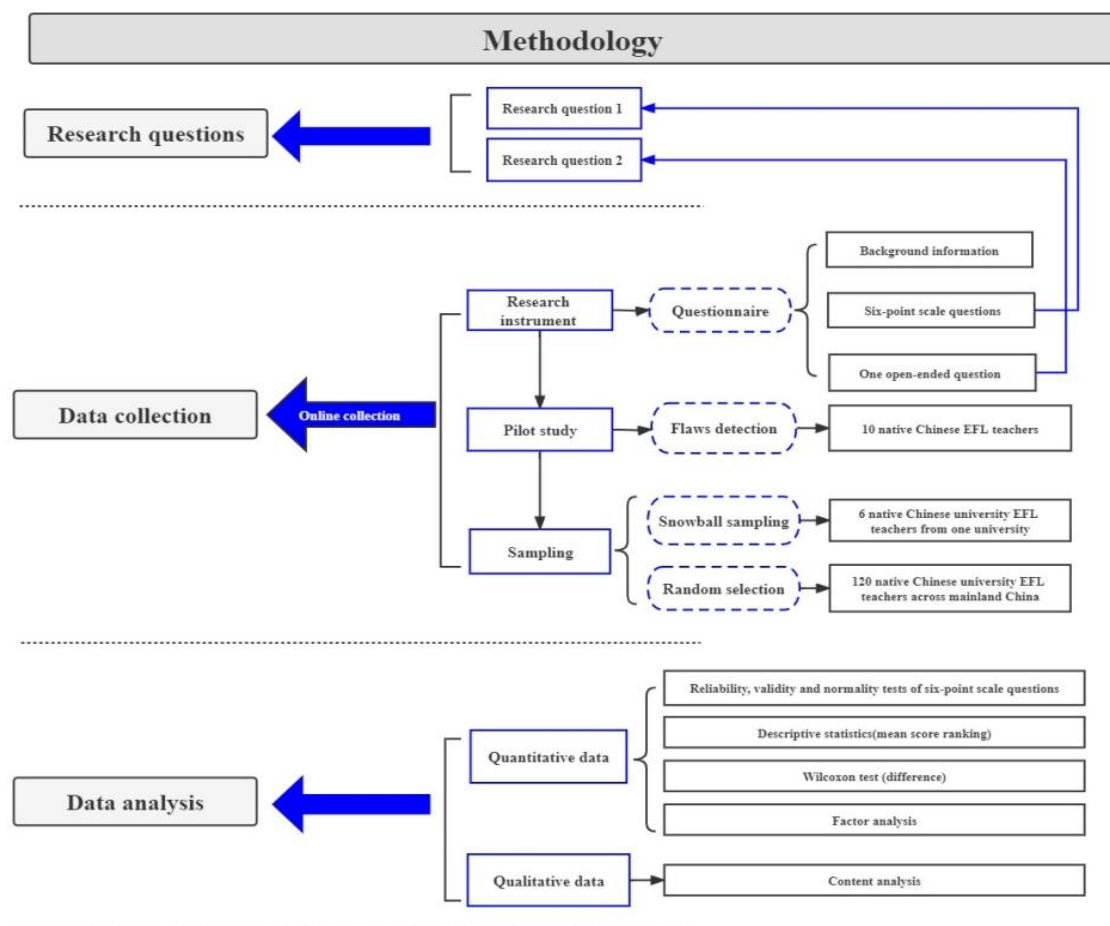


Figure 2: Research method diagram

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Participants voluntarily participate, understand the nature and consequences of the study, and give consent. They have the right to withdraw at any time without comment, ensuring autonomy and privacy. Data is collected anonymously without the storage of any personal information, protecting the anonymity of responses. Participants are assigned a unique identifier for research purposes only. Electronic files containing raw data are encrypted and will be destroyed after ten years to ensure long-term security.

3.5 Reliability and Validity of the Questionnaire

Reliability reflects the stability and consistency of tool scores (Creswell,

2015). Cronbach's alpha (α) was used to validate the questionnaire, with a result of 0.850, and all 18 items had α values > 0.7 (an acceptable standard in social science research). Therefore, the measurement tool is considered highly reliable. This suggests that the questionnaire has good internal consistency. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure verified the sampling adequacy of the analysis (see Table 2): KMO=.811 (mediocre, according to Hutcheson and Sofroniou, 1999) with a significant difference ($\chi^2(120)=691.580, p<.05$). This indicates that this questionnaire is fit for factor analysis.

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's test results

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.811
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	691.580
df		120
Sig.		.000

4. RESULTS

4.1 Attitudes Towards Teaching

The first item in the questionnaire aims to determine whether the participants' attitude towards teaching has changed over time. Participants were required to self-evaluate their enthusiasm, interest, and dedication to teaching at two time points - when they first started teaching English and the present time, using a six-point scale. Subsequently, we calculated and compared the average scores for each dimension, with the results summarized in Table 3. Given the non-normal distribution of the data, we employed the Wilcoxon test to compare the data from these two time points (see Table 4, $p=.000, <.05$). Table 4 reveals that participants exhibited high levels of enthusiasm (mean = 5.45), strong interest (mean = 5.50), and profound dedication (mean = 5.54) towards teaching at the beginning of their careers. However, over time, these positive attitudes have significantly declined: enthusiasm has waned (current mean = 2.18), interest has diminished (current mean = 2.16), and dedication has also decreased (current median = 1.19). The results of the Wilcoxon test are highly statistically significant (Z-values of -9.348, -9.284, and -9.460, respectively, $p=.000, <.001$), further confirming our observation that the surveyed English teachers' enthusiasm, interest, and dedication towards their teaching careers have all shown a pronounced downward trend over time.

Table 3: Results of normality tests

		Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Beginning	Enthusiasm	.371	120	.000	.701	120	.000
	Interest	.379	120	.000	.681	120	.000
	Dedication	.395	120	.000	.577	120	.000
Present Moment	Enthusiasm	.257	120	.000	.827	120	.000
	Interest	.257	120	.000	.810	120	.000
	Dedication	.292	120	.000	.758	120	.000

Table 4: Comparison of EFL teachers' attitudes towards teaching over time

Items	Time	Mean	Percentiles			Z	Sig. (2-tailed)
			25th	50 th (Median)	75th		
Enthusiasm	Beginning	5.45	5.00	6.00	6.00	-9.348 ^b	.000
	Present	2.18	6.00	2.00	3.00		
	moment						
Interest	Beginning	5.50	5.00	6.00	6.00	-9.284 ^b	.000
	Present	2.16	1.00	2.00	3.00		
	moment						
Dedication	Beginning	5.54	5.00	6.00	6.00	-9.460 ^b	.000
	Present	1.19	2.00	3.00	4.00		
	moment						

Notes: b refers to a positive rank.

4.2 EFL teachers' Demotivating Reasons and Factors

Among the nineteen potential factors contributing to demotivation among EFL teachers, "a rigid evaluation system" and "a low salary" emerged as the two primary sources, with respective means of 5.08 (SD=1.07) and 5.05 (SD=0.88), as indicated in Table 5. Following closely was the academic requirement factor, specifically "high requirements for academic achievement," ranking third on the list with a mean of 5.02 (SD=1.18). Additionally, heavy workloads significantly impacted motivation, as evidenced by the score of 4.94 (SD=0.98) for item No. 13. Furthermore, student-related issues, notably "students' inappropriate behaviors in class," played a role in demotivation, scoring 4.80 (SD=1.34) on average. Conversely, interpersonal relations with colleagues, exemplified by "unsupportive colleagues" (item No. 16), were the least frequently cited reason, with a mean of 3.55 (SD=1.22). In conclusion, the predominant factors leading to demotivation in this study are intimately tied to the evaluation system, remuneration, and academic expectations.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Demotivating Reasons

Items	Mean	SD
My Motivation Decreases Through/Because Of		
A Rigid Evaluation System (9)	5.08	1.07
A Low Salary (3)	5.05	0.88
High Requirements for Academic Achievements (11)	5.02	1.18
A Heavy Workload (13)	4.94	0.98
Students' Inappropriate Behaviors in Class (E.G., Using Cell Phones, Talking to Each Other) (1)	4.80	1.34
Lack Of Responses from Students To My Questions (7)	4.68	1.24
Inadequate Time for Research (18)	4.62	1.09
Inadequate Opportunities for Career Development (4)	4.53	1.26
Students' Reluctance to Participate in Class Activities (12)	4.49	1.30
A Large Class Size (14)	4.46	1.33
Little Recognition from the Society for Personal Efforts Put into Teaching (15)	4.43	0.93
Little Appreciation from the Administration (17)	4.17	1.53
Inadequate Opportunities for in-Service Training (5)	4.12	1.42
Few Acknowledgments of Personal Achievements (19)	4.01	1.46
Receiving Less Respect than Expected from the Society (2)	3.99	1.43
Set Teaching Materials (8)	3.81	1.28
Too Many Other Regular Duties that Need to be Performed Every Semester (6)	3.73	1.10
Unsupportive Colleagues (16)	3.55	1.22
Discrepancies between Exceptions and the Reality (10)	3.47	1.20

To compare various demotivating factors, exploratory factor analysis was conducted. However, items 8, 10, and 14 were excluded because their factor loadings were below .500. The results are shown in Table 6. As can be seen, five factors, each with at least three items, were identified, accounting for approximately 67% of the variance. The reliability coefficients measured by Cronbach's alpha (α) ranged from .540 to .872, indicating the relatively high internal consistencies of each factor. Factor 1 consists of four items and is labeled 'students'. All three items described students' uncooperative behaviors in English class and their nonchalant attitudes towards learning English. Factor 2 is defined by four items regarding opportunities for career development, in-service training, and support from colleagues and university administrations, and is labeled 'career opportunities and institutional support'. Factor 3 is comprised of three items and concerns academic research conditions and requirements. All three items describe the rigid requirements for academic performance expected from the administration and the demanding research conditions that the EFL teachers face. The items loaded on Factor 4 represent

unpleasant working conditions, such as a heavy workload and a low salary. Factor 5 with loadings above .547 includes another three items, whose central feature was a lack of recognition from society.

Table 6: Factor Analysis for EFL Teacher Demotivation

Item No.	Demotivating Factors				
	Students	Career opportunities and institutional appreciation	Academic Research conditions and requirements	Working conditions	Societal recognition and acknowledgment
7	.845				
12	.839				
1	.683				
17		.872			
5		.819			
4		.767			
16		.540			
11			.792		
9			.748		
18			.700		
13				.778	
6				.685	
3				.553	
15					.795
19					.626
2					.547
Eigenvalue	5.21	1.73	1.37	1.26	1.08
Cumulative %	32.53	43.34	51.89	59.77	66.50

As Table 7 shows, the working conditions factor (Factor 4) was rated the most demotivating among all five factors, with a mean of 4.91 (SD=0.92). In particular, the item “a low salary” (No. 3) with a mean of 5.05 (SD=0.88) was

reported as the second most important reason that led to the EFL teachers' demotivation. The research conditions and academic requirements factor (Factor 3), that is, high requirements for academic achievements, was ranked as the second most detrimental factor, with a mean of 4.75 (SD=0.75). Factor 1, which referred to students' inappropriate behaviors and attitudes towards learning English, was the third most adverse factor contributing to demotivation. In comparison, career opportunities and the appreciation that EFL teachers received from the institution (Factor 2) were the weakest determinants of their demotivation (Mean=4.09, SD=1.11).

Table 7: Descriptive statistics for demotivating factors

	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Working Conditions	2.67	6.00	4.91	0.92
Research Conditions and Academic Requirements	2.25	6.00	4.75	0.75
Students	1.67	6.00	4.66	1.08
Societal Recognition and Acknowledgment	2.00	5.67	4.14	0.94
Career Opportunities and Appreciation from the Institution	1.00	6.00	4.09	1.11

4.3 Open-Ended Question Regarding Demotivation

In addition to project analysis, participants took part in an open-ended survey, listing the top three reasons that affect their work motivation. The feedback directly addressed the second research question. Key findings include: 69.17% mentioned poor working conditions, such as high pressure and heavy workloads leading to exhaustion (P004); 56.67% pointed out students' negative attitudes and low participation, with indifferent responses diminishing teaching enthusiasm (P038, P064, P078). Some participants believed that students' lack of cooperation weakened their professional effectiveness and self-identity, considering it the primary reason for losing motivation, as detailed below:

"One primary factor that dampens my motivation stems from students' disengagement during class. Despite my meticulous course planning, some students remain engrossed in their mobile games, leaving me feeling disheartened." (P063)

"My demotivation arises primarily from students' reactions to my instruction, as I place great importance on their engagement. Failing to receive the anticipated feedback from them fosters self-doubt - questioning whether I explained concepts sufficiently, if I've chosen an inappropriate topic, ultimately eroding my confidence." (P100)

The issue of a low salary was identified as a contributor to participants' declining motivation, accounting for 45.83% of the responses. Several participants expressed their concerns, stating that "inadequate earnings can significantly detract from one's dedication to teaching" (P013) and "the meager pay gradually diminishes enthusiasm for the job" (P017). In conclusion, both quantitative and qualitative data indicate that the demotivation experienced by EFL teachers can primarily be attributed to five significant factors. An unpleasant working environment, such as a heavy workload and financial issues led to the EFL teachers' demotivation. This study reveals that students' negative attitudes towards English learning and improper behavior in class have become the main inducements for English teachers' lack of motivation. At the same time, strict standards for academic performance and low salary levels also seem to have a non-negligible negative impact on the work enthusiasm of English teachers.

5. DISCUSSION

This study extracted five major factors leading to EFL teachers' demotivation. The three factors related to working conditions, research conditions and academic requirements, and students were more detrimental to demotivation than the other two factors, namely, career opportunities and societal recognition. In summary, the findings of this study align with multiple previous studies (Kızıltepe, 2008), confirming the multiple reasons for the lack of motivation among English teachers across different educational levels. Student factors, as Johnson discovered in Mexican teachers, are crucial to low morale (Johnson, 2000). Sugino's study on Japanese teachers also pointed out the impact of students' inappropriate behavior (Sugino, 2010). Inadequate financial incentives are a barrier for Greek teachers (Tziava, 2003), while Turkish teachers are heavily burdened by working conditions and student factors (Aydin, 2012). Öztürk's study on Turkish teachers in state universities revealed that heavy workload, low salaries, and insufficient support for professional development also significantly affect their motivation (Öztürk, 2015). Yaghoubinejad et al. also found that a lack of social recognition and respect led to Iranian junior high school English teachers' demotivation (Yaghoubinejad et al., 2017). The findings of the current study are also in line with what has been found in studies on university EFL teachers in the Chinese context (Swanson & Mason, 2018). Among the five demotivating factors extracted, the factor of working conditions was the most influential in the current study. For

instance, a low salary was rated as a primary demotivating reason. The salaries of Chinese teachers are closely related to their academic qualifications and credentials. According to the survey, the salaries of college teachers vary depending on their professional titles, with lecturers earning an average annual salary of approximately US\$13,000 and professors earning US\$25,000. In general, the salaries of university teachers are lower than those of professionals with similar work experience and educational backgrounds, such as civil servants (Rasheed et al., 2016). Bland and Altman unequivocally pointed out in his thorough research that for university teachers in Northern Ireland (Bland & Altman, 1997), the myriad challenges encountered during the research process, particularly the pressing constraints of time and the formidable pressure to publish, constitute an indispensable and significant driving force in their professional lives. These challenges not only ignite teachers' passion for exploring the unknown and striving for excellence but also propel them forward on their academic journey. In China, particularly within research-oriented institutions of higher learning, teachers confront an even more intricate and multifaceted role. They must not only dedicate themselves fully to teaching, ensuring quality and effectiveness, but also delve deeply into scientific research, conducting cutting-edge explorations and studies. This dual responsibility places an exceptionally heavy burden on teachers' shoulders. Furthermore, the evaluation and promotion systems for teachers are often closely tied to their academic achievements and research contributions, undoubtedly adding to their stress. However, the situation for college English teachers in China may be even more dire. They must undertake arduous teaching tasks, encompassing every aspect from lesson preparation and delivery to homework correction and student tutoring, while simultaneously carving out time for research amidst their limited schedules. This dual time constraint often leaves them feeling overwhelmed and struggling to find a balance between the two. Faced with the rigorous standards and demands set by universities, English teachers frequently perceive themselves as unable to meet these expectations, leading to a gradual decline in their sense of self-efficacy. Consequently, when external expectations surpass teachers' own capabilities, a prevalent phenomenon emerges – a lack of demotivation. Student factors play a pivotal role, encompassing inappropriate classroom behavior, negative learning attitudes, and a lack of motivation, all of which diminish learning drive and serve as the second major contributor to low teacher morale, as confirmed by multiple studies including this one. Research by Kiziltepe

(Kızıltepe, 2008) and Mifsud also underscores the importance of students as a significant factor in teacher motivation, with inappropriate behavior being a primary external cause. Teaching necessitates interaction, and when teachers' enthusiastic engagement meets with indifferent student responses, it can undermine their teaching enthusiasm, a phenomenon also noted by Kim and Kim (Kim et al., 2014). Despite meticulous curriculum design aimed at piquing student interest, the indifferent or even dismissive attitude of students, who may prioritize personal activities such as using mobile phones, severely dampens teachers' motivation. The online survey and open-ended questions indicate that the main sources of motivation are mostly external, which is consistent with Herzberg's two-factor theory. This theory distinguishes "motivators" (such as a sense of achievement and responsibility) that enhance satisfaction and "hygiene factors" (such as policies, relationships, and compensation) that reduce dissatisfaction. This differs from the viewpoint of Arai and others who believe that motivation cannot be solely attributed to external factors (Arai, 2004), but aligns with Dörnyei's perspective on the multidimensional nature of motivation (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009; You & Dörnyei, 2016). In conclusion, the demotivating factors affecting EFL teachers at Chinese universities generally align with the prevalent findings of research on teacher demotivation. It seems that teachers globally face comparable challenges, leading to analogous consequences.

6. CONCLUSION WITH IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

This study focuses on analysing the phenomenon of job motivation loss among English teachers whose mother tongue is Chinese in Chinese universities, and delves into the crux of English teaching practice. The research design is dominated by quantitative analysis and relies on an online questionnaire consisting of closed-ended and open-ended questions to achieve the research objectives. The study sample consists of 120 local English teachers from universities in mainland China who voluntarily participated and shared their emotional attitudes towards teaching as a profession and the perceived factors of professional frustration. In addition, the teachers' responses to open-ended questions were also collected as valuable data for analysing the root causes of low morale among teachers. Finally, this study compares and reviews the obtained results with existing research on job motivation inhibition. The study indicates that, on average, EFL teachers reported maintaining a

comparatively high degree of career motivation, despite acknowledging a perceived decline in the intensity of this motivation since their entry into the profession until the completion of the survey. Regarding demotivating factors revealed in the current study, participants predominantly referred to factors related to working conditions, research conditions and academic requirements, students, career opportunities and societal recognition. The findings point to unpleasant work environments, students' negative dispositions towards English language acquisition, and inadequate compensation as the primary detrimental factors impacting EFL teachers' motivation, as reported by participants. Based on these data, this study holds multiple significances. Firstly, the research finds that unpleasant working environments, particularly low salaries, have the most pronounced negative impact on English teachers' professional enthusiasm. In light of this, it would undoubtedly be a positive move for university administrators to take measures to increase the salaries of English teachers. Furthermore, as Maslow's hierarchy of needs suggests (Maslow, 1954), a sense of security and economic assurance are fundamental human needs, and English teachers are no exception. Insufficient income can plunge teachers into economic anxiety, which in turn affects their work attitude and leads to more negative sentiments (Dizon-Ross et al., 2019). Therefore, university administrators should ensure that English teachers receive adequate salaries to provide them with the necessary sense of security, especially for young teachers who are just starting their careers. A survey of young university teachers in China reveals that about a quarter of respondents struggle with making ends meet, and over 10% of teachers rely on family support during their early career years. What's more, nearly 15% of respondents admit that they have to take up part-time jobs outside school, such as teaching at training centres, to make a living. These phenomena underscore the urgency of improving the salary situation for English teachers. Furthermore, in the current research discussions, numerous respondents have expressed dissatisfaction with the rigid evaluation system and the excessive emphasis on academic performance. Currently, research participation has become a crucial driving force for the professional development of university teachers. Specifically, the number of published papers and the level of activity in participating in various projects or plans are considered the core metrics in the academic evaluation system (Han & Yin, 2016). However, multiple researchers have pointed out that the evaluation system can hardly achieve absolute objectivity and fairness. Applying a uniform standard to measure all teachers overlooks individual and disciplinary differences, which may dampen teachers' enthusiasm and

limit the full realization of their potential. In view of this, establishing a new evaluation system that incorporates more dimensions, such as teaching skills and technological application abilities, may effectively stimulate the enthusiasm and creativity of English teachers. Recently, the Ministry of Education of China has issued an important document on the reform of the promotion system for university teachers. This document emphasizes the need to adjust the teacher evaluation system, prioritizing professional ethics and emphasizing the importance of teaching contributions and other responsibilities. At the same time, teacher evaluation should comprehensively consider various factors such as educational achievements, scientific research achievements (including paper publications), educational degrees, and research funding. To address students' incentive needs, English teachers can undergo professional training to acquire a variety of motivation techniques, effectively stimulating their enthusiasm for English learning. Research in the field of motivation indicates that the incentive strategies employed by teachers have a profound impact on shaping learners' motivation to learn a foreign language (Dörnyei, 2014; Fives & Manning, 2005). Furthermore, we can integrate innovative teaching methods, such as utilizing engaging English learning materials like video clips and modern technological tools like English learning apps, to enhance students' interest in learning. When students' intrinsic learning motivation is fully ignited, the negative factors that may hinder learning will naturally diminish, thereby assisting teachers in better maintaining and enhancing students' learning motivation. Future research can address the shortcomings of the current study and optimize it from multiple angles. Firstly, one of the limitations of this study lies in the limited number of teacher participants. A larger sample size would enable the generation of more robust and reliable research conclusions. Secondly, while this study focuses on English teachers, future research could be extended to teachers of different subjects to provide a more comprehensive picture of motivation phenomena in the Chinese educational context. Furthermore, the current questionnaire tool has limitations because it relies on participants' self-reports, and such self-assessed data may be biased. Future research could consider a mixed-methods design combining questionnaires with in-depth interviews to enhance the accuracy and depth of the data. Additionally, this study adopts a synchronic perspective in assessing negative emotions, overlooking the dynamic and variable nature of motivation and drive as psychological concepts (Waninge et al., 2014). Consequently, synchronic studies struggle to capture subtle changes in motivation over time, particularly regarding

the loss of motivation, where it is difficult to accurately determine whether motivation has declined and to what extent. To address this issue, future research should employ a diachronic approach, tracking changes in teachers' motivation over time, thereby revealing the dynamic process of motivation more accurately. In the future, we can rely on observational data to conduct longitudinal tracking studies, delving into the evolution of English teachers' motivation over time. This approach will enable us to identify potential issues more promptly and take corresponding preventive measures, thereby enhancing the awareness of English teachers and administrators towards these issues. Furthermore, expanding the research perspective to areas where concerns exist about the potential impact of English teachers' motivation and drive on student performance will be a meaningful endeavor. Specifically, we can explore the intrinsic relationship between teachers' and students' motivation, verifying how teachers' motivation contributes to students' English learning outcomes. Lastly, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of foreign language teachers across China, comparative studies can be conducted that encompass not only English teachers but also teachers of other foreign languages and language teachers from different educational stages (such as university and secondary school teachers), aiming to compare the differences and similarities in their motivation.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this paper will be made available by the lead author on request.

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