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ENHANCING MOTIVATION IN EFL TEACHING: INSIGHTS FROM VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITY EFL TEACHERS

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Abstract: This study explores the role of teacher motivation in the context of English education reforms in Vietnam, where reforms have traditionally emphasised language proficiency, teacher training, and pedagogical skills. Drawing on data from 74 EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers across 14 universities in Vietnam, along with 30 in-depth interviews, the study identifies institutional strategies that may support teachers' motivation. The findings highlight five key areas for improvement: professional development, curriculum and teaching reforms, leadership and management practices, workload management, and the provision of benefits and incentives. The study offers context-specific recommendations to support a more motivated and dedicated teaching workforce.

Keywords: teacher motivation, EFL teaching, Vietnamese higher education, leadership and management

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NÂNG CAO ĐỘNG LỰC GIẢNG DẠY TIẾNG ANH: Ý KIẾN CỦA GIÁNG VIÊN TIẾNG ANH TẠI MỘT SỐ TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC Ở VIỆT NAM

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Tóm tắt: Những nghiên cứu về động lực giảng dạy tiếng Anh của giáo viên thường tập trung vào việc cải thiện trình độ ngoại ngữ, chương trình đào tạo giáo viên và kỹ năng giảng dạy. Nghiên cứu này khám phá vai trò thường bị bỏ qua trong các nghiên cứu trước đây về động lực dạy tiếng Anh của giáo viên. Bằng cách thu thập dữ liệu từ 74 giảng viên tiếng Anh thuộc 14 trường đại học ở Việt Nam, cùng với 30 cuộc phỏng vấn, nghiên cứu này đề xuất những chiến lược hiệu quả để nâng cao động lực giảng dạy tiếng Anh cho giảng viên đại học ở Việt Nam. Kết quả nghiên cứu đã chỉ ra rằng giảng viên ưu tiên cải thiện năm lĩnh vực chính: phát triển chuyên môn, cải cách phương pháp và chương trình giảng dạy, lãnh đạo và quản lý, cải thiện khối lượng công việc và cải thiện phúc lợi cho giảng viên. Nghiên cứu cũng đưa ra những khuyến nghị thiết thực nhằm nâng cao động lực và sự nhiệt huyết của giảng viên, góp phần vào sự thành công trong việc triển khai các phương pháp giảng dạy sáng tạo.

Từ khóa: động lực của giảng viên, giảng dạy tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ, giáo dục đại học Việt Nam, lãnh đạo và quản lý

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, language teachers' motivation has attracted an increasing interest from researchers and educators around the world (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). Research on English teachers' motivation has been dominant in the field (see Hayes, 2008; Kim et al., 2014; Pennington, 1991; Sugino, 2010b). Much of the existing literature has examined the vital role of English language teachers' motivation to students' motivation and performance, instructional quality, and teachers' job satisfaction (Bernaus et al., 2009; Kassabgy et al., 2001; Mifsud, 2011; Pourtoussi et al., 2018). Various attempts have been made to identify factors that increase or thwart teachers' motivation for English language teaching (Heckhausen, 1991; Hettiarachchi, 2013; Kassabgy et al., 2001; Öztürk, 2015; Pennington, 1995; Pourtoussi et al., 2018; Sugino, 2010a). However, the impacts of these findings on practices are still limited (Hiver et al., 2018). English language teachers' actual needs in teaching and strategies to have teachers' motivation sustained and improved have received little attention in the literature.

Despite these contributions, less research has focused specifically on what institutional measures teachers themselves believe would support their motivation, particularly in the context of Vietnamese higher education. As English language teaching at the higher education level has always been the emphasis of the Vietnamese government and the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), reforms in English language education have been implemented to improve the English language proficiency of both English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers and students in the tertiary sector (Ngo, 2019; Tran et al., 2020). However, persistent challenges in English language teaching and learning remain, which might deter EFL

teachers from effective teaching (Hoang, 2010; Nguyen, 2017; Nguyen, 2018). This study aims to identify institutional strategies and measures that can enhance the motivation of Vietnamese university EFL teachers, based on their perspectives and experiences. The following research question will be answered in the current study, “What do Vietnamese university EFL teachers believe their institutions can do to enhance their motivation for English language teaching?”.

2. Research on Language Teachers’ Motivation

Identifying teachers’ sources of motivation and demotivation has been the focus of many studies in both the educational mainstream and in the English language teacher motivation research (Lauermann, 2017; Teymour & Karim, 2021). The major work examining teachers’ motivation and satisfaction was conducted by Pennington and colleagues (Pennington, 1991, 1995; Pennington & Ho, 1995; Pennington & Riley, 1991). In 1991, the researcher conducted two studies to investigate the extent to which English as a second language (ESL) teachers felt satisfied with their profession. Findings of the first study showed that *moral values* and *social services* were the two most crucial factors of teachers’ motivation. Less important factors were creativity, achievement, and ability of utilisation.

In the second study, Pennington and Riley (1991) employed the Job Descriptive Index questionnaire (covering five facets: *pay*, *promotion*, *co-workers*, *supervision*, and *the nature of the work*) and an additional general job satisfaction measurement to examine ESL teachers’ job satisfaction. Findings showed that teachers felt satisfied with their jobs in general (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). However, teachers’ satisfaction with the five facets of teaching varied. Co-workers and the nature of the work were the highest rated, and promotion and pay were the lowest rated (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

Subsequently, various studies have been carried out to identify English language teachers’ sources of motivation and demotivation in different educational settings, for example, the United States (Doyle & Kim, 1999; Kassabgy et al., 2001), South Korea (Doyle & Kim, 1999), Egypt (Kassabgy et al., 2001), Greece (Gheralis-Roussos, 2003), Saudi Arabia (Shoaib, 2004), Nigeria (Christopher, 2012), Sri Lanka (Hettiarachchi, 2013), China (Kim et al., 2014; Ma, 2012), Jordan (Dweik & Awajan, 2013), New Zealand (Yau, 2010), Turkey (Öztürk, 2015; Tasçi, 2019), Thailand (Hayes, 2008), Japan (Kim et al., 2014; Sugino, 2010a, 2010b), and Iran (Pourtoussi et al., 2018; Yaghoubinejad et al., 2017).

Factors affecting English language teachers’ motivation can be categorised into three groups: student-related factors, collegial factors, and institutional factors. Students have been recognised as an important source of English language teachers’ intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction (Pourtoussi et al., 2018). Students-related factors included students’ attitudes towards English language learning (Doyle & Kim, 1999; Gheralis-Roussos, 2003; Hettiarachchi, 2013; Tran & Moskovsky, 2022), participation in lessons (Doyle & Kim, 1999; Gheralis-Roussos, 2003; Hettiarachchi, 2013), performance (Gheralis-Roussos, 2003; Hettiarachchi, 2013; Pourtoussi et al., 2018), levels of motivation and learning effort (Öztürk, 2015; Pourtoussi et al., 2018), and student-teacher relationships (Gheralis-Roussos, 2003; Hettiarachchi, 2013). Collegial factors encompassed workplace relationships, and co-workers’ behaviours and attitudes towards joint tasks (Heckhausen, 1991; Hettiarachchi, 2013; Kassabgy et al., 2001; Öztürk, 2015; Pennington, 1995; Pourtoussi et al., 2018; Sugino, 2010a). Institutional factors are regarded as external or contextual conditions of teaching. They can have impact on both the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of English language teachers. Institutional factors encompass salary and benefits, promotion, recognition and rewards, support of teachers’

autonomy, suitable and fair distribution of workload, opportunities for professional development, positive working climate, efficient and effective administration, availability of teaching facilities and resources (Dweik & Awajan, 2013; Gheralis-Roussos, 2003; Kassabgy et al., 2001; Öztürk, 2015; Pennington, 1995; Pourtoussi et al., 2018; Tran, 2023).

3. The Study

3.1. English Language Teaching and Learning in Vietnam

Improving the quality of the English language education has always been given top priority of the Vietnamese government for socio-economic development (Bui & Nguyen, 2016; Hayden & Thiep, 2010; Manh et al., 2017; Nguyen, 2019). In 2008, MOET launched the National Foreign Language Project 2020 with a budget of approximately five billion USD to enhance English language proficiency of Vietnamese students at all levels (Prime Minister, 2008). Under the project, new and compulsory English programs have been implemented, English has been used as a medium of instruction for other subjects, such as mathematics, physics, and chemistry, and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) has been employed to assess the language proficiency of students and English language teachers (Prime Minister, 2008). In-service English language teachers at all levels nationwide were provided opportunities to participate in intensive training programs to address the issues of English language instructional quality (Ngo, 2019; Nguyen, 2017).

Regardless of these remarkable attempts, there exist several challenges that Vietnamese university English language teachers are currently facing. For example, low levels of students' motivation and English language proficiency, large class sizes, irrelevant teaching resources, mismatch between curriculum requirements and students' needs, inadequate of language teacher preparation, lack of systematic training and professional development programs, low salaries, poor teaching conditions, and heavy workloads (Bui & Nguyen, 2016; Le et al., 2017; Le, 2015, 2020; Ngo, 2019; Nguyen, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2020; Nguyen & Phung, 2015; L. T. Tran et al., 2020; Trinh & Mai, 2018). These constraints together can threaten teachers' motivation and commitment to English language teaching (Han & Yin, 2016; Sugino, 2010a).

3.2. Methods

This study forms part of a larger research project on Vietnamese university EFL teachers' motivation, which adopted Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as its theoretical framework. However, the current paper focuses specifically on teachers' suggestions regarding what institutions can do to support their motivation, rather than directly analysing intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. Data used in this paper were collected through a survey (open-ended questions) and interviews. The survey was completed by 104 Vietnamese university EFL teachers. The open-ended question about suggested measures to improve university EFL teachers' motivation was answered by 74 teachers. The response rate for this question was 71.15%. Semi-structured interviews with 30 teachers were undertaken to provide insights into teachers' responses.

3.3. Participants

Three-fourths of the survey respondents were female (74.3%). More than half of them were between 31 and 40 years old (51.4%). Nearly one fifth of the respondents fell into the category between 20 and 30 years old (24.3%). Only a small number of respondents was older than 51 (9.5%). The vast majority of respondents were lecturers at the time they participated in the study (81.1%). Senior lecturers accounted for 12.2% and five respondents were indicated

as visiting lecturers (6.8%). More than half of the respondents were working in the private sectors (51.4%). The length of English language teaching (ELT) of the survey respondents ranged from less than a year to 40 years. Respondents whose ELT experience was less than 5 years constituted 16.2%. The number of respondents with 6 to 10 years of ELT experience was the same as those with 11 to 20 years (35.1%). The number of respondents with more than 20 years of ELT experience was small (12.2%). A summary of the characteristics of interviewees is provided in Appendix A.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

The research project was conducted in 14 universities across Vietnam. Five universities are located in the North, one university is in the Central, and seven universities are in the South of Vietnam. Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the institution where the author is based. The researcher also obtained approval for conducting research from leaders of the participating universities. An invitation email included a participant information sheet and a link to the online survey was sent to EFL teachers at these universities. For those who wanted to participate in the research project but were unable to access the online survey, a paper survey was delivered to them.

At the end of the survey, teachers were invited to participate in a follow-up interview. Teachers who were interested to participate were asked to provide their contact details before they submitted their responses. The researchers contacted these teachers and scheduled times and venues for interviews. Interviews were conducted in Vietnamese – the mother tongue of the participants and the researcher. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative data, several validation strategies were employed. After the interviews were transcribed verbatim, the transcripts were sent back to the respective interviewees via email for review. This member-checking process allowed participants to verify the accuracy of the transcription and confirm that their views were accurately represented. Interviewees were also given the opportunity to clarify their responses, add further details, or provide additional reflections if needed. This process helped ensure that the data authentically captured teachers' perspectives and minimized the risk of misinterpretation. In addition, peer debriefing with colleagues familiar with qualitative research was conducted during the data analysis phase to discuss emerging themes and ensure consistency in coding and interpretation.

Teachers' responses to the open-ended survey question and interview transcriptions were imported to NVivo software. Thematic analysis was used to analyse and interpret data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Brenner, 2012). The qualitative data analysis procedure in the current study involved three phases: preparation, coding and analysis, and interpretation and display. A coding scheme was developed to identify themes and sub-themes related to the measures suggested by teachers in the survey. The researcher used the coding scheme to code interview transcripts. Interview data were used to provide details of teachers' needs and suggested measures to sustain and improve teachers' motivation. To protect privacy and confidentiality, the researcher used respondent codes for survey respondents and pseudonyms for interview teachers.

4. Results

4.1. Teacher Professional Development

More than half of the survey participants ($n = 41$) agreed that providing teachers more opportunities to participate in professional development and training programs would improve

their enthusiasm and motivation for EFL teaching. Various forms of professional development activities were suggested by teachers. These included long or short-term training courses ($n = 27$), conferences or seminars ($n = 23$), qualification programs ($n = 9$), observation visits to other national and foreign institutions ($n = 16$), and English language teaching competitions or festivals ($n = 7$). Teachers also noted that by participating in these activities, they could improve their English language competence ($n = 11$) and their English language teaching skills ($n = 32$). Some surveyed teachers ($n = 18$) expressed that they would like to have opportunities to collaborate and work with native English speakers, and study abroad. As one rural teacher said:

MOET and institutions should organise more seminars and conferences with the participation of native English teachers and educators. So, we [teachers] could exchange our knowledge and teaching experience with them. To me, these opportunities are invaluable because we can learn many interesting things from them [native speakers] and apply that knowledge in our teaching. (Chi)

Professional development courses and programs provided by MOET are often organised in major cities. This poses difficulty for teachers working in rural and remote institutions. A teacher from a private metropolitan institution suggested that the times and venues of these activities should be flexible to reduce geographical barriers and promote equity in teachers' professional growth:

Not everyone in my faculty can participate in the training courses provided by MOET. So, I think these kinds of opportunities should be accessible to every teacher. Also, MOET should consider the venues of training programs and workshops. For example, rather than organising a course or workshop in a city or province that requires some teachers to travel long distances, MOET can distribute these sessions in different regions. The first one can be organised in a Northern city or province, so teachers from the North can participate and teachers from the Central and South don't need to travel so far. Then they can move to the Central and South areas to have that course or workshop organised there. (Tuan)

Apart from the quantity of teachers' professional development opportunities, teachers suggested that the quality of these activities should be taken into consideration. Some interviewed teachers ($n = 5$) noted that the content of professional development activities should meet their interests and demands. Ngat, who had more than 9 years of English language teaching experience, commented on the workshops she had participated in the past:

These workshops didn't teach us [teachers] practical teaching skills. They only showed us theories in English language teaching. I found these workshops too boring and theoretically oriented. What I needed and expected was learning new teaching skills that I could apply in my classes and attract my students to my lessons.

On the other hand, a small number of surveyed teachers ($n = 9$) stated that institutions should support professional growth for teachers by providing them with funding and grants which teachers could use to cover the registration fee of training courses and programs. A public rural teacher described her financial difficulties:

If I attend a workshop organised by the private sector, I have to pay the workshop fee. How can I cover that fee with my low salary? So, I decide not to attend, which means that I miss an opportunity to access updated and innovative teaching methodologies. (Tung)

4.2. English Language Teaching and Curriculum

Reforms to English language teaching and curriculum were noted by a third of the surveyed teachers ($n = 25$). Numerous strategies and recommendations were provided by teachers, including: avoiding reducing English teaching hours in the curriculum ($n = 9$),

reducing large class sizes ($n = 11$), teaching students communicative skills rather than focusing on grammar ($n = 4$), and designing the English language curriculum to match students' interests as well as employees' requirements ($n = 7$). All of these recommendations aimed to improve students' interest in and motivation for English language learning. These changes would make English language teaching easier and more effective. A rural teacher commented:

MOET has high expectations for teachers that teachers do their best to ensure that students can communicate fluently in English after graduation. However, they [MOET] don't investigate English language learning. Students' English competence should reach a certain standard before they are allowed to enter the university. So, we [teachers] don't need to teach them from ABC. Effective English language teaching at lower levels of education will decrease relatively higher education teachers' difficulties in teaching English. (Tung)

4.3. Facilities and Teaching Resources

A small number of surveyed teachers ($n = 13$) stated that the physical environment played an important role in facilitating teachers' motivation and performance. Classrooms should be upgraded and equipped with air conditioners, high-quality sound systems, and projectors. Some teachers ($n = 6$) recommended that institutions should help teachers get access to English language teaching and learning apps, teaching resources, and education supplies. Gam, who had been working for a public rural institution for more than 18 years, described her difficulties when teaching in poor conditions, "I have a burning ambition to design attractive lessons and interesting activities for my students. But we have nothing but desks, chairs and a blackboard".

4.4. Leadership and Management Improvement

Eleven teachers who responded to the survey wanted reform of leadership. Among those, five teachers hoped that their leaders would develop more effective management skills. Then, they could provide teachers with clear and consistent instructions (P45 and P67). Three teachers noted that good leaders would assign and assess work effectively (P15), encourage teachers to improve their teaching competence (P8), and connect and build positive relationships among teachers in the faculty (P71). Hang, who had been teaching English as a foreign language at a private metropolitan institution for more than 8 years, recommended that the leader of the faculty/department should show flexibility:

My boss is sometimes so strict and harsh that teachers in my faculty feel discouraged and demotivated. Some colleagues told me that the strict management style hindered them from devoting themselves to teaching as well as the development of the faculty.

Another teacher from a private metropolitan institution commented that strict and inflexible management style could hurt teachers' feelings and demotivate them:

We have rigid principles and regulations imposed upon us at the institutional level. I feel this is unfair because there are some unreasonable regulations. I am aware that these principles and regulations are in general use, and everyone should follow them. However, there's no rule or regulation without an exception. The leader should pay more attention to teachers' feelings and reactions rather than just focus on implementing the regulations and principles. (Nhi)

Four surveyed teachers said that giving teachers more autonomy could enhance teachers' positive attitudes and motivation. Teacher autonomy can be seen as teachers' freedom to make decisions about their teaching (P72 and P66), teachers' freedom to raise their voices in joint tasks (P52), and teachers' involvement in the faculty decision-making process (P17). Talking about teachers' autonomy, Oanh, whose ELT experience was more than 17 years, stated:

I think there should be a change in the leadership and management that teachers should be given

more autonomy. When it comes to faculty meetings, no one dares to raise their voice. Instead, we hang our heads and try to listen to every word of the dean. I feel like there is no democracy at all. I do not offend the senior leader. But I think that junior teachers should be given a chance to express their ideas and opinions. It is extremely bad and uncomfortable that junior teachers can't raise their voice. I can see that they always keep silent. They might feel that their efforts and dedication are assessed and recognised equally.

Two interviewed teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with the assessment of teacher performance. There should be more carefully designed institutional policies for assessing teachers' performance:

There should be clear public regulations about rewards and punishments. That is, when teachers reach targets or standards of teaching performance, they will be given rewards equivalent to their efforts and dedication. By doing this, teachers will feel that they are cared and respected. Teachers will be more motivated to dedicate themselves to teaching. (Gam)

There should be accurate criteria to assess teachers' performance. Every institution has their assessment criteria, but we should not apply the same set of criteria for all departments and divisions. I hope that my institution and department will be more flexible in designing and implementing these criteria that assess teachers' performance. (Vu)

4.5. Workload Reduction

A quarter of the surveyed teachers ($n = 18$) suggested that reducing workload would relatively enhance teachers' good feelings and motivation for EFL teaching. These teachers agreed that heavy workloads, tight teaching schedules, and long teaching hours left them exhausted and demotivated. Six teachers expressed concerns about excessive duties outside teaching including paperwork, meetings, and extra-curricular activities. By reducing teaching hours and the volume of non-teaching tasks, teachers could spend more time on the quality of their lesson as well as their professional development.

I'm teaching 450 hours per year. It's overwhelming to me. Apart from teaching, I'm required to be involved in other tasks, for example marking, developing course outlines, developing final exams, and organising faculty events. I feel exhausted and tired. I always feel like I'm running out of energy. I have no spare time for professional development. (Men)

4.6. Teachers' Benefits and Incentives

More than a third of surveyed teachers ($n = 28$) said that teachers' performance could be improved by increasing salaries and incentives. The majority of interviewed teachers agreed that their salaries were insufficient ($n = 24$). One teacher commented: "teachers' salaries are even lower than a manual handling job pays" (Thuy). Other teachers ($n = 8$) mentioned that they worked on a secondary job or taught English outside their institutions to earn extra money. Lien, who had been teaching English for more than 10 years at a rural public institution, shared her thoughts:

To keep teachers motivated, MOET and other institutions should ensure that teachers can make ends meet. As far as I know, both metropolitan and rural teachers' salaries can't cover their essential goods and services. Our benefits and incentives are too poor. Even some teachers have to take on part-time jobs to support their families. With that low payment, it's pretty hard to encourage teachers to dedicate themselves to teaching.

Teachers also felt unfairly treated when they worked hard but received less than what they deserved. A rural teacher described her frustration:

[...] At least, the payment should be equal to our efforts and dedication. We're paid 60,000 VND

(~ 2.64 USD¹) for one teaching hour. While the construction worker salary is 200,000 VND (~8.79 USD) per working hour. I can join other professions that pay me more, but I choose to stay in teaching because I love this job. However, I have a deep need for fairness. I want my effort and dedication to be recognised fairly. (My)

5. Discussion

The current study explored the perspectives of Vietnamese university EFL teachers on institutional measures that could support their motivation in English language teaching. Data were collected from a survey and semi-structured interviews. Teachers' suggested measures focused on six aspects of the English language teaching, including teacher professional development, reforms to English language teaching and curriculum, leadership and management improvement, workload reduction, and increasing teachers' salary.

In line with previous studies on factors motivating language teachers (Öztürk, 2015; Pourtoussi et al., 2018), teachers in the current study reported a strong need for continuous learning opportunities. They emphasised that professional development played a vital role in improving the quality of their instruction. However, providing EFL teachers with professional learning opportunities is not sufficient to enhance their motivation. Evidence of the current study showed that Vietnamese educators should focus on the variety and quality of continuous training and professional development programs. These programs should be constructed and organised in different forms and accessible to teachers regardless of their sector (public or private sectors), teaching title, and geographic location. In addition, teachers' needs, and interests should also be taken into consideration when designing professional development programs. This finding is in line with previous findings (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Matherson & Windle, 2017; Penuel et al., 2007) that teachers want to participate in professional development programs that they find engaging and relevant so "they do not feel they have wasted their time" (Matherson & Windle, 2017, p. 30). Participating in ineffective and irrelevant programs can lower teachers' sense of competence (Bautista & Wong, 2019; Bolliger et al., 2014). Also, universities should provide English teachers with grants or funding to support their participation and commitment to professional learning programs.

Reforms to English language teaching and curriculum have always been the emphasis of the Vietnamese Government and MOET (Nguyen, 2017). Various efforts and significant investment have been made to "deliver a comprehensive reform to the foreign language teaching and learning in the public sector and implement new and innovative foreign language programs at all levels of the education system" (Prime Minister, 2008, p. 1). However, there have been no significant changes in the quality of the English language teaching and learning at the higher education level in Vietnam (Tran, 2019). Teachers in the current study experienced the same issues with their college before reforms occurred, for example irrelevant curriculum, mismatch between learning content and students' needs, and large class size (see Bock, 2000; Kam, 2002; Le, 2007). These constraints not only caused teachers challenges in teaching but also threatened their sense of competence. Findings of the current study suggested that future English language teaching and learning reforms should involve teachers' voices and expectations in the process. It is also important for policy makers and instructional coordinators to ensure the alignment between the English language teaching curricula, assessment, students' learning capacity standards, and learning outcomes at all levels of the education system.

¹ The exchange rate in 2018 when the data was collected.

Reform of leadership at the higher education level was one of the main concerns of teachers in the current study. Teachers' issues related to higher education leadership and management styles reported in the current study reflect the influence of collectivist cultures, Confucian philosophy, and characteristics of the Soviet leadership system on the 'high-power distance' and 'top-down' approach and management of Vietnamese higher education (Hallinger & Truong, 2014; Nguyen et al., 2017; Tran, 2012). For example, strict and inflexible management styles, lack of teachers' autonomy, lack of teachers' involvement in the decision-making process, and the inadequacy of the current teaching performance assessment. These factors have been found to significantly demotivate EFL teachers and diminish their efforts in English language teaching. Empowering teachers, involving teachers in curriculum development and decision-making processes, and developing an effective performance evaluation system can be possible solutions.

Heavy workload with tight teaching schedules, multi-course teaching, large-class sizes, and extra-curricular duties have been major concerns of teachers around the world (Dinham & Scott, 2000; Doyle & Kim, 1999; Griva et al., 2012; Sahito & Vaisanen, 2020; Wang et al., 2009), including Vietnamese teachers (Nguyen et al., 2016; Tran, 2017; Tran et al., 2020). Excessive workload was found to reduce energy and took away their enthusiasm for and pleasure in teaching (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Teachers' well-being was affected by excessive workload, consequently, teachers put reduced focus and effort into their work (Hiver et al., 2018). The current study suggests that maintaining a reasonable workload for English language teachers is important for the quality of English language teaching and learning, as well as for teachers' well-being.

The majority of suggestions made by teachers in the current study were linked to the intrinsic values and quality of the English language teaching and learning at higher education in Vietnam. The last suggestion was related to teachers' extrinsic motivation, that is increasing teachers' salaries and incentives. Research on motivation suggests that giving material benefits is not a good way to improve motivation and it can hamper the development of intrinsic motivation (Deci et al., 1999). Findings of the current study did not support this argument. Teachers reported that their salary was not sufficient to support themselves and their family, and this resulted in a sense of job insecurity and dissatisfaction (Christopher, 2012; Crookes, 1997; Doyle & Kim, 1999; Kassabgy et al., 2001; Pennington, 1995). Some teachers chose to work in a secondary job to reduce financial pressures. However, this solution might drain teachers' energy and enthusiasm for teaching at their universities (Ballou, 1995). Working a second job or teaching English outside the university can also impair teachers' physical and mental health, as well as reduce the time and effort invested in lesson preparation and professional development (Tran, 2013). The study argues that higher educational policy makers must ensure teachers' financial security before working on other strategies to improve teachers' motivation for English language teaching.

6. Conclusion

The study provides Vietnamese higher education leaders and policy makers an insight into EFL teachers' needs and expectations. Despite the small sample size, the current study offers practical suggestions on how English language teaching conditions can be improved to keep teachers staying motivated and committed to the teaching profession. Findings of the current study suggested that it is important for Vietnamese higher education policy makers to consider and involve teachers' voices and opinions in the policy-making process. Further work

needs to be done to uncover potential aspects of English language teaching that need to be improved to sustain and maintain Vietnamese university EFL teachers' motivation. There might be a difference in needs and expectations between teachers who work in metropolitan areas and teachers who work in rural areas. Future work should focus on examining working conditions and motivation of university EFL teachers who work and live in rural and remote areas in Vietnam.

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Appendix A

Demographic Information of Interviewees

Interviewees	Gender*	ELT experience (years)	Geographical location		Institution	
			Metropolitan	Provincial	Public	Private
Thoa	F	10	X		X	
Thuy	F	8	X		X	
Tung	M	12		X	X	
Vu	M	6	X			X
Tuan	M	14	X			X
Bich	F	15		X	X	
Cam	F	22	X			X
Hoang	M	21		X	X	
Hoai	F	16		X	X	
Hong	F	20	X			X
Ngat	F	9	X			X
My	F	16		X	X	
Gam	F	18		X	X	
Nga	F	9		X	X	
Nam	M	4		X	X	
Yen	F	2	X			X
Ha	F	7	X			X
Doan	F	16		X	X	
Chi	F	16		X	X	
Men	F	24	X			X
Hai	F	5	X			X
Tien	F	20	X			X
Viet	M	18		X		X
Vo	M	10	X		X	
Ly	F	37	X			X
Lien	F	10		X	X	
Oanh	F	14	X			X
Hang	F	8	X			X
Nhi	F	8	X		X	
Giang	F	12		X	X	

*Note. F: Female M: Male

Appendix B

Open-ended questions and interview questions

Open-ended question: Name any measures that could be taken by your institution to improve your positive attitudes and good feelings about teaching English as a Foreign Language and clarify these below.

Interview question: What do you think your institution or department/faculty could do to better support EFL teachers' motivation?