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*Iranian Journal
of
Language Teaching Research*
ORIGINAL ARTICLE



Urmia University

Exploring the Interplay of Migration and Motivation Among Transnational EFL Teachers in Türkiye

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ABSTRACT

Despite extensive research into language teacher motivation, specific experiences of transnational language teachers remain understudied. Therefore, this qualitative study explores the motivations and experiences of transnational EFL teachers in Türkiye using Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2011) model of motivation. Through a thematic analysis of teacher-generated YouTube videos, this study explores how intrinsic factors, socio-contextual influences, temporal dimensions, and negative pressures shape the transnational teachers' decision to migrate to and work in Türkiye. The findings reveal that passion for teaching and contribution to society, lifelong growth, and cultural curiosity are key intrinsic motivators. Past experiences, present circumstances, and future aspirations also play a significant role as the temporal dimension of motivation. Considering socio-contextual factors, supportive communities and positive work environments are among the factors contributing to teachers' motivation to migrate to Türkiye. The study also identifies negative pressures including job insecurity, bureaucracy, discrimination, economic hardship, unorganised school environments, limited career prospects, and political and social climate, as demotivating factors. Despite these challenges, expatriate teachers exhibit resilience, empathy, and a sense of empowerment in navigating their professional journeys. The study underscores the intricate motivational factors experienced by transnational EFL teachers in Türkiye. In doing so, it provides insights into how teacher motivation and migration intersect in today's globalised education sector.

Keywords: EFL teachers; expatriates; motivation; migration; transnational; Türkiye; YouTube

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 10 Mar. 2025

Revised version received: 11 June 2026

Accepted: 20 July 2026

Available online: 31 July 2026

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doi 10.30466/ijltr.2026.57080.3316

Introduction

The word motivation is derived from the Latin word “movere”, meaning to move; as such, the term is a combination of motive and action, and the majority of scholars believe that motivation is the magnitude and direction of human behaviour (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). In other words, motivation is the driving force behind an individual's decision to participate in an activity, the duration of their enthusiasm for the activity, and the level of effort they are willing to exert in pursuing it (Dörnyei, 2001). Although various theories (e.g., Goal-setting theory, Goal-orientation theory, Self-efficacy theory) have tried to shed more light on the nature of motivation, for teachers, it is simply the enthusiasm that they have for their profession (Dörnyei, 2001). Teacher motivation includes reasons for choosing a teaching career, teaching a specific subject, or pursuing professional growth possibilities (Liu, 2020).

Generally, motivation to teach is positively correlated with teachers' level of dedication to the teaching profession (Bruinsma & Jansen, 2010). Additionally, teacher motivation can help teachers deal with difficulties (Wang et al., 2023), which lowers the possibility of teacher attrition (Sinclair, 2008). It also has an impact on engaging teaching-learning environments, improving academic outcomes, forming teachers' professional commitment, and enhancing psychological wellbeing and resilience. Similarly, teacher motivation has been claimed not only to influence teachers' continuous professional development (Kim et al., 2014) but also to boost learner motivation and achievement (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011), fostering a supportive learning environment (Altun & Chicho, 2026).

Although various theories have contributed to understanding motivation, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) believed that teacher motivation should be examined from a different perspective. They identified four motivational dimensions that are considered highly relevant to language teacher motivation:

Intrinsic dimension: From this standpoint, teaching is fuelled chiefly by the internal drive to educate others, share information, and make a societal impact (Dörnyei, 2001). The educational process (i.e., noticing student progress) and the subject taught (e.g., English) are the two sources of intrinsic motivation as observed in various studies (e.g., Sadeghi & Pourbahram, 2024a). Such motivation has been reported to correlate with self-reflection and positive self-evaluation (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014).

Socio-contextual influences: External socio-contextual elements, including micro and macro factors, can influence teacher motivation. Micro elements pertain to smaller-scale issues within a school, while macro factors refer to larger-scale societal influences. While factors such as job stability (security) encourage student instructors to enter the teaching profession, in certain cultures, such as Türkiye (Kılınç et al., 2012); in collectivist contexts, such as Oman, student teachers place a greater emphasis on socio-cultural factors as a significant source of professional motivation (Klassen et al., 2011).

Temporal dimension: From this perspective, teachers follow their profession for a long time. It is believed that they will be more motivated if they have an open-ended career path (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). This temporal approach was later expanded by Kubanyiova (2009), who proposed a model with three constructs: the ideal language teacher self, the ought-to language teacher self, and the feared language teacher self.

Negative influences: Various challenges and stressors may influence teachers (Pourbahram & Sadeghi, 2020). Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) refer to five factors, including stress, restriction of teacher autonomy, insufficient self-efficacy, lack of intellectual challenge, and inadequate career structure, that can influence teachers negatively.

Migration and Transnational Teachers

Migration may be seen as a kind of crisis that compels people to start over, both in terms of finding new employment prospects and learning the language of the host country (Ennerberg & Economou, 2021). Internal or external situations, like unemployment or migration, make people actively compelled to problematise or negotiate their identities, as identity work occurs during these crises (Riach & Loretto, 2009).

Entering a new country's labour market might provide unique difficulties for immigrants with prior job experience in terms of reclaiming and reworking their new professional identities (Ennerberg & Economou, 2021). For instance, acculturation problems, or difficulties adjusting to the new values and customs of the prevailing culture, might be encountered by migrant teachers (Boutakidis et al., 2006). This crisis is observed in various contexts, e.g., Sweden, in which migrant teachers try different ways to adapt to the new situation (Ennerberg & Economou, 2021). Studies have also listed various challenges of expatriate teachers, such as the limited transferability of certificates, prejudice, and the underappreciation of instructors' abilities (Schmidt & Schneider, 2016), differences in learner-teacher relationships (Bigestans, 2015), a need to balance religious beliefs to minimise possible conflicts (Berger et al., 2017), and the devaluation of teachers' expertise (Jönsson & Reich, 2006). Teachers who are forced to flee their homelands due to war, natural disasters, discrimination and similar issues help reshape our understanding of teacher motivation as they struggle to survive. When teachers are displaced for such reasons, not only educational policies, but humanity as a whole need to be redefined (Sadeghi, 2025).

Despite all the challenges, transnational teachers, as individuals who have traversed the boundaries physically and philosophically, retain ties in various nations, languages, and cultures, and interact in transnational spaces (Yazan et al., 2023). In Türkiye's increased international connectedness with the rest of the world, English has taken on a more significant role with the increase in multicultural and multinational interactions in the last decade (Aygün Oğur & Baycan, 2023). Moreover, to be considered for elite positions and for the nation to attain a position in the global economy, English proficiency plays a vital role in Türkiye (Uştuk & Yazan, 2024). Besides, Türkiye's geopolitical prominence has made it an emerging multilingual milieu, which makes it easier to attract transnational teachers from a variety of backgrounds (Arsal, 2019). Considering these goals, numerous teaching opportunities have been created for teachers to move to this country. However, transnational teachers face challenges with teaching English in Türkiye (Uştuk & Yazan, 2024), making it a suitable setting for a more in-depth study of teachers from various dimensions.

Literature review

Motivation has been studied from various dimensions. One set of studies has researched the relationship between teacher motivation and other constructs such as immunity, vision, teacher performance, or a sense of belongingness (e.g., Layek & Koodamara, 2024; Pourbahram & Sadeghi, 2020; Rahmati & Sadeghi, 2021; Sadeghi & Pourbahram, 2026). For instance, teachers' motivation was linked to vision in a study by Rahmati and Sadeghi (2021). The researchers asserted that teachers' comprehensive vision of their future selves, accompanied by fully functioning conditions and agentive actions, sustained their motivation. In a more recent study, motivation was found to influence teacher performance. The study highlighted the significance of having a sense of belonging and satisfaction in sustaining motivation and dedication to one's work (Layek & Koodamara, 2024).

In another group of studies, researchers aimed at identifying (de)motivating factors in teaching (e.g., Pekmezci & Ertaş, 2024; Stężycka & Etherington, 2020). Among the main motivation boosters, Kimura (2014) referred to the love of students, satisfaction with student achievement, and a desire

for Professional Development (PD). Similarly, a mixed-methods study of Polish EFL teachers indicated knowledge sharing, self-vision and fulfilment, work benefits and atmosphere as the motivating elements. However, heavy workload, insufficient payment, limited PD chances and lack of achievement acknowledgement were among the factors demotivating teachers (Stężycka & Etherington, 2020). A case study by Sampson (2016) also manifested the complex and dynamic nature of teacher motivation. While the teacher reported moments of demotivation in his unsuccessful classes, his motivation peaked significantly through student interactions and the following positive feedback, attesting that motivation is relational and continuously being reformed. In Türkiye, Pekmezci and Ertaş (2024) found that the sense of belonging to school led teachers to schools. That is, pre-service teachers with a high sense of belongingness were strongly motivated to work and had a greater inclination to continue their teaching education successfully as well. The warmth, acceptance, and satisfactory conditions created by university professors could assist the pre-service teachers in forming a high sense of belonging to their profession and boosting the self-actualisation of their teaching profession.

So far, two types of studies (i.e., the relationship between motivation and other constructs, and the factors leading to motivation) have been reported. However, the story can be different in contexts other than teachers' homelands, i.e., transnational EFL teachers may have other motivational factors to teach across borders. Therefore, the third group of studies, which are scarce in number, have focused on transnational EFL teachers. For instance, a study on expatriate EFL teachers in South Korea utilised interviews as a data collection tool to understand offshore teacher motivation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Special life pathways, easy employment, and an attractive cultural environment were the three main categories attracting EFL teachers to teach in South Korea (Dos Santos, 2022). In Japan, Filipino teachers felt empowered and enjoyed the economic gains of teaching English; however, they also suffered from non-nativeness and discrimination following that (Balgoo, 2019), as also reported by San Jose and Piquero-Ballescas (2010). Moreover, Filipino EFL teachers in Taiwan also reported economic incentives and better job opportunities as a strong factor leading to their migration. Although the discourse from Filipino teachers indicated numerous challenges faced by this group, such as racial discrimination, the teachers demonstrated resilience and a strong commitment to their jobs (Yeh, 2025).

By focusing on transnational teachers, our inquiry adds to the fascinating avenue of research on transnational teacher motivation and enhances the existing literature by reflecting on the discourse produced by such teachers. Drawing on Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2011) motivational dimensions, the study examines how external socio-contextual factors, intrinsic motivation, temporal dimension, and demotivators shape the experiences of transnational teachers. Hence, the study seeks to answer the following research question:

- 1) What motivational factors influence the migration of EFL teachers to Türkiye?

Materials and Methods

Context

As a country where Eastern and Western cultures blend, Türkiye covers a total size of 780,000 square kilometres, encompassing both Asia and Europe. The official language of the country is Turkish, and English is considered a foreign language. Despite a decrease in the significance of purifying Turkish from other foreign words (mainly Arabic and Persian) over the previous two decades, the Turkish Language Association (Türk Dil Kurumu), established in 1932 as an official organisation, continues to exert influence over the state's language policies. The organisation maintains its language policy and continues its efforts to find suitable words (Çolak, 2004). Since the adoption of a Latin script and the creation of a new Turkish language (Öz Türkçe), it has become

a device for cultural dissemination. The language was used to facilitate the exchange of ideas and promote culture (Çolak, 2004).

According to data from TurkStat, Türkiye received over 393,000 migrants in 2025. Meanwhile, the total population surpassed 85 million as of December 2025. In 2025, Turkmenistan citizens ranked first among foreign nationals arriving in Türkiye with 23.4%. Turkmenistan was followed by Azerbaijan (8.3%), Uzbekistan (6.9%), Egypt (6.1%), and Afghanistan (5.8%) (TÜİK, 2026). Parallel to this demographic growth, Türkiye's institutional infrastructure has expanded; according to the data from the Council of Higher Education (CoHE, 2026), there are 208 higher education institutions in Türkiye. Statistics also show more than 74,000 schools in the country (including upper-secondary, lower-secondary schools, primary schools, and pre-primary schools), indicating a substantial number of teachers involved in the educational system (TÜİK, 2026).

Türkiye, a geographical and cultural bridge between Asia and Europe, has a unique approach to language training. English is taught in public and private schools (called *Kolej*, the Turkish version of College), usually starting in the second grade (at age 8-9) in public schools and much earlier in the private sector. In public schools, the Turkish Ministry of Education prescribes books, but instructors augment them with texts and other resources during 2-4 hours of language teaching every week. There are also private schools, which utilise textbooks comparable to those used in public schools but published by Cambridge or Oxford University Press. Classes may meet 10 to 20 hours a week, depending on the curriculum of the specific school. In addition to some private schools where English is the medium of instruction in all the courses, there are private language institutions in Türkiye that provide private tuition on weekdays or weekends, with no age limits. While some famous private language institutes prefer to utilise their own resources, others use Cambridge or Oxford University Press editions (Sadeghi & Pourbahram, 2024b). In higher education, English continues to be taught in the School of Foreign Languages (SFL), functioning as preparation courses for students aiming to continue their studies at university. At the university level, besides the ELT departments, some programs are also delivered in English (specifically for international students). This study focuses primarily on teachers at the pre-tertiary level, excluding ELT departments and those teaching in the higher education system.

Design and Procedure

Web-based education is gaining momentum and is an effective communication system based on the Internet. Numerous websites provide informal educational settings. Teachers often use YouTube, Instagram, and other social media platforms like WhatsApp as instructional resources. Such digital platforms enable educators to disseminate their knowledge and perspectives on a variety of topics through textual, auditory, visual, animated, and multimedia formats. These materials can be shared publicly on social media networks (Watson, 2020). Platforms such as YouTube enable the widespread distribution of teachers' narratives via self-produced Vlogs, allowing them to effectively communicate their experiences and emotions to others (Raun, 2016). Teachers can share their experiences on YouTube in a way that transcends the limitations of traditional interviews. By sharing personal narratives and tasks other than teaching (grading, preparing, etc.) that are unseen in interviews, YouTube Vlogs can provide a broader picture of teachers' lives. Moreover, as one of the top three platforms for social media, YouTube is worth studying (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). Hence, teacher-generated video files on YouTube are examined in this study.

Adapting Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework for scoping reviews: "identifying research questions, identifying relevant studies, study selection, charting the data, and collating, summarising and reporting the results" (p. 22), we used purposeful sampling to find video files by transnational EFL teachers in Türkiye similar to that of Yeh (2025) in Taiwan. The collected user-generated

content was then analysed using corpus discourse analysis. The videos focused on transnational teachers' stories and experiences of their teaching in Türkiye. The data were collected from the videos produced by different EFL teachers that were all shared publicly. Videos were all recorded in English and lasted between 5 and 38 minutes. The YouTube search lasted from July 2024 to October 2024 and included videos posted in the last few years (2021-2024). Due to the rapid changes in the economic and cultural conditions of Türkiye, we preferred to limit the search to the last few years. The following keywords were used to identify the relevant videos: *English teachers in Türkiye*, *Teaching English in Türkiye*, *EFL teachers in Istanbul*, and *expatriate teachers in Türkiye*. The metadata of the selected videos from the pool of videos on YouTube were charted into Excel. The metadata included the link to the video, the YouTube account name, duration, and the upload date. Initially, we had 76 videos, but after the screening, a total number of 39 videos were included in our study based on our inclusion criteria (i.e., transnational [not Turkish] teachers working in Türkiye, teachers working in public/private schools and institutions, including SFLs, narratives recorded between 2021-2024 [not before that], and narratives about teaching experiences rather than advertising or promotional content). Auto-generated subtitles (transcriptions) available on YouTube were used for analysis (98168 words).

Researcher positionality and ethics

As non-Turkish researchers with limited experience teaching English in Türkiye, we bring a unique perspective to this study. While our outsider status allows us to observe and analyse the teaching practices from a fresh lens, it also limits our understanding of the cultural and historical context that shapes the experiences of language teachers. To mitigate this, we have engaged in ongoing dialogue with Turkish colleagues and have immersed ourselves in the Turkish language and culture. This self-reflection and cross-cultural engagement aims to ensure that our research is grounded in the lived experiences of the teachers and avoids imposing assumptions.

Data Analysis

The auto-generated transcriptions on YouTube were read and checked for possible mistakes. Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2011) framework for teacher motivation was used as a roadmap in the analysis. The video transcripts mostly centred on the reasons influencing teachers' choice to migrate and work in Türkiye. The aim was to detect recurring themes in their discourse about motivation, particularly in their pursuit of economic prospects and personal development.

Thematic analysis of the data was done in various stages. After engaging in immersive reading and re-reading the transcriptions to gain a nuanced comprehension of data depth and breadth, we took notes of initial reflections to provide insights during later stages. We then identified potential topics that emerged naturally from the data. We initiated analysis with an overall deductive framework (following Dörnyei and Ushioda's model). However, further analyses were conducted inductively, and relevant themes and subthemes were identified, fitting the coding scheme. Coding the entire data set systematically and then collating codes into potential themes came next. We then examined the codes and collated data to identify broader patterns of meaning (themes). Following this, the core concepts for each theme were identified. We then ensured that the themes worked in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set.

Findings

Considering the *intrinsic dimension* of motivation, teachers chose Türkiye for teaching due to several personal and internal factors that drive their decisions. The following were the recurring themes, in order of importance, extracted from teachers' discourse.

1. Intrinsic Motivation

1.1 Passion for Teaching and Contribution to Society: Many (almost all) teachers expressed having a genuine love for teaching and a desire to make a positive impact on their students' lives. The opportunity to teach in Türkiye allowed them to fulfil this passion in a new and diverse environment. Teachers were motivated by a desire to contribute to the educational development of students in Türkiye. They felt a sense of purpose in helping students improve their language skills and broaden their horizons.

Extract 1: I think I can be a useful person to society when I teach. I not only love to teach the language, but I also teach my students the way to be a better person because I love my kids in the classroom. I think this is my duty.

1.2 Lifelong Growth: Teaching in a foreign country acts as a catalyst for personal growth. Teachers in our study deliberately pursued challenges that pushed them out of their comfort zones, helping them grow as individuals. This intrinsic desire for self-improvement was the primary driver to teach in Türkiye. Teachers not only had the chance to learn Turkish (as a third language), but they also learned other languages as they had access to lots of tourists as well as multinational students.

Extract 2: I also like to learn many languages from my colleagues, students, and possibly other tourists who are everywhere in the city.

Extract 3: They asked me: Why are you going to learn Turkish as you are working here as an English teacher, so just go with English and then make yourself understood by basic Turkish. But I think when I learn Turkish, I can have a new viewpoint on the world because Turkish people have their own unique look at the world.

The opportunity to implement creative teaching methods and adapt to different learning styles was intrinsically motivating. A number of teachers enjoyed the freedom to innovate and experiment with their teaching approaches in a new context.

Extract 4: I guess I can practice creativity here in my classes, but back home, in China, we were very restricted, and you know, I don't like to be limited.

Teachers derived satisfaction from the challenges and successes of teaching in a different educational system. Overcoming obstacles and adapting their teaching methods provided a sense of accomplishment, boosting teachers' self-confidence and providing a chance for growth.

Extract 5: I have lots of difficulties in my workplace and out there in society, but after I solve them, I feel proud of myself. I am happy that I am strong enough and don't need to rely on my family.

1.3 Cultural Curiosity and Appreciation: Teachers were intrinsically motivated by a desire to learn about and immerse themselves in Turkish culture and history, which was enriching. The chance to experience a different way of life and customs was a strong motivating factor, as Türkiye offers a rich cultural heritage, which attracts teachers interested in experiencing a new culture and lifestyle. The prospect of exploring new places, trying new foods, and meeting new people was intrinsically rewarding.

Extract 6: I like to try Turkish food and see how they drink coffee and tea in their own way, all the time.

2. Temporal Dimension

Considering the *temporal dimension*, teachers chose Türkiye because of several factors related to their past experiences, present circumstances, and future aspirations, as follows:

2.1 Past experiences: Teachers had various previous positive experiences with Türkiye, including travel to touristic places, cultural exchange programs, or interactions with Turkish people through social media. These past experiences created a favourable image of the country, motivating them to seek teaching opportunities there.

Extract 7: Once I travelled to Istanbul for a few days, as soon as I was in the city and saw lots of people from different nationalities, I knew I wanted to live here, and then I decided so.

2.2 Present circumstances

Job Vacancies: Türkiye offers a variety of teaching positions, particularly in private and international schools, without the need for high qualifications and certificates. The demand for English teachers, along with the potential for competitive salaries and benefits, attracted teachers looking for immediate employment. Countless small language centres provide part-time vacancies for people even without proper teaching qualifications. The ease of finding jobs through online platforms and social media, such as Facebook groups and LinkedIn, networking, and distant applications, also played a role in their decision.

Extract 8: Teaching is one of the most common jobs you can find, and Türkiye has actually been one of those countries that received a lot of experts in teaching English or foreign languages like German and Spanish. If you come from English-speaking countries like South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, the UK, America, and Australia, you know that, in Türkiye, they're looking for these people.

Extract 9: One thing which motivated me was the direct online application. Everything got done through the Internet, and I didn't need to travel to Türkiye (during the job application process).

Competitive Salaries and Benefits: While salaries can vary, many private schools offer competitive pay, housing assistance, and benefits such as health insurance, paid holidays, and utilities and transportation costs, making the positions financially attractive. This was repeated a number of times in the videos, although teachers also referred to the worsening economic situation in the last few years.

Extract 10: If you can find a reputable private school with high standards, then payments are really good, lots of bonuses, and sometimes (of course not so often) the contract can be in dollars.

Work-Life Balance: Teachers (mostly in public schools) reported enjoying a good work-life balance, with paid time off during holidays, summer, and breaks, allowing them to travel and explore.

Extract 11: I work in a school. Usually, the classes are from 9 to 5 so I am free after 5 pm and do whatever I want. We also have summer vacations and some holidays for Eid. I think I have enough time to take care of my life.

2.3 Future aspirations: The geographical location of Türkiye allows for easy travel to other European and Middle Eastern countries. Teachers were motivated by the prospect of exploring new places during their time off, which enriched their overall experience and provided a sense of adventure.

Extract 12: One point which was important when I made the decision to move to Istanbul was that the country is between Asia and Europe, and you can have access to both continents very easily, and also there are lots of flights to various foreign cities from Istanbul, so I really like this.

Teachers may have long-term goals related to their careers, such as gaining experience to eventually teach in other countries or pursue higher degrees. Teaching in Türkiye was seen as a stepping stone towards achieving these future aspirations, especially for those teachers who came from neighbouring, less advanced countries. The opportunity to connect with other educators, both local and international, was another motivating factor. Teachers tried to build professional relationships that led to collaboration, enhancing their teaching experiences. This aligned with their future aspirations of advancing their careers, improving their resumes, and potentially opening doors to further opportunities in education.

Extract 13: There are lots of international schools and universities here that I can work in. This way, I can start networking and thinking of possible future destinations for my job.

Extract 14: It is easy to improve here. Usually, there are international training courses in the city, and even for international exams such as IELTS, you can find a seat every day.

In summary, the temporal dimension of motivation highlights how past experiences, current opportunities, and future aspirations collectively influence teachers' motivation.

3. Socio-Contextual Influences

Considering the *socio-contextual* dimension of motivation, teachers chose Türkiye to teach English for several reasons related to its social environment:

3.1 Supportive Community: Many teachers were attracted to the presence of an expatriate community in Türkiye. This community provided social support, networking opportunities, and a sense of belonging, making the transition to living and working in a new country easier and more enjoyable.

Extract 15: It is not easy to live in a country where you are a stranger. Happily, there are lots of teachers here who come from other countries; they have had similar experiences and are living in similar conditions as you, so this is very heart-warming.

3.2 Positive Work Environment: Many teachers reported that Turkish schools, particularly private institutions, foster a positive work environment. Supportive administration, friendly colleagues, and motivated students enhanced job satisfaction and encouraged teachers to choose Türkiye as their teaching destination.

Extract 16: I enjoy the atmosphere in the teachers' office, and colleagues and our school principal are very respectful and helpful. This really helps me a lot.

3.3 Diverse Student Body: Teachers stated that they worked with a diverse group of students, which enhanced their teaching experience. Especially in private universities/institutes, having a body of multicultural students was prevalent. Moreover, working with adult students led to friendships and networking opportunities, enriching the social experience. The opportunity to build meaningful relationships with students was a powerful motivator. Teachers found fulfilment in helping students learn and grow, and the prospect of forming connections with Turkish students was appealing.

Extract 17: In SFL, we have students from various nations. I like my classes when each person has something new to say about their culture. Some students keep in touch even after graduation, like friends.

In summary, the socio-contextual dimension of motivation emphasises the influence of the social environment and community on teachers' decisions to come to Türkiye to teach English.

4. Negative Influences

However, challenges always coexist with the advantages of being a transnational teacher. *Negative influences* on teachers' motivation were identified as follows and are listed in order of importance.

4.1 Job Insecurity (contractual issues & sudden terminations): Some teachers faced job insecurity and often reported problems with their contracts, being augmented in the last few years. The sudden termination of contracts and no guarantee for further extension altered their decision to continue their profession in Türkiye.

Extract 18: Things can change overnight here. In SFL, they asked me and some of my colleagues to leave in a few days, although we had a full-time contract. They also immediately terminated our work permit, which caused a lot of problems.

Extract 19: They illegally forced us to leave our jobs before our contract ended, because they downsized the school, and then they terminated my work permit. Now, I can't stay here. I will be charged a large fee for staying here, and this isn't even my fault. I had paid for a one-year work permit.

4.2 Bureaucracy (complex work permit and administrative procedures): Teachers reported that getting a work permit was complicated, and they had to ensure they met all legal requirements to work in the country. Specifically, in the last few years, the procedure has become more complicated compared to the past, and teachers often felt frustrated when faced with bureaucratic hurdles, such as obtaining/extending work permits. This frustration stemmed from a lack of clarity or support in these areas. The extract from a newly arrived SFL lecturer follows:

Extract 20: I was really disappointed the first month I arrived here. There was lots of paperwork, and I honestly doubted my decision to move to Türkiye. I wasn't sure if I did the right thing to choose it for teaching. The city is too large to go to various places for paperwork every day.

Extract 21: Because we are here and we stay here with our work permits, it is really hard, especially when we want to change schools. Going from this school to that school, we have to consider a lot of different things apart from the salary, like the administration and everything else. We have to consider the fact that if I want to stop working for this organisation, I might have to think about going back home.

4.3 Discrimination and cultural adaptation: Teachers holding passports from non-native English-speaking countries could face discrimination in hiring practices and salary offers, affecting their motivation and sense of value in the workplace. Moreover, building a social network was difficult for transnational teachers, especially if they came from specific cultural backgrounds not favoured by Turkish citizens.

Extract 22: When you are non-native, likely either they want to pay you way less regardless of your qualifications or they are not going to hire you because a lot of times they all care about the passport, the image, and some of many of those teachers are not that qualified but just because they hold the passport innate from a native English-speaking country, they are going to hire them over you.

Extract 23: I heard them talking. The guy told our head, "If you want to hire an English teacher, get one from an English-speaking country, why from a non-English-speaking country?!" They don't understand this is our job, and it is not relevant to our first language.

Adapting to a new culture and educational system was challenging, particularly for those who were not familiar with Turkish customs and practices. A number of teachers needed time to adjust to the new system. Some EFL teachers experienced feelings of isolation, especially if they struggled to build social connections in the new country. This was exacerbated by language barriers and cultural differences.

Extract 24: I can't speak the language well, although I understand it. So, I avoid talking to people, I feel they are not patient enough to listen to me speaking so slowly.

Extract 25: When comparing the education systems, teaching here is actually different from the way I was teaching in Africa, in my country Cameroon. In my country, Cameroon, the school starts at 7 am, but here in Türkiye, not all schools start by 7 am; they usually start later, around 9 a.m. There are also lots of other differences.

4.4 Economic Hardships (Low salaries, inflation, unstable currency): Many teachers reported that salaries are below the minimum wage, especially in private institutions, leading to financial stress and dissatisfaction (considering the current high inflation rate of the country). While some positions offer competitive salaries, others may pay less than expected, especially in smaller towns or less prestigious institutions. Moreover, qualifications are not considered important in the payment system. Likewise, the instability of the Turkish currency affects teachers' financial situations, especially if they are paid in local currency (which is often the case) rather than in more stable currencies like USD.

Extract 26: How come I (a PhD holder) get the same money as my BA holder colleague? It is not fair. They don't care about qualifications.

Extract 27: The inflation rate in Türkiye has skyrocketed, and it has left people in a really different sort of struggle and misery. Our salary is below the minimum wage, and the atmosphere is really frustrating!

Extract 28: Two years ago, \$1 was 17 Turkish liras; now it's about 34. Almost doubled. So, this is so risky, it's better to find a job with a contract in dollars rather than lira. I am thinking of leaving the country, as it is not as good as before.

4.5 Unprofessional Work Environments: Many language institutes/schools were described as unprofessional and unorganised, leading to stress and frustration for teachers who were not accustomed to working under such circumstances. Overnight decisions were reported to be prevalent in various settings. Teachers felt disappointed when their expectations about the teaching environment or the support from schools did not align with reality.

Extract 29: They tend to leave everything to the last minute. They make teachers run to do things in the last five minutes when something is required, so that was a little bit of a difficult thing for me because I'm not used to working under those circumstances, but most of the schools have these. They are a little bit unorganised.

Extract 30: They don't usually let you know what you will be teaching in the new term till 2 days before the semester begins. This is the case in our SFL. I can never plan ahead. This is really annoying.

Teachers often faced last-minute demands and were required to complete tasks quickly, which created a chaotic work environment. These teachers faced high expectations from school administrations and had to manage various responsibilities beyond teaching, such as meetings, administrative tasks, and parent interactions. In some private institutions, they were asked to be in their workplace even if they did not have any classes (i.e., during the summer).

Extract 31: There is a lot of burden on teachers' shoulders, not only teaching but also boring meetings, interaction with parents, monitoring, and sometimes administrative tasks.

Extract 32: If they just see us free for a while, they just try to make us do things which are not needed at all. They would like to see teachers working all the time

Teachers were sometimes pressured to alter students' exam results, creating ethical dilemmas that led to dissatisfaction and moral conflict; this was reported by two teachers in a private institute.

Encountering practices that conflict with their personal or professional ethics, such as being pressured to alter student exam results, led to feelings of moral distress and frustration. Moreover, in private language institutes, teachers were sometimes asked to have Western nicknames to make students believe that teachers are native English speakers/come from Western countries. This created identity conflict for those who did not like this policy.

Extract 33: I left the private institute where I was working because I couldn't take it when the manager asked me to change my student exam result. I didn't like this, and unfortunately, some institutes are like this.

Limited opportunities for teachers to develop professionally or receive support were reported, which hindered teacher motivation to improve their teaching practices.

Extract 34: We usually don't have regular workshops or meetings to discuss the problems or learn something. I would rather work in a place where I can grow and learn something.

The job market varies significantly between major cities and smaller towns, affecting salary and job availability. Although part-time jobs were often available, finding a stable one with a suitable contract was challenging.

Extract 35: It is not easy to find a stable job in reputable places, and other places are just good for temporary working conditions.

Extract 36: Cities like Istanbul are very different from smaller cities. Small cities usually don't have many schools or centres to find teaching jobs.

4.6 Political and Social Climate. Teachers encountered political or social unrest in Türkiye, which created an uncertain environment and affected their sense of safety and stability.

Extract 37: You can just sometimes see a huge number of people protesting on the streets. Seems demonstrations are common. They won't hurt you or endanger your safety, but it's just kind of strange and uncomfortable.

These challenges can vary depending on the individual teacher's circumstances, the specific school environment, and the region of Türkiye in which they are working. They contribute to a challenging work environment that can negatively impact teachers' motivation and overall job satisfaction in Türkiye.

Following such negative demotivators, we also identified a number of features that immunized teachers in the face of various challenges, at least temporarily. We found *resilience, empathy, hopefulness, reflection, community, and empowerment* in response to the multiplicity of drawbacks and complications teachers encounter.

Resilience. Despite the obstacles, many teachers expressed feelings of resilience and determination. They often found ways to adapt and overcome challenges, which led to personal growth and professional development.

Extract 38: I always say immigration is not an easy thing. Challenges are just part of it. So, it is what it is. I keep continuing.

Empathy. Teachers developed a sense of empathy towards their students, especially when they encountered similar challenges in language acquisition and cultural adjustment. This enhanced their teaching approach and fostered a supportive classroom environment.

Hopefulness: Amidst the challenges, there was a sense of hopefulness as teachers worked towards building their careers and making a positive impact on their students' lives. This optimism motivated them to persist despite difficulties.

Extract 39: I hope things get better. It is not ideal here, but possibly still better than the conditions in my own country.

Reflection: Teachers often engaged in self-reflection regarding their experiences, leading to a deeper understanding of their emotions and motivations. This reflective process created a sense of purpose in their teaching journey.

Extract 40: I keep thinking of where I was, where I am now, and where I am going to be in future. I am growing.

Community: In the face of various challenges, being part of a supportive expatriate community evoked feelings of belongingness and solidarity. Sharing experiences with fellow teachers created a sense of mutual support.

Extract 40: I am not alone. I have several friends who are in similar conditions as me. We are all from one country and were working together. And we were dismissed together, so now we are helping each other to solve our problems and find new places to work.

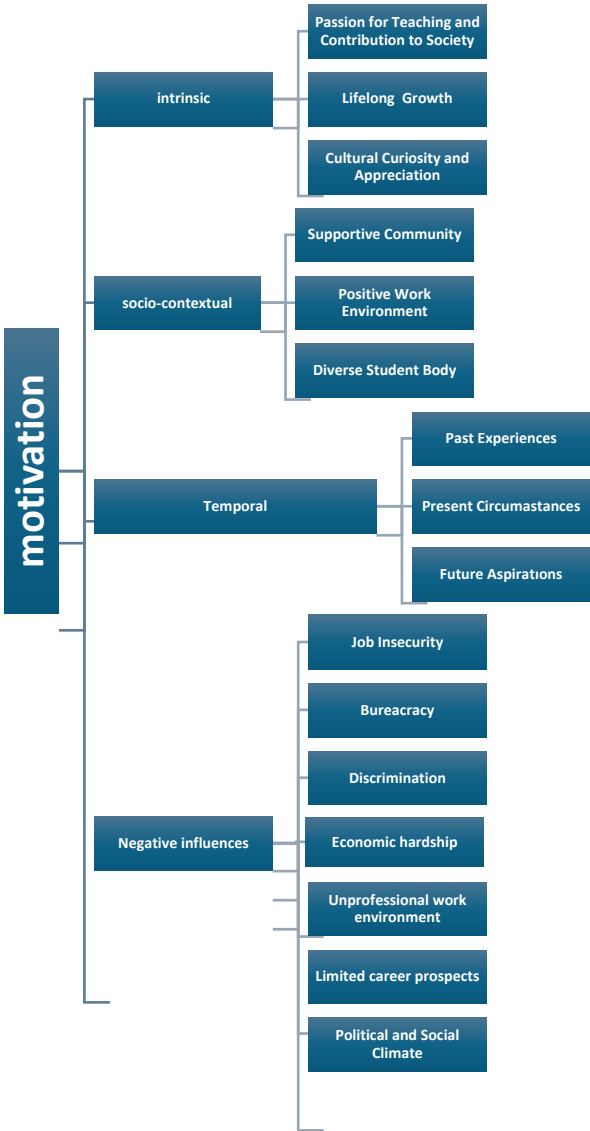
Empowerment: Successfully navigating the challenges of teaching in a different country was accompanied by feelings of empowerment. Teachers often gained confidence in their abilities to adapt and thrive in new environments.

Extract 41: It gives me more self-confidence when I can solve my problems here. I haven't even told my family about the issues that I face here. I always tell them everything is good here.

Overall, the emotions conveyed in the creation of self-perceived obstacles reflect a complex mix of challenges and personal growth experiences that EFL teachers encounter while working in a foreign country. Although the identified challenges of working in Türkiye could build stronger personalities, the continuously deteriorating work conditions can influence teacher motivation substantially, making teachers rethink their decision and leave the country for prospective destinations with better prospects. Figure 1 below summarises all the findings.

Figure 1

Motivational Elements of Expatriate Teachers



Discussion

The study examined the discourse of transnational teachers in Türkiye and categorised the findings according to Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2011) theory of motivation. Accordingly, the transnational EFL teachers in Türkiye enjoyed their passion for teaching and contribution to society, lifelong learning and personal growth, cultural curiosity and appreciation as major boosters of the *intrinsic dimension* of the motivation theory. Numerous studies have highlighted the role of intrinsic motivation, particularly a passion for teaching, as a key driver of teacher engagement (Alemi, et al., 2025; Pourbahram & Sadeghi, 2022). Similarly, Jalilzadeh et al. (2024) reported that EFL expatriates in Türkiye expressed a strong love for their profession, echoing the feelings of our participants. Layek and Koodamara (2024) further corroborate the notion of professional satisfaction as a potent motivator. Consistent with the findings of Eren and Tezel (2010) and Sadeghi and Pourbahram (2024a), our participants expressed a strong sense of motivation stemming from their belief in the transformative impact of their role on both individual learners and the broader society. Social impact is highly recognised in collectivist societies such as Türkiye, and "social utility value" was ranked as the highest reason for teaching among Turkish teachers in Türkiye as well (Kılınc et al., 2012), as recognised by some expatriates in the present study too. The mentioned altruistic value was also identified in a study by Rahmati et al. (2018). While the relationship between motivation and self-development is noteworthy (Nakare et al., 2023), our participants were motivated to work in Türkiye by the opportunity for personal growth. Furthermore, the enticing cultural milieu reported as a motivating factor in South Korea (Dos Santos, 2022) is likewise evident in our study in Türkiye.

Regarding the temporal dimension, teachers' past experiences, present opportunities including job vacancies, competitive salaries, work-life balance, and future aspirations encompassing professional development, travel and exploration opportunities, and career advancements were identified as factors affecting motivation. This study underscores the positive influence of work-life balance on teacher motivation. Sadeghi and Pourbahram (2024b) further validate the favourable work-life balance experienced by transnational teachers in Türkiye. In contrast, several studies have documented the detrimental effects of excessive workload and work-life imbalance on teacher motivation and wellbeing, indicating a difference in various settings (Pourbahram & Sadeghi, 2022; Stężycka & Etherington, 2020). Stężycka and Etherington (2020) found that competitive salaries and various bonuses positively influence teacher motivation. Additionally, ample job opportunities and ease of employment can attract individuals to the teaching profession, as observed in this study. The abundance of job vacancies in various private language centres, including less reputable institutions, facilitated the acquisition of part-time employment. This motivating factor aligns with the findings of Dos Santos (2022) in Korea. Although expatriates in Japan and Taiwan enjoyed substantial economic gains (Balagoa, 2019; Yeh, 2025), in our study, only a few teachers referred to sufficient salaries. As the payment system in various academic settings in Türkiye is not the same, some teachers expressed their satisfaction; however, considering the current economic status of the country, almost an equal number of teachers reported their dissatisfaction, the issue that needs more analysis in specific contexts of public vs private schools, institutes, and SFLs.

The socio-contextual aspect of motivation was primarily nourished by the presence of a supportive community, a positive work environment, and a diverse student body. Healthy relationship patterns among teachers, staff, and learners are reported to enhance teachers' performance and wellbeing (Harding et al., 2019; Hofstadler et al., 2021). Such quality relationships contribute to a positive work environment and are one of the motivational factors reported in our study, in line with previous studies (Jin et al., 2021). This positive atmosphere stemming from a supportive community, connections, and relationships among Turkish expatriates is also highlighted by Jalilzadeh et al. (2024). Overall, considering the dynamic and complex nature of teacher motivation, the intrinsic, temporal, and socio-contextual aspects are all intertwined and influence each other mutually.

Despite numerous benefits and the positive emotional experiences of expatriate teachers, teaching in Türkiye is not without its challenges. Job insecurity, bureaucracy, discrimination, economic hardship, and unprofessional work environments were the main adversities of teaching English in Türkiye. Job insecurity, a significant challenge identified in this study, has also been reported by Jalilzadeh et al. (2024) in the context of Türkiye and other contexts (Mercer et al., 2016). If not addressed, this factor could influence teachers' decisions regarding their continued employment in the country. Work permit requirements and bureaucratic paperwork are other major stressors mentioned in the Turkish context in this study and confirmed by Sadeghi and Pourbahram (2024b) as well.

Unfortunately, many studies report low teacher remuneration worldwide despite all their efforts to improve people's lives (Pourbahram & Sadeghi, 2022), and recognize its negative influence on teacher motivation (Stężycka & Etherington, 2020). The lack of due attention to the profession and qualifications of teachers in the payment system in Türkiye is also recognised by Sahin (2010). The fluctuation in Turkish currency value, as a remnant trace of the pandemic that has damaged the country's economy (Karapinar, 2024), is still evident in people's lives. Previous research has indicated that economic factors can negatively impact teacher well-being and motivation. This financial stress has been documented in studies such as Jin et al. (2021) and Pourbahram and Sadeghi (2020). Moreover, in Türkiye, although people coming from similar cultures may not face cultural issues due to linguistics/cultural similarities between home and workplace (Sadeghi & Pourbahram, 2024b), others expressed some cultural issues to which they were not accustomed. This was noticed by transnational teachers in a study by Greenier and Connor (2024) and Jin et al. (2021) as well, implying that acculturation can be a significant issue for expatriates (Boutakidis et al., 2006). Moreover, discrimination based on nationality, reported by our participants, has also been documented by Keles (2025) in Türkiye. Non-nativeness and discrimination experienced by transnational teachers have been among the concerns in studies by Balgoa (2019), Epps and Moodie (2025), San Jose and Ballescas (2010), and Schmidt and Schneider (2016) in different countries as well.

Another demotivator in the Turkish context was the lack of in-service professional development courses, whereas numerous studies have pinpointed the significant influence of teacher training courses on teacher motivation and performance (Hojeij et al., 2024). While unorganised school environments were found to be frustrating to teachers in our study, the severe impacts of school environment leading to teacher burnout are supported by findings in Shackelton et al. (2019). Moreover, the pressure to meet administrative demands similar to external obligations in Sak's (2024) study, and organisational pressures of conforming to specific policies similar to that of Wong (2026) and high expectations besides identity conflict (as a broader concept for ethical concern) in our study could lead to teacher demotivation in the long run and would reduce teaching quality and enthusiasm.

While Turkish and non-Turkish EFL teachers share some (de)motivating factors, such as love for teaching, supportive community, unorganised school environments, pressure to meet administrative demands, and economic instability, other factors, such as work permit issues and cultural discrimination, may only affect the latter group, thereby impacting their motivation in a different way from that of their Turkish counterparts. In dealing with such uphill battles, the expatriates went through a diverse spectrum of emotions, including resilience, empathy, hopefulness, reflection, community, and empowerment. Sustaining resilience in the face of difficulties is in line with the findings of Xodabande and Karimpour (2025) in the Turkish context.

These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors that either motivate or demotivate expatriate teachers in Türkiye. They look beyond traditional economic explanations and emphasize the importance of personal, social, and cultural factors. Furthermore, the study

emphasises the need to address the adversities related to job security, economic instability, and discrimination to create a more sustainable environment for transnational teachers.

Conclusion

This qualitative study offers a comprehensive understanding of the motivations and experiences of transnational EFL teachers in Türkiye. By applying Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2011) model of motivation, the research reveals a complex interplay of intrinsic factors, socio-contextual influences, temporal dimensions, and negative influences that shape expatriate teachers' decisions to migrate to and teach in Türkiye. While passion for teaching and lifelong growth are key intrinsic motivators, social factors, temporal considerations, and challenges also significantly impact their experiences, signifying the context-specific nature and dynamism of teacher motivation (Kimura, 2014; Sampson, 2016; Steżycka & Etherington, 2020). Findings suggest that transnational teachers are driven by a desire for personal and professional development, cultural exchange, and a sense of purpose. However, they also face challenges such as job insecurity, work permit problems, organisational issues, discrimination, and economic instability. Despite these difficulties, teachers demonstrate resilience and a commitment to their profession. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of teacher motivation and migration in a globalised educational context, offering valuable insights for policymakers, educational institutions, and future research.

Implications

While this study centred on transnational teachers in Türkiye, the identified motivational factors possess a universal resonance, extending beyond this specific context. These findings have implications for schools with diverse student populations/teachers, emphasizing the importance of fostering cultural connections and providing professional growth opportunities to enhance teacher retention. Therefore, while the study's focus is specific, the core motivational factors and the insights gained from analysing their intersection with identity have broad implications for understanding and supporting teachers in diverse contexts, and provide a framework for future research on the intersection of teacher motivation and identity.

The findings can contribute to the development of policies that support the wellbeing and professional development of transnational EFL teachers in Türkiye. As such, changes are essential in the type as well as the legal power of contracts signed by expatriate teachers to prevent the illegal dismissal of teachers, which was recently the case in a certain university (Birgün Gazetesi, 2024). Moreover, policymakers who are continuously upgrading the immigration rules need to reassess the complex procedure of work permits and bureaucratic stages to retain quality teachers in the system. An informal conversation with a dismissed expatriate teacher revealed that he would have to wait at least four months to obtain a new work permit, which made him consider leaving Türkiye to find employment abroad rather than remaining unemployed for months. The payment system needs to be re-evaluated by the responsible agencies as well to ensure a stable teaching workforce.

Institutions need to provide a supportive atmosphere to attract expatriates. Providing free cultural training, language training, and introductions to their education system are only some of the examples. While principals need to ensure job security for the teachers, discrimination and ethical concerns also must reach their minimum in academic settings, and the only differentiating criteria must be the teacher's expertise. By planning every step in time and informing teachers in advance of any possible meetings, duties, and decisions, institutions can guarantee a reduction in turnover rates.

Limitations and Future Studies

The study has several limitations that must be considered while interpreting the findings. First of all, the study used YouTube videos. Participants who choose to create YouTube videos may not be representative of the entire population of expatriate EFL teachers in Türkiye. They may be more outgoing, tech-savvy, or have specific experiences that make them more likely to share their experiences online. This can lead to biased insights. Relying solely on YouTube videos for data limits the opportunity for triangulation, which involves gathering data from multiple sources and perspectives to validate findings. This can make it difficult to establish the reliability and generalisability of the results. Future studies need to employ other data collection tools, such as interviews, as well as teacher journals and diaries. After establishing proper rapport with expat colleagues, informal interviews can delve into more sensitive issues which do not find a chance to be addressed in formal interviews. Also, diaries written not specifically for research purposes can offer rich data on the nuances of teachers' professional lives at a more personal level. Concerning the difference between our findings and those of Dos Santos (2022), we strongly recommend the need for replication of both studies in other contexts, as context can make a huge difference in the experience of expatriates. Moreover, there can be differences in the motivational trends of native and non-native English-speaking expatriate teachers, which can be considered in future research. Furthermore, future studies can compare the motivational trends of expatriate EFL teachers with those of their peers in their homelands in diverse ecological conditions.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Acknowledgement

This research is dedicated to the countless transnational teachers who have left their homelands in pursuit of brighter futures. Their resilience, determination, and contributions to education worldwide are deeply inspiring.

AI-empowered tools have been used to enhance the clarity and fluency of the manuscript.

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