

MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING KHMER VIETNAMESE EFL TEACHERS' CAREER CHOICE

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Drawing on Self-Determination theory, the current study examined how intrinsic, altruistic and extrinsic factors affected their career choice within the sociocultural context of the Khmer ethnic community. Extrinsic motivations such as job stability and social respect were found to be secondary motivational factors. These findings provide an insightful understanding of what motivated teachers in ethnically diverse contexts to choose teaching career and highlight the importance of integrating cultural and social considerations into teacher recruitment and retention strategies.

Keywords: *English teaching career choice; Motivation; Mekong Delta; Khmer ethnic minority group; Vietnam.*

1. Introduction

After 10 years of implementing Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW, dated November 4th, 2013, of the 11th Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, on “Fundamental and comprehensive reform of education and training to meet the requirements of industrialization and modernization within the context of a socialist-oriented market economy and international integration”, Vietnam’s education sector has achieved significant success. Key achievements include the nationwide completion of preschool education for 5-year-olds, improvements in primary and secondary education quality, and a positive change in general education from knowledge acquisition to developing learners’ qualities and competencies. In spite of remarkable achievements since the implementation of Resolution No.29-NQ/TW, the foreign language proficiency, including English, of labor force remains low which hinders the process of international integration. Additionally, the structure and quantity of teaching staff in many localities are not equally distributed and their quality is fluctuated. The Vietnamese Politburo emphasizes promoting English as a second language across educational levels and improving English skills for a globally adaptive workforce (The Politburo, 2024).

Vietnam is a multiethnic nation with 54 recognized groups. The Khmer ethnic group comprise 4.45% of the population in the Mekong Delta (General Statistical Office, 2019). For Khmer English teachers in the Mekong Delta, their challenges are considerable compared with the Kinh majority teachers. The challenges can be from socio-economic, and educational contexts,

which significantly impact their professional development. One of the primary challenges is the low professional qualifications among the Khmer ethnic people. Research indicates that many Khmer teachers suffer from inadequate training and limited access to professional development opportunities, which hinders their ability to deliver effective English language instruction (Le et al., 2021). The lack of support for teacher training may be part of this challenge, as many teachers are not equipped with the necessary pedagogical skills to meet the demands of modern English language education (Do et al., 2022).

Moreover, the socio-economic challenges faced by the Khmer ethnic group have negative effect on their teaching career. Many Khmer teachers come from economically disadvantaged areas, which can affect their motivation and ability to pursue further education and professional development. Data collected in a research by Nguyen et al. (2020) shows that the poverty and near-poverty rates for the Khmer ethnic community in 2018 were 19% and 14.7% respectively. This indicates that there are still high rates of poverty and near-poverty among the Khmer households.

Most Khmer people are born as followers of Theravada Buddhism, which has dramatic influences on their way of living and behavior. Compassion is easily seen in their characteristics which can be referred to their honesty and peaceful living. They believe that by living kindly and contributing good things to community, they can create happiness and peace to the world (Hai, Thanh & Chau, 2021). With this belief, the Khmer people support others in help their community. The Khmer people also believe in the law of cause and effect. Therefore,

they make efforts to live a good life at the present time with the hope to have a better next life. It can be seen easily through the way they are engaged with religious and community activities such as donating to build pagodas or helping the poor by which they can reach Nirvana in their next life (Van & Long, 2019). Being kind to others is a big part of their culture. Khmer families often give items like rice, cloth, and sticky rice to pagodas. Wealthier Khmer also support to the poor in their villages and neighboring areas. Festivals are a time for bringing people closer together, and strengthening love within the community (Shi, 2016). It can be explained that the way the Khmer people behave in the community is originated from the typical feature of altruism which is from their Theravada Buddhist beliefs.

Despite significant educational progress under Resolution No.29-NQ/TW, Vietnam still faces challenges in foreign language proficiency and teacher quality. The Politburo emphasizes promoting English for global integration. Khmer English teachers in the Mekong Delta encounter additional obstacles due to socio-economic disadvantages, limited professional development, and cultural influences. However, their strong beliefs to Theravada Buddhist principles, which emphasize altruism and community service, may serve as a driving force for them to enter the teaching profession. Corresponding to these factors, this study aims to investigate what motivated the Vietnamese Khmer EFL teachers in the Mekong Delta to come into teaching profession with the focus on how the Khmer sociocultural context affected their intrinsic, altruistic and extrinsic motivations.

The research is conducted to answer the two research questions.

(1) What are intrinsic, altruistic and extrinsic motivations for their English teaching career choice?

(2) How does the sociocultural context shape their motivations?

2. Research overview

Teacher motivation is understood to be the combination of intrinsic and extrinsic reasons that drive individuals to enter and efforts to stay in their teaching careers. According to Williams & Burden (1997), motivation in teaching includes both initial motivation, which reflects the reasons behind the decision to become a teacher, and sustaining motivation, which involves the ongoing effort required to continue teaching. Sinclair (2008, p.37) adds “attraction” to teaching into motivation as he defined teacher motivation is “what attracts individuals to teaching, how long they remain in their initial teacher education courses and subsequently the teaching profession, and the extent to which they engage with their courses and the teaching profession”. Dörnyei & Ushioda (2001, 2011) extend this by pointing out that teacher motivation encompasses the direction,

or why people choose to become a teacher, and the magnitude of human behavior, or how much effort is put forth to continue in the profession. In the present study, the term “teacher motivation” has been adapted from Han & Yin (2016, p.3), it “refers to reasons that emanating from individuals’ intrinsic values to choose to teach and sustaining teaching, and the intensity of teacher motivation which is indicated by effort expended on teaching as influenced by a number of contextual factors”.

When referring to teacher motivation, three common categories of motivation are well-mentioned namely intrinsic, altruistic and extrinsic motivation. Findings across the previous empirical studies consistently highlighted intrinsic and altruistic motivations, such as a passion for teaching, the desire to make a difference in students’ lives, and the opportunity to contribute to society. Extrinsic motivations, including job security, working conditions, and career prospects, were more significant in certain non-Western contexts Fray & Gore (2018). Statistically, the study by Perryman & Calvert (2019) to explore the motivations that lead graduates of UCL’s Institute of Education’s Initial Teacher Education program to enter the teaching profession identified that their motivations for entering the profession were in various forms (i.e. intrinsic, altruistic, and extrinsic) including a desire to work with young people (64%), make a difference (69%), love of subject (50%), inspired by own teachers (38%), to have an intellectual challenge (36%), to be creative (35%).

Intrinsic motivations such as passion for teaching, interest in subject taught, and enjoyment of working with children, consistently emerge as primary motivations of career choice. Many studies employing different theoretical frameworks like the Factors Influencing Teaching Choice model developed by Watt & Richardson (2007), emphasize the correlation between teaching and individuals’ interests and personal satisfaction. Findings of Glutsch & König (2019) indicated that subject interest was perceived to be a highly significant motivational factor by pre-service teachers at a German university who were pursuing qualifications for teaching in lower and upper secondary schools, positively correlating with social motivations, and perceived teaching abilities. Saito (2024) echoed the findings of Glutsch & König (2019) when he investigated the motivations and career aspirations of teacher education students in Japan. Grounded from the FIT - Choice framework, data were collected from 202 undergraduate students enrolled in concurrent degree and teacher-training programs at a four-year university. The findings showed that Japanese teacher education students were highly driven to become teachers due to their desire for teaching and their intrinsic values were enhanced during their educational experiences. Bergmark et al. (2018) found a link between prior positive learning experience to passion for becoming

teaching. Their study analyzed 259 student texts from three Swedish teacher education programs (primary, middle, and upper secondary levels) between 2013 and 2015 showed that the participants believed that their love for teaching had developed through former positive learning experiences and considered former teachers as role models.

Like intrinsic motivations, altruistic motivations such as the desire to contribute to society, enhance social equity, and make young generation better, were also frequently cited in previous empirical research across different cultural contexts (Mukminin et al., 2017; Nesje, Brandmo & Berger, 2017; Tang et al. 2018; Perryman & Calvert, 2019). Mukminin et al. (2017) investigated the motives of EFL student teachers in Indonesia for pursuing teaching as a career by enrolling in a teacher education program. Data were collected from 285 EFL student teachers through questionnaires and from 22 participants via semi-structured interviews at a public university in Jambi, Sumatra. Findings revealed that altruistic motivations such as perceiving teaching as a socially worthwhile job and shaping the future of children, were predominant, followed by intrinsic factors. Similarly, a study conducted in another Asian country confirmed the findings of Mukminin et al. (2017). Htang (2019) investigated the motivations of teacher trainees in Myanmar for choosing teaching as a career, analyzing factors such as gender, prior intentions, satisfaction with career choice, and socio-economic background. The findings indicated that altruistic motivations such as a desire to contribute to society and improve education for underserved communities were the most significant motivators of career choice. Pre-service teachers' altruistic motivation for choosing teaching as a career can be affected by social-cognitive, emotional, and realistic factors. In fact, the study by Li & Guo (2024) revealed that social-cognitive factors such as engagement with social issues had positive impact on altruistic motivation. Emotional influences play a crucial role in shaping teachers' commitment. Additionally, realistic factors, such as family expectations and career preferences, significantly influence teachers' career decisions.

Extrinsic motivations, including job security, salary and more time for family, are important but typically secondary to intrinsic and altruistic motivations. In fact, the level of these motivations varies by region and context. In Western countries, intrinsic and altruistic motivations dominate, driven by a strong force of personal fulfillment and social contribution (Fray & Gore, 2018). Cornali (2018) investigated the motives behind the choice of the teaching profession among Italian pre-primary and primary teacher candidates. The study surveyed 383 third-year students enrolled in the Primary Education Sciences program at the University of Turin. The qualitative interviews emphasized intrinsic motivations, such as a passion for working with children and the personal satisfaction derived

from teaching. Altruistic motives, like contributing to societal well-being, were mentioned less frequently, and extrinsic factors were largely absent from the interview narratives. In contrast, in low and middle income countries, extrinsic motivations often emerge as a more significant role, though intrinsic and altruistic factors are still influential (Htang, 2019).

Contextual and cross cultural perspectives were revealed to have notable differences in teaching motivations. Tang et al. (2018) compared the motivational factors of pre-service student teachers in Hong Kong and Macau. Their findings reported that the participants in the two research sites had different views on extrinsic motivations. In Macau, participants perceived teaching as a stable and respectful profession while those in Hong Kong perceived as less attractive because of high workloads and limited professional opportunities. Watt, Richardson & Smith (2017) found that contextual factors like societal respect for teaching, economic stability, and cultural collectivism also influence motivations. In countries like Turkey and Indonesia, personal utility values (i.e. job security) are more pronounced due to economic conditions, while in regions with highly selective teacher education systems, motivations are more intrinsic and ability-focused. Fray & Gore (2018) stated that altruistic motivation together with intrinsic motivation were much more significant in comparison to extrinsic motivation in certain Western contexts. In fact, a study was conducted by Nesje, Brandmo & Berger (2017) to investigate to what motivated preservice teachers at a single Norwegian university to choose to become teachers. The findings confirmed that intrinsic and altruistic motivations were predominant among Norwegian preservice teachers. Key motivational factors included perceived teaching abilities, intrinsic interest in teaching, and a desire to shape the future of children and adolescents. In the context of England, the findings by Perryman & Calvert (2019) showed that motivations such as a desire to "make a difference" and a passion for working with young people, were key reasons for becoming teachers when conducting survey of 1,200 UCL Institute of Education graduates in London (2011-2015).

Previous researches found that there is intersection of intrinsic, altruistic and extrinsic motivations. Genders are found to be a strong mediator affecting the intersection. Štemberger (2020) conducted a study to determine whether career stages and motivations differ based on gender. Data were collected from 94 secondary school teachers across seven Slovenian regions, all of whom worked in public secondary schools. Findings revealed that female teachers were more intrinsically motivated to choose the teaching profession, emphasizing personal interests, personality traits, and a love of working with children. In contrast, male teachers exhibited higher levels of environmental motivation,

influenced by family background and societal expectations. The study of Štemberger (2020) confirmed the findings of Mukminin et al. (2017) that there were contrasting types of motivation between female and male participants. In their study, Mukminin et al. (2017) found that EFL female student teachers in Indonesia were more likely to cite family-oriented extrinsic motives, while male participants emphasized professional aspirations.

Despite extensive research on motivational factors in teaching career choice, most studies focus on individual influences and employ quantitative methods, often ignoring cultural and contextual aspects that is argued to have much impact teacher motivation. Consequently, more qualitative research that considers social, cultural, and religious contexts are expected to emerge (Heinz, 2015; Han & Yin, 2016). This research aimed to explore how the unique sociocultural characteristics of the Khmer EFL teachers in the Mekong Delta shaped their motivations to choose teaching profession.

Majority of previous empirical studies of motivations of teaching career choice, the FIT-Choice model, developed by Watt & Richardson (2007), was the most frequently used methodological approach (Fray & Gore, 2018). Although the FIT - Choice model is effective in identifying key factors that influence individuals' decisions to pursue teaching, it has been criticized for its limitations in capturing new or emerging factors that may also shape teaching motivation (Fray & Gore, 2018). This research employed Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) as the theoretical framework. The theory proposes the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs (i.e. autonomy referring to the feeling of being in control of one's actions, competence involving the sense of mastery and effectiveness in activities, and relatedness encompassing the desire to connect with others) "as conditions for human flourishing" (Richardson & Watt, 2018, p.43). In fact, individualistic cultures may emphasize autonomy, while collectivist cultures may place greater importance on relatedness (Chirkov et al., 2003). In the context of Khmer EFL teachers, the cultural context of the Khmer community, which values communal relationships and social harmony is argued that relatedness is a critical factor for their teaching career choice. Additionally, it is argued that the cultural characteristics of the Khmer participants (e.g. collectivism) may influence their motivations. The interplay between individual aspirations and communal expectations can shape their career choices, suggesting that motivations are not solely personal but also socially constructed.

3. Research method

3.1. Research design

This research utilized a qualitative approach to investigate the intrinsic, altruistic, and extrinsic factors influencing Vietnamese Khmer teachers

in the Mekong Delta to pursue careers in English teaching. Qualitative research enables the researcher to explore and comprehend the significance individuals or groups attribute to social and human issues (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Instead of collecting numerical values in a quantitative study, qualitative research is defined as "a type of research that explores and provides deeper insights into real-world problems" (Tenny et al., 2023, p. 1). For this research, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the data collection instrument because they allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' intrinsic, altruistic, and extrinsic motivations and this method enabled the researcher to probe participants' responses. Then the data were analyzed by thematic analysis guided by Creswell & Guetterman (2019).

3.2. Research participants

Four Khmer EFL teachers were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews. Snowball sampling technique was used in this research. This technique is considered a type of convenience sampling which aims at identifying participants who possess specific characteristics meeting the sampling criteria (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this research, a few initial participants were selected through convenience sampling and then they referred the researcher to other potential participants that met the same criteria. The process of snowball sampling helped the researcher to save time as the target population (Khmer EFL teachers) was relatively small. Another rationale for using the snowball sampling technique was that it enhanced the likelihood of establishing rapport, as following participants were likely to have some prior connection or relationship with the initial sample, creating a sense of trust and familiarity between the researcher and participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In fact, for the first two participants were introduced by the researcher's friends who were currently teaching at a primary school in Tra Vinh Province and Vinh Long Province. The third participant was introduced by a friend who was taking the same cohort of PhD course with the researcher. The researcher got to know the fourth participant via the introduction of the second participant. As shown in Table 1, there were two female and two male participants in the study who varied in stages of teaching and teaching contexts. All names are pseudonyms. One of them was a novice teacher at a high school and the others were mid-career teachers at primary schools. All of the participants received bachelor degrees in English Education.

3.3. Data collection

The interviews followed a semi-structured format and conducted via Zoom platform, typically lasting around 30 minutes. With the participants' consent, the interviews were recorded. The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese language because using their native language instead of

English language was believed to help them express their thoughts more clearly and thoughtfully. The conversations began by exploring the participants' educational and professional backgrounds before moving to a discussion about their motivations for pursuing a career in teaching.

3.4. Data analysis

Creswell & Guetterman (2019) suggest that the data in qualitative research is analyzed using a “bottom-up approach” (p.237). This type of data analysis initiates with data collection and ends with themes. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying themes or patterns within qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2012). An advantage to using thematic analysis is that it allows the researcher to examine the perspectives of participants and explore unanticipated insights (Nowell et al., 2017). The participants in the current research were identified by a numerical code, and their names were changed in the findings to maintain their anonymity. The final report was then generated based on a thematic analysis of the data.

The data was analyzed based on the guidelines suggested by Strauss & Corbin (1998). There were three stages in the process of data analysis of the interview with the Khmer EFL teachers including open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the open coding, it involved breaking down the data from interviews by analyzing the data line-by-line, identifying concepts, themes and patterns related to intrinsic, altruistic and extrinsic motivations for their teaching career choice. For example, the patterns “*I could do like her in the future*”, “*My English teacher made the lesson understandable*”, “*I recognized that the Khmer pupils in my community were kind of shy*” were recognized in the transcript analysis. In the second stage, the emerging themes were analyzed their connections to develop broader categories or themes. The pattern like “*I could do like her in the future*” was categorized into personal autonomy/interest, and “*I recognized that the Khmer pupils in my community were kind of shy*” was categorized into desire to community contribution. In the final stage, data analysis were refined and the most significant and central themes were selected (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the current research, the patterns “*I could do like her in the future*”, “*My English teacher made the lesson understandable*”, were categorized into personal autonomy/interest

and to bigger theme of intrinsic motivation.

4. Research result

4.1. Intrinsic motivations

The data from the semi-structured interviews with participants showed that all of the Khmer teachers in the current research came to the profession of English with initial interest in the subject though there were some slight differences in the way of their expressions. The participants started to learn English from the secondary school level and found the subject really special from other subjects especially the way their teachers delivered the lessons. All of them admitted that their English teachers contributed greatly to their passion for English. For instance, participant Xuan shared that she was impressed with the way of her teacher as she stated “*My English teacher made the lesson understandable for all pupils with exciting activities instead of much focusing on grammatical points and I believe that I could do like her in the future*” while participant Ha admired the English teacher because she found that her teacher could speak three languages including Khmer, Vietnamese and English. For the two female participants, their interest in English arose when they joined ethnic minority boarding school where they considered their English teachers as model whom they believed to become like in the future. These two male teachers could not explain why they had such impression onto their English teachers.

Another intrinsic motivational factor that contributed to the choice of career of the Khmer participants was their belief into their English language competence. The two male teacher (Thu & Dong) shared that they saw the similarities between English language and their native language which boosted their motivation for choosing teaching English as a career. In fact, participant Thu stated “*Many of English words share the similar way of pronunciation with Khmer language. For example, the English word “She” is pronounced like the Khmer word “si” which means eating*”. Slightly different from the two males, the participant Xuan shared that “*In secondary school, I had a dream to become an English teacher as I believed that I had and aptitude for that job*” and participant Ha did not confirm that she was good at the language but “*I was good enough to pursue my dream job*”.

4.2. Altruistic motivations

Table 1. Demographic information of participants

Participants	Age	Sex	Level of education	Years of teaching	Place of teaching
Xuan	27	Female	Bachelor	3	High school, Tra Vinh province
Ha	35	Female	Bachelor	11	Primary school, Vinh Long province
Thu	41	Male	Bachelor	13	Primary school, Tra Vinh province
Dong	39	Male	Bachelor	15	Primary school, Tra Vinh province

All of the participants shared the same culture as they were followers of Theravada Buddhism and they believed that by living kindly, working hard to change their lives and contributed to the development of their Khmer community. This cultural feature was considered to be an influential factor to their decision to become English teachers but not all of the participants believed that contributing to the betterment of community was their consideration in choosing the teacher career. Teacher Thu admitted that it was altruistic motivation that led him to being an English teacher. He expressed that he used to grow up in a rural area where majority of Khmer children were hard to approach English language which was thought to be very necessary for them to find good jobs. He stated *"Their grandparents and parents are poor farmers and in case that their children will become poor farmers if I do not provide them opportunities to learn English to help them find a job in the future"*. That was one of his considerations when he decided to choose the teaching career. Echoing the statement shared by Thu, the second male participant (teacher Dong) believed that being a teacher was a good way to provide children in his community with opportunities to have a better life and be a helpful citizen. He cited *"I wanted them to learn English to be able to work for tourist agencies in the community or move to work abroad"*. He witnessed many children did not go to school and ended the life with unstable income or jobless so he wanted to educate the children in the community to understand that learning was the best way to live a better life.

In the contrary perspective of belief, the two female participants affirmed that they came to be English teachers not for altruistic motivation to contribute to the community but for potential benefits the job would bring. They admitted that their altruism developed gradually during the period of time they experienced teaching the children. For example, one of the two female participant cited that she recognized the Khmer pupils in her community were kind of shy and could not catch up the lessons as well as those in her previous school. Therefore, she started to offer free English classes at pagodas with the aim to help them improve the language.

4.3. Extrinsic motivations

Through the discussion in the semi-structured interview with the participants, it can be withdrawn that almost all of them did not put priority on financial benefits of being an English teacher when they chose the job. In fact, participant Xuan cited *"I would not have chosen to become an English teacher if I had considered financial benefits that the job brought me"*. She explained that his father even rejected her idea of becoming a teacher but expected her to learn to become a police woman because of much more benefits. Eventually, she found ways to convince him to let her choose the dream job. Participant Thu did not have any idea of the amount of salary he would receive after

graduation from the education program. However, the participants admitted that they considered other types of extrinsic factors when started their teaching journey. Teacher Ha shared that due to her parents' experience, she believed that becoming an English teacher at a primary school would be a comfortable and stable job. She added *"Being an English teacher would help me be more respectful by community and school colleagues. Students and their parents admire me as I could speak Khmer, Vietnamese and English"*. Teacher Dong also considered that being a teacher would be appreciated by the society and he could find alternative jobs in case of not becoming an English teacher. He cited *"If I am an English teacher, it will be easy for me to find a living. In case that I do not teach, I can work as a tour guide to make a living"*.

5. Discussion

Drawing on Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), this section discusses the findings of the study exploring the intrinsic, altruistic and extrinsic motivations of Khmer teachers in the Mekong Delta in choosing English teaching as a career

Intrinsic motivations, such as passion for English subject and interest in teaching which originated from model teachers in the past, were shared among the four participants. This finding aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), particularly the feeling of English competence, the sense of mastery and effectiveness in one's activities. Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) suggests that when individuals feel competent in their skills, they are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation and persist in their profession. The Khmer EFL teachers in this study reported that their initial interest in English subject during their school years was largely inspired by their model teachers. Their admiration for their English teachers shaped their perception of teaching as a desirable and attainable career, reinforcing their feeling of competence in learning the language and find a good job then.

This finding is consistent with Glutsch & König (2019) and Saito (2024), who found that personal interest in a subject was a significant motivational factor for individuals entering the teaching profession. Furthermore, the participants emphasized that the similarities between English and Khmer played a crucial role in enhancing their confidence and motivation to become English teachers. This linguistic connection provided them with an initial sense of mastery, which aligns with Bergmark et al. (2018), who highlighted the role of teacher modeling in fostering intrinsic motivation. By feeling competent in their linguistic abilities, these teachers developed greater self-efficacy in teaching English, further reinforcing their long-term commitment to the profession. Overall, when teachers perceive themselves as skilled and effective in their subject, they are more likely to

develop a sustained passion for their profession, greatly contributing to their retention in the field later then.

In this research, altruistic motivations to contribute to community development were prominently reported among male participants. The commitment of participant Thu to providing English education for rural Khmer children highlights his sense of responsibility for social development. This finding supports previous research by Mukminin et al. (2017), Nesje, Brandmo & Berger (2017), Tang et al. (2018), Htang (2019), Perryman & Calvert (2019), which identified “making a difference” for future generations as a significant altruistic motivation for entering the teaching profession. Moreover, this finding aligns with research in low and middle-income countries, where teaching is often perceived as a means to drive social change and improve community living quality. The research emphasizes the role of Khmer sociocultural characteristics in shaping teacher motivations to become English teachers. Participants believed that being a follower of Theravada Buddhism guided them to choose teaching English as a career by which they practice the principles of compassion and community contribution. In particular, participant Dong was committed to educating children for better job opportunities which reflects the Khmer culture focusing on communal well-being. The study supports Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) in the way that relatedness plays a crucial role in sustaining teachers’ motivation. In this study, by feeling strong connections with their pupils and Khmer communities, Khmer teachers developed a sharp sense of belongings, commitment to the profession.

Interestingly, while male teachers in this study identified altruistic motivations as a strong driving force in their initial decision to join the teaching profession, female teachers reported that this motivation developed progressively over the pathway of their teaching careers. This finding suggests that altruistic motivations might develop through professional contexts, shaped by contexts in Sinclair’s (2008) study. This difference reinforces the findings of Mukminin et al. (2017) and Štemberger (2020), who noted gender differences in career motivations, with men being more likely to enter teaching due to a pre-existing desire to serve the community, whereas women may develop a stronger sense of social contribution over time.

The participants in this research did not consider extrinsic motivations as top criteria when choosing their career. It is contrasting with the findings of Fray & Gore (2018). Fray & Gore found that extrinsic motivation played a more significant role in influencing individuals to pursue teaching job in non-Western countries. However, participant Ha chose teaching because it provided her with stable profession and social respect. This belief could be explained to be shaped by her parents’ experience.

She believed that as a multilingual teacher, people in the community would admire her according to Khmer perspectives. Notably, participants prioritized societal respect and perceived job stability influenced their extrinsic motivations, supporting findings from Tang et al. (2018) in Hong Kong, where cultural attitudes towards teaching was prominent despite financial issues.

6. Conclusion

Drawing on the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), the findings of this study provide significant insights into the motivations behind Khmer EFL teachers’ career choices in the Mekong Delta, emphasizing the interplay among intrinsic, altruistic and extrinsic factors. These findings highlight the importance of understanding cultural values in shaping career motivations and suggest that teacher recruitment and retention strategies should integrate these cultural dimensions to effectively support and motivate more Khmer individuals to pursue and sustain careers in teaching English. It can be concluded that it was their passion and initial interest for teaching and confidence in their linguistics that motivated them to choose the profession. The findings emphasize the model role of model English teachers as they had direct impact on enhancing the love of the English language during their school years. Among the motivations, their altruistic motivations which were rooted from the typical cultural features of Buddhist values played a vital role in their consideration of job prospects. Another significant finding of the study is that male participants especially showed a strong sense of responsibility to use teaching as a tool to better their communities, while female participants developed their altruistic motivations as they witnessed inequalities in their teaching environments. It confirms that gender plays a determining role in affecting individuals to choose a career.

Despite the contribution to the existing literature, the study has two limitations. The sample size is only four participants. A larger sample could provide a more comprehensive understanding of Khmer EFL teacher motivations. Additionally, the exclusive use of semi-structured interviews as the data collection method may limit the rich data collection which may lead to the lack of unidentified factors influencing teacher motivation of career choices. However, this study has practical implications for teacher recruitment and retention policies. Understanding the role of sociocultural and religious values in shaping Khmer teacher motivation can help policymakers and school leaders have proper support for teachers from ethnic minority groups. For example, the support can be provision of professional development opportunities especially for the needs of Khmer teachers to enhance their teaching retention.

For future research, mixed-method approaches, including surveys and longitudinal studies could

be considered to conduct to further explore how teacher motivations evolve over time. Additionally, exploring the motivations of Khmer EFL teachers

in different regions of Vietnam could be conducted to have an insightful understanding of how different sociocultural contexts shape teacher retention.

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ĐỘNG LỰC THÚC ĐẨY NGƯỜI DÂN TỘC KHMER CHỌN NGHỀ GIÁO DẠY TIẾNG ANH

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Bài viết sử dụng Lý thuyết Tự quyết làm khung lý thuyết nhằm phân tích sự tác động của các yếu tố động lực nội tại, động lực vị tha và động lực bên ngoài đến quyết định chọn nghề giáo dạy tiếng Anh của người dân tộc Khmer với sự tập trung phân tích yếu tố văn hóa xã hội của người Khmer. Những kết quả của nghiên cứu này đóng góp vào sự hiểu biết sâu rộng hơn về động lực của giáo viên tại những vùng có đông người dân tộc thiểu số và góp phần vào việc làm giàu thêm tài liệu nghiên cứu về động lực chọn nghề giáo bằng cách nhấn mạnh tầm quan trọng của các yếu tố xã hội, văn hóa và tôn giáo khi xem xét động lực chọn nghề dạy học.

Từ khóa: Chọn nghề dạy tiếng Anh; Động lực; Đồng bằng sông Cửu Long; Người dân tộc Khmer; Việt Nam.