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English as a Foreign Language Teachers' Motivation: An Activity Theory Perspective

Teymour Rahmati
Urmia University, t_rahmatitaleshi@yahoo.com

Karim Sadeghi
Bahçeşehir University, kerimsadeghi@gmail.com

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Abstract

Drawing upon Activity Theory, this mixed-methods study explored L2 teachers' (de)motivation factors, motivation change, and voice in adopting strategies that could motivate L2 teachers. Semi-structured interviews, a motivational timeline diagram, and a researcher-developed scale were used to collect data from 226 in-service L2 teachers. The interview data collected from 15 participants were analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding using MAXQDA Analytics Pro version 12.3. Individual participants' motivational timelines were also carried over into a collective diagram to illustrate motivational trajectories. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data collected from 211 teachers. The findings identified a number of (de)motivation factors and indicated that L2 teachers experienced changes in their motivation due to some primary and secondary level contradictions in their motivational activity systems. Moreover, L2 teachers' commitment to their profession revealed the significant role of teachers' beliefs and agency in resolving those contradictions. The theoretical and practical implications of the study were accordingly discussed.

Keywords

language teacher motivation, motivation factor, demotivation factor, motivation change, activity theory, motivating strategy, exploratory sequential design, qualitative research

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English as a Foreign Language Teachers' Motivation: An Activity Theory Perspective

Teymour Rahmati
Urmia University, Iran

Karim Sadeghi
Bahçeşehir University, Turkey

Drawing upon Activity Theory, this mixed-methods study explored L2 teachers' (de)motivation factors, motivation change, and voice in adopting strategies that could motivate L2 teachers. Semi-structured interviews, a motivational timeline diagram, and a researcher-developed scale were used to collect data from 226 in-service L2 teachers. The interview data collected from 15 participants were analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding using MAXQDA Analytics Pro version 12.3. Individual participants' motivational timelines were also carried over into a collective diagram to illustrate motivational trajectories. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data collected from 211 teachers. The findings identified a number of (de)motivation factors and indicated that L2 teachers experienced changes in their motivation due to some primary and secondary level contradictions in their motivational activity systems. Moreover, L2 teachers' commitment to their profession revealed the significant role of teachers' beliefs and agency in resolving those contradictions. The theoretical and practical implications of the study were accordingly discussed.

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Current realization of the significant influence of English as a Foreign/Second Language (L2) teachers' motivation on their own professional development, and their learners' achievement has led to a proliferation in the volume of research in this area. The recurrent themes in the explorations of L2 teacher motivation include the initial career motives (e.g., Hayes, 2008), factors affecting L2 teachers' motivation (e.g., Kim et al., 2014; Yaghoubinejad et al., 2017), and motivational changes brought about through interaction with teacher education programs and mentors (e.g., Yuan, 2016; Yuan & Zhang, 2017). However, as already observed by Hiver, Kim, and Kim (2018), one of the challenges facing L2 teacher motivation researchers is to explore how established theories could possibly be adopted or adapted to specifically examine language teacher motivation. Another challenge is to develop appropriate scales as a major step toward drawing on the potential of both qualitative and quantitative research strands and enhancing the generalizability value of the relevant findings.

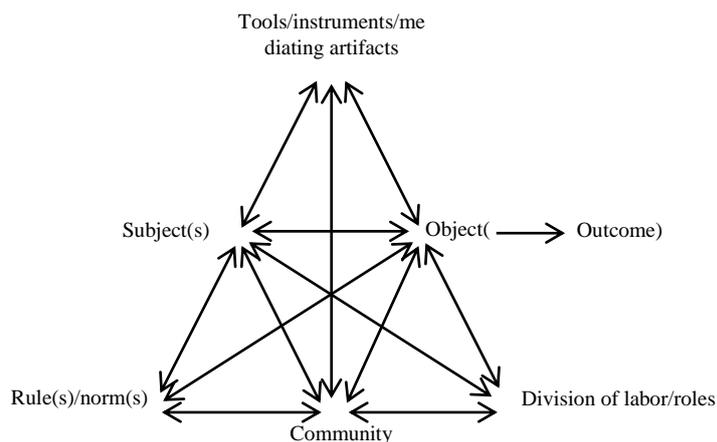
The present mixed-methods study intends to investigate Iranian state sector in-service L2 teachers' motivation from an Activity Theory perspective. The main aim is to contribute to the growing body of the relevant literature since gaining a closer understanding of L2 teacher motivation and demotivation factors is essential to slow down the current astonishing language teacher attrition rate (Farrell, 2012, 2016; Trent, 2017). Moreover, language teacher

motivation research is at a nascent stage (Lee & Yuan, 2014) and arriving at a comprehensive understanding of the construct is contingent upon delineating its representations in different educational settings and investigating the relevant themes through hybrid research methods. Hence, another objective of the paper is to illustrate how qualitative research methods can supplement quantitative ones to better reveal the true nature of events. We believe that qualitative research needs to accompany quantitative studies in better illustrating the internal processes at work in the phenomena under investigation.

Activity Theory

The origins of Activity Theory (AT) are rooted in the concept of Vygotsky project in education (Fleer, 2016). Drawing upon Vygotsky's (1987) basic mediated action triad of "tool," "subject," and "object," Engeström (2001, 2015) developed a triangular model of an activity system which comprised "subject," "tools," "object," "rules," "community," and "division of labor" as the six interrelated components of any activity along with "outcome" as the end result of the interaction among them (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Activity Systems Model



Note. (adapted from Engeström, 2001)

The term "subject," also referred to as agent, actor, or respondent, describes the main participant of an activity while "tools," including physical, psychological, mental, symbolic, and/or virtual (Gedera, 2016), are used to get an anticipated effect. The "object" of an activity system is the main reason or motive for which the activity is carried out. "Rules" denote implicit and explicit regulations that must be observed by the subject and the "community," or co-participants other than the main participant but sharing the same object. Finally, "division of labor" refers to the roles and shared responsibilities among members of the community. Accordingly, an activity can be defined as a purposeful, collaborative, power-relations specified and rule-governed undertaking which is performed by a main agent using appropriate instruments to achieve a desired outcome. Thus, rather than focusing on a single aspect of a phenomenon in a particular point in time, an AT perspective adopts a holistic and dynamic approach by examining personal, social, and contextual factors and the transitions brought about by the interaction among those factors over time.

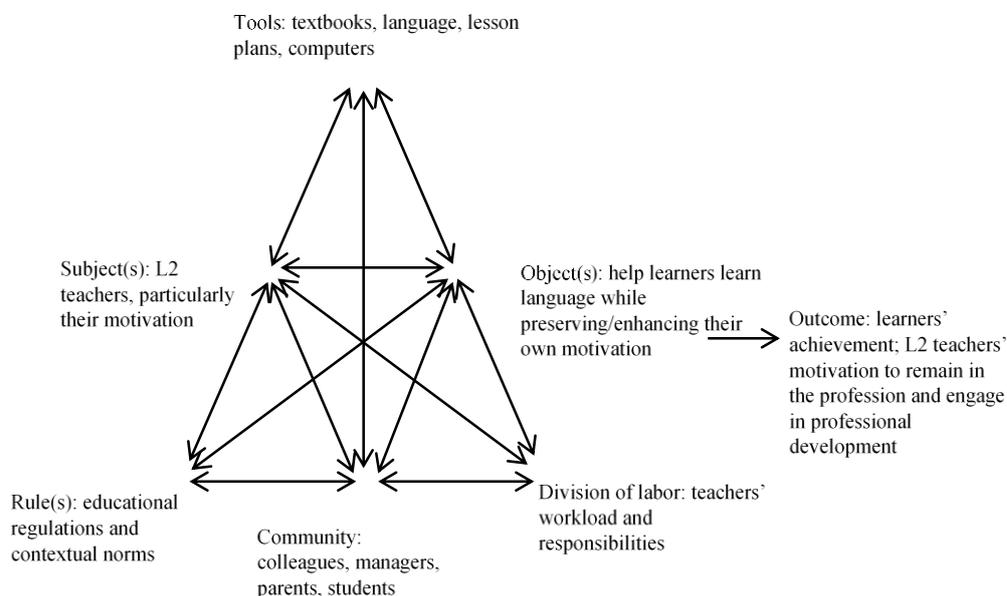
Furthermore, the main potential of AT lies in its power to identify contradictions, which can be of four types. A primary contradiction happens within a specific component

(e.g., subject) while a secondary one occurs between two elements (e.g., subjects and tools). A tertiary contradiction arises as a result of the introduction of a new change (e.g., a modern technology) which may lead to an imbalance. Finally, a quaternary contradiction often occurs in the third-generation activity systems in which a minimum of at least two activity systems (e.g., a teaching and a testing activity systems) operate together. These contradictions can lead to positive changes and developments if they are managed through exercising agency and employing appropriate repair actions (Mochizuki, 2017).

According to Gedera (2016), however, an essential requirement in any AT-informed research is to translate AT terminologies into discipline-specific equivalents. Therefore, the following diagram (Figure 2) shows how the original AT triangular model has been modified to serve the specific purposes of language teacher motivation research.

Figure 2

Language Teacher Motivation Activity Systems Model



AT has lately been able to attract language teacher motivation researchers' interest. This is mainly because the holistic perspective of AT facilitates the identification and categorization of possible contradictions within the elements of a system which, in turn, can result in taking concerted and concentrated repair actions.

Language Teacher Motivation Research

The findings of L2 teacher motivation studies of the last decade indicate that L2 teachers enter the profession with a combination of intrinsic, extrinsic, and altruistic motivation including interest in English and teaching (Wong et al., 2014), material benefits and job security (Kim & Kim, 2015), and contributing to society (Yuan & Zhang, 2017). Concerning motivation change, no general conclusions can be readily drawn due to the context-dependent nature of the very process of change in motivation. Most relevant studies, nevertheless, identify teacher education programs, peer support, professional autonomy, and personal beliefs as influential factors mediating motivation change among L2 teachers (Lee & Yuan, 2014; Yuan & Zhang, 2017). Language teacher motivation and demotivation factors

have also been the subject of extensive investigations, which have mostly reported almost similar findings. A list of the most identified motivating factors includes experience in teaching (Kimura, 2014), students' success and involvement (Tardy & Snyder, 2004), and supportive colleagues (Cowie, 2011). A similar list of demotivating factors contains the opposing ends of the above-mentioned motivating factors along with overcrowded classes with mixed ability students and poor administration (Kim & Kim, 2015), bureaucratic school culture (Crookes, 2009; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013), limited facilities, limited professional development opportunities, and low salary (Yaghoubinejad et al., 2017). Nevertheless, as already pointed out, most L2 teacher motivation studies present a thematic and descriptive account of the phenomena involved and are less bound to theoretical frameworks.

To address this theoretical challenge, Kim and Zhang (2013) exemplified the application of AT to explore language teacher motivation through re-examining the data for Emiko, who was one of the four participants of a study by Kumazawa (2013). Emiko was a highly motivated teacher, but extracurricular workload and students' low proficiency as secondary contradictions of subject-division of labor and subject-community types, respectively, exerted great pressure on her and made her demotivated. Although the study focused on only one teacher, it was among the first attempts to validate AT as a potential framework to study the interrelationship among various elements influencing the dynamics of language teacher motivation.

In another study, Zhang (2014) inspected the demotivation factors and motivation change of four Chinese L2 novice teachers through the lens of AT. Generally, subject-community tensions such as students' misbehavior and object-tools contradictions like lack of facilities were found to have a detrimental influence on the participants' motivation. Similarly, Song and Kim (2016) applied AT to investigate motivation change and demotivation among South Korean L2 teachers using semi-structured interviews and life-stories to collect data from six L2 teachers. In the final report, the researchers focused on two participants, named Anna and Bona who were highly motivated teachers when they initially joined the profession. Later, however, students' lack of interest (subject-community tension) and extra workload (subject-division of labor tension) made Anna change career and become a translator. Bona was offered an independent teaching job in which she had to make decisions about textbooks and course objectives. However, Bona felt she did not have enough experience to carry out this responsibility because in the past she had followed the plans proposed by experienced teachers. Therefore, she experienced a subject-division of labor tension which caused her to feel maladjusted and demotivated.

The present mixed-methods study contributes to the growing body of the relevant research by investigating Iranian state-sector in-service L2 teachers' motivation. To comply with the historical and developmental nature of AT studies, it explores Iranian in-service L2 teachers' initial motives and motivational trajectories as well. It also aims at examining the motivating and demotivating factors which bring about changes in motivation. Moreover, as a new aspect of language teacher motivation research, it attempts to take account of L2 teachers' voice regarding the most appropriate strategies effective in generating and sustaining motivation among language teachers. L2 teachers' voice in motivational strategies has thus far been neglected in language teacher motivation research and this gap is addressed in the present study. Accordingly, the current study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What factors influence L2 teachers' motivation as viewed from the AT perspective?
2. What motivational trajectories do L2 teachers experience throughout their professional career?

3. What strategies, or repair actions in AT terms, do L2 teachers propose to motivate language teachers?

Hopefully, the answers to these questions can help L2 teachers to systematically deal with the myriad professional contradictions in their contexts and assist policy makers in adopting repair actions which result in the reduction of L2 teachers' burnout and attrition rate.

The findings of the present study are of particular significance to the present researchers who, as L2 teachers and teacher trainers, are professionally involved in keeping themselves and their students motivated. We intend to get an image of the interrelated (de)motivation factors and an understanding of the kind of strategies that may assist us in enhancing L2 teachers' ability and willingness to exercise agency in resolving contextual tensions and keeping the flames of their motivation burning against the contradictions of a highly demanding profession.

The Study

Design

The present mixed-methods study employed an exploratory sequential design. According to Creswell and Clark (2011), data collection in an exploratory sequential design begins with initial qualitative phase and proceeds with the development of a quantitative data collection instrument. That is, the development of the questionnaire in exploratory sequential design is informed by the data collected through qualitative procedures. Following validity and reliability investigations, the quantitative scale is, then, administered to research participants. The rationale behind adopting exploratory sequential design was its potential in enhancing the generalizability value of qualitative findings and exploring uncharted constructs for which no quantitative scale has been developed so far.

Context

The present research was set in the context of Iranian state sector educational system where foreign language teaching has witnessed a lot of ups and downs as a result of mainly political shifts in the history of the country (Zarrinabadi & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2018). In the Iranian educational system, the instruction of English as a school subject is formally offered at first grade junior high school (grade 7th) when students are at the age of 12 and continues for six years until the last year of senior high school. All the decisions regarding teaching methods and materials as well as assessment procedures are made centrally by the Ministry of Education. For years, the dominant teaching method was Grammar-Translation Method and English textbooks promoted deductive teaching of grammar, memorization of vocabulary items, and the ability to translate texts from English to Farsi. Traces of a weak version of the Audio-Lingual method were also observable in doing drills, pattern practice, and limited teaching of language functions. No serious consideration was given to teaching listening and speaking skills. Recently, however, the Ministry of Education has promoted the use of a locally developed communicative approach through the introduction of the new *English for Schools* series including *Prospect 1-3* and *Vision 1-3* for junior and senior high schools, respectively. The former package has been intended to facilitate the development of all four language skills with a particular emphasis placed on listening and speaking whereas the latter package aims at developing mainly reading and writing skills. Iranian state sector L2 teachers must teach English textbooks from cover to cover with a weekly allocated time

of 2-4 hours. Every L2 teacher works for 24 hours per week, except those with more than 20 years of experience whose weekly teaching load is reduced to 20 hours.

Participants

The participants of the present study were 226 Iranian public school in-service L2 teachers out of whom 15 (8 male and 7 female) teachers took part in the qualitative phase and the remaining 211 (92 male and 119 female) teachers participated in the quantitative phase of the study. For the qualitative phase, we issued announcements to L2 teachers working at different state schools and explained the purposes of our study to them. From among those who agreed to participate in the study, we chose the most experienced ones (based on years of teaching). For the quantitative phase, we posted the same announcement on L2 teacher groups in social networks and invited them to participate in a study on L2 teachers' motivation. The participants of the qualitative phase were, therefore, drawn through purposive sampling while the participants of the quantitative phase were drawn using convenience sampling technique. The rationale behind the selection of in-service L2 teachers was the need to take account of language teachers' motivation change while the focus on public sector was to control for the variable contextual factors in public and private sectors. There was no need to get any special permission to conduct the present study in our context; however, we reassured the participants that their safety, privacy and the confidentiality of their data would be observed, and they could opt out of the study any time they wished to do so. The participants' demographic information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Participants' Demographics

Groups	Gender (%)		M/A	Degree (%)		Major (%)				Teaching level (%)		MTE	MWTH
	male	female		B.A.	M.A.	TEFL	EL	L	TS	JH	SH		
Qualitative	53.33	46.67	42.33	60	40	53.33	33.34	13.33	0	40	60	22.93	21.73
Quantitative	43.60	56.40	38.66	59.16	40.84	66	14	10	10	50	50	19.1	22.65

Notes. M/A= mean age (years); TEFL= Teaching English as a Foreign Language; EL= English Literature; L= Linguistics; TS= Translation Studies; JH= Junior High-school; SH= Senior High-schools; MTE= Mean Teaching Experience (years); MWTH= Mean Weekly Teaching Hours

Instruments

We collected the qualitative data for the purposes of the current study through semi-structured interviews, and a timeline diagram. The provisional interview protocol included an introduction to the study, a demographic information section, and questions on L2 teachers' motivation, motivation change, and motivation strategies. Examples of the questions included:

- Why/How did you become an English teacher?
- What are the motivating/demotivating factors in your teaching context?
- What strategies do you believe to be effective in motivating L2 teachers?

The preliminary interview protocol was expert viewed by a university faculty member interested in and engaged with research on L2 teacher motivation. Furthermore, prior to actual interview sessions, the whole procedures were piloted through conducting two

interviews with L2 teachers representative of the study participants. We conducted the interviews individually (one teacher at a time) and at the beginning of the data collection stage of the study.

To gain a graphic representation of the participants' motivational trajectories, we designed a timeline diagram in which the vertical line denoted levels of motivation while the horizontal line represented teaching experience. We borrowed the original idea of using a timeline diagram from Song and Kim (2016); however, the design of the timeline diagram used in the current research followed an innovative approach. That is, Microsoft Office Word 2016 Gridlines option was used to divide the vertical line into 3 equal levels of low, mid, and high and the horizontal line into six 5-year intervals. Thus, the whole area of the timeline diagram was divided into equal cells vertically representing one degree in level of motivation while horizontally indicating a year in teaching experience. The use of this innovative design was meant to assist teachers in producing a reasonably accurate recall of the level of their motivation during their career history and collect comparable data on the participants' motivation change. We also asked the participants to provide reasons for moments of ebbs and flows in their motivation on the margins of their timelines. Therefore, the timeline diagram helped us to collect further qualitative data on the history of the participants' motivation changes during their career.

To elicit quantitative data, a researcher-developed questionnaire (Appendix A) was used which was composed of an introduction, a demographic information section, and a main section. The introductory section introduced the study and clarified the participants' rights to voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality. The next section collected the participants' background information on gender, age, level of education, field of study, teaching experience, weekly teaching hours, and level of teaching. The main section of the questionnaire included a total of 32 statement type items ($\alpha = .85$) in Farsi to which the participants responded by choosing one of the five-point Likert-scale options of Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The initial questionnaire consisted of 36 items of which 4 items were deleted based on the results of the scale piloting (skewness = $-.260$, Kurtosis = $.067$, Kolmogorov-Smirnov significance value = $.20$) conducted with a group of 35 L2 teachers representative of the final participants.

The formation of the questionnaire was informed by the interview data and the theoretical underpinnings of AT. More specifically, items 1-9 ($\alpha = .78$) pertained to the subjects component of L2 teachers' motivational activity system including their personal characteristics compatible with L2 teaching and initial motives to join the profession. Items 10-15 ($\alpha = .71$) focused on the motivational force of the object of language teaching while statements 16-18 ($\alpha = .83$) were on the tools component of the AT model. Items 19-23 ($\alpha = .75$) examined the de/motivating impact of rules and items 24-28 ($\alpha = .73$) delved into how community influenced L2 teachers' motivation. Finally, items 29-32 ($\alpha = .71$) focused on the division of labor component of the L2 teachers' motivational activity system.

Procedures

The participants were invited to take part in a study on L2 teacher motivation and were provided with information regarding their rights to voluntary participation and confidential treatment of their data. Semi-structured interviews (conducted in Farsi and audio-recorded using a smartphone) were arranged with those participants who granted their agreement by signing informed consent forms. The interviewer began the interview with obtaining demographic information followed by asking the main interview questions. The shortest and longest interviews took 25':17" and 33':06", respectively (29': 03" on average).

Subsequently, the L2 teachers were provided with the timeline diagram template, written and oral instructions on how to complete the diagram, and a sample of a completed diagram. They could take the timeline diagram home and draw their timelines in their own free time. Immediately after completing the task, the participants notified the interviewer, who, then, collected the timelines. At this stage, we asked the participants to explain the data on their timelines in case they felt the need to do so.

To collect quantitative data, the electronic version of the questionnaire was developed using Google Forms Option and the Internet link to the questionnaire was posted to L2 teacher Telegram groups and refreshed regularly on a weekly basis. To prevent response duplication, manual administration of the questionnaire was avoided to eliminate the possibility of providing paper-and-pencil and electronic responses by the same participant(s). Furthermore, the "Limit to one response" option of the Google Forms was activated to allow each participant to submit only one response. The questionnaire was posted to L2 teacher Telegram groups from around Iran with a total of 1261 members of whom 293 members submitted their responses resulting in a response rate of 23.24%. We stopped collecting quantitative data when the pie chart pertaining to the scale alternatives (Strongly Disagree - Strongly Agree) provided by Google Forms Response option showed almost no change (saturation level) in the areas occupied by each alternative for the individual items on the questionnaire. Out of the total number of 293, responses submitted by L2 teachers working in the private sector and both public and private sectors were excluded from the present study and the ones submitted by 211 public school teachers were selected for final analysis.

To analyze the interview data, we transcribed the recorded audios verbatim and translated them into English. The interview transcripts were, then, imported to MAXQDA Analytics Pro version 12.3. We began data analysis using open coding technique, which constitutes the first level of data analysis and breaks the data into segments of variable length that form categories (Dörnyei, 2007). Operationally, we applied the Wh-questions (who, what, where, when, and how) to explore the data and extract the categorizing codes (Flick, 2018). Open coding of the expressed themes resulted in the emergence of several categories including, for instance, "students' disinterest," "parents' expectations," "lack of facilities," "being admitted to a higher education course," etc. Next, we carried out axial coding in which connections are established among categories in order to integrate them into higher-order categories (Dörnyei, 2007). Practically, we subsumed the categories identified at the open coding stage under the six components and four contradictions of the AT framework. For example, "students' disinterest" and "parents' expectations" were coded as "community" and categorized under the community component of the AT framework. Finally, at the selective coding stage, in which a core category is selected to focus on (Dörnyei, 2007), we organized the findings of the previous two stages under the central themes of (de)motivation, motivation change or trajectory, and motivating strategies. These procedures assisted in the identification of the participants' initial career motives, contradictions in the L2 teachers' motivational activity systems, and the repair strategies they assumed to be effective in resolving those motivational contradictions.

To illustrate changes in the L2 teachers' motivation, the participants' individual motivation timelines were carried over into a collective diagram using Microsoft Office Word 2016 Insert Shapes (scribble) option. These data were gathered to answer the second research question regarding L2 teachers' motivational trajectories as they graphically depicted ups and downs in the participants' motivation during their career. Furthermore, the reasons mentioned for those ups and downs in motivation triangulated the interview data regarding (de)motivation factors as the focus of research question one in the present study. Dividing the motivational timeline diagram area into equal cells representing years of teaching and level of motivation greatly assisted the process of transferring individual timelines into a collective

diagram. To observe rigor, as an essential feature of any qualitative study, we used member checking both at the stage of translating interview transcripts into English and at the coding stage when we came across vague remarks. To ensure dependability, we coded the data separately and resolved the areas of divergence by asking an expert colleague to codify those sections of the data. The quantitative data were also analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (version 16) to obtain descriptive statistics (e.g., mean and standard deviation). The presentation of the findings of the study follows the order of research questions and the results of both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis procedures are organized around the AT framework.

Results

Factors Influencing Motivation

This section presents the results of the study on the motivating and demotivating factors in the Iranian language educational context through the analytic lens of AT. Qualitative data analysis revealed that Iranian public in-service L2 teachers were mostly motivated by their students' success in learning English although they believed that this happened at a basic level and for a small number of learners. A representative remark in this respect was made by interviewee 05, who believed "students' production of the very first English sentences can be really motivating to teachers." A number of other factors including "a teacher's high self-confidence" (interviewee 01), "speaking a foreign language" (interviewee 10), the pleasure of "working with the younger generation" (interviewee 04), and "being related with others" (interviewee 09) were mentioned as motivating factors. Nevertheless, these were not treated as codes since each of them were mentioned by one participant only.

Further analysis of the interview data also identified some demotivating factors in the Iranian public school in-service L2 teachers' motivational activity systems. Concerning the subject component, for instance, interviewees 03 and 14 reflected that, sometimes, inability to answer the questions posed by learners demotivated them.

The mismatch between an L2 teacher's ideal and practical realities was another factor which resulted in L2 teachers' demotivation. The observation in extract 1 was made by interviewee 11 and shared by interviewee 08:

Extract 1: Sometimes I think I did not achieve what I had in my mind or I could not achieve my ideal. Anyway, I do not think I can do so in the future either.

This remark showed that the practical realities of the teaching contexts were not conducive to the realization of L2 teachers' ideals and the resulting disappointment demotivated teachers.

The tools component of the L2 teachers' motivational activity systems in turn suffered some contradictions. For example, at some schools, particularly in rural areas, teachers did not have access to audio-visual technology. Similar problems as stated in extract 2 by interviewee 05 were referred to by two other interviewees:

Extract 2: In most schools, we do not even have a CD player to play audio-visual material. In some schools in the city, we have computers and video projectors, but we share them with other subject teachers.

Lack of access to audio-visual technology was a serious matter concerning the very nature of the latest English textbook series, which emphasized the development of listening and speaking skills in both teaching and assessment procedures.

Additionally, interviewees 07 and 12 believed “teaching materials and methods” were demotivating and interviewee 15 agreed with them on teaching methods only while believing “the recent changes in English textbooks” were helpful.

Low income, unfavorable attitudes toward English in the form of its low weight in the University Entrance Exam, for instance, and lack of enough time (less than four hours per week) to teach English textbooks at schools were the tensions associated with the rules component of the participants’ motivational activity systems. Regarding low income, interviewee 10, who believed that teachers’ salaries were too low, mentioned:

Extract 3: Teachers, regardless of the subject they teach, are demotivated because of their low income.

Interviewees 01 and 13 entertained similar opinions about L2 teachers without making any reference to teachers of other subjects.

Pertaining to negative attitudes toward English, interviewee 15 along with three other interviewees complained:

Extract 4: Our educational policy makers do not have a positive attitude toward English. It is always said that a basic familiarity with English is enough. Is simple familiarity with English enough in the current age of technology?

With respect to limited time to teach English, interviewee 05’s opinion in extract 5 was adopted by three other colleagues:

Extract 5: We do not have enough time to teach English. What can be done in 1 or 2 sessions per week?

The demotivating factors identified in the community component of the L2 teachers’ motivational activity systems included students’ disinterest in learning English, a general lack of success in learning English on the part of the learners, and parents’ high expectations. Closely related to students’ disinterest was their lack of success in learning English. Interviewee 06 reflected:

Extract 6: Teachers feel demotivated when they work hard, but their students are not successful in learning English. After studying English for over six years, most high school students are not able to perform successfully in a conversation in English on an everyday life situation.

The demotivating impact of students’ disinterest was confirmed by interviewees 08, 09, and 12. They attributed students’ disinterest to factors such as the mismatch between education and the job market and non-curricular activities which distracted students’ attention away from their lessons.

Parents’ expectation, identified by interviewee 03, was the last motivational contradiction in the community component:

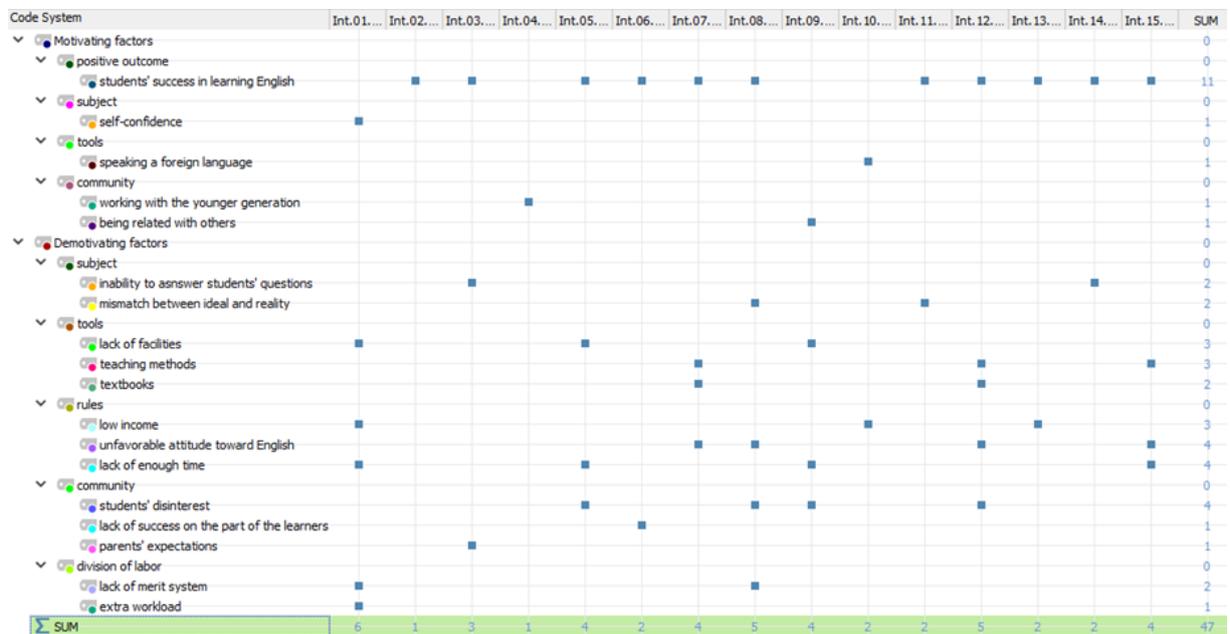
Extract 7: Parents expect school teachers to help their children learn to use English accurately and fluently almost like a native speaker. They expect us to help their children pass the English section of the University Entrance Exam with a score of over 90 percent. This is very difficult to do considering our limitations.

Finally, “lack of a systematic appraisal mechanism” (interviewee 08) and “extra workload” in the form of overstaying at school in order to conduct remedial work with lower-level learners (interviewee 01) were the two tensions found in the division of labor component of the L2 teachers’ motivational activity systems.

Interviewees 02 and 04 were the only two teachers who expressed that they never felt demotivated although they taught at the same context as the other participants.

The qualitative findings presented in this section are summarized in Figure 3 generated using MAXQDA visual tools Code Matrix Browser option. In this figure, the data presented under Code System are first divided into two general categories, namely motivating and demotivating factors. The first level bullet-point items under each category represent the components of an activity system while the second level bullet-point items are the specific instances under each component. The abbreviation Int. stands for the word interviewee followed by the number assigned to every participant of the interview phase. Moreover, the horizontal Sum demonstrates the number of codes expressed by each interviewee while the vertical Sum shows the number of times each subcomponent of the main component of an activity system appeared in the data.

Figure 3
AT Categorization of the L2 Teachers’ Motivating and Demotivating Factors



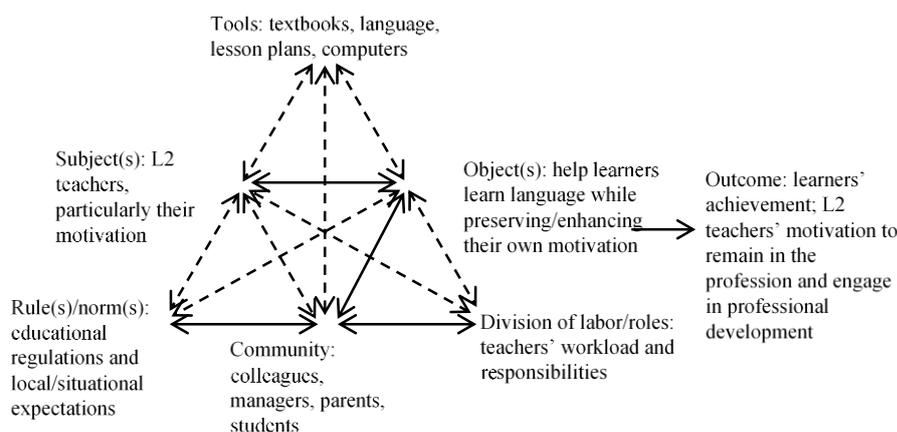
The results of the quantitative data analysis pertaining to (de)motivation factors are presented in Table 2. As shown in table 2, low mean scores on tools, rules, community, and division of labor components confirm the qualitative findings.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics on the Components of L2 Teachers' Motivational Activity Systems

Component	N	Number of items	α	Mean/Total possible score	Standard deviation
Subject	211	9 (1-9)	.78	34.35/45	5.63
Object	211	6 (10-15)	.71	23.85/30	3.16
Tools	211	3 (16-18)	.83	8.32/15	2
Rules	211	5 (19-23)	.75	11.18/25	3.67
Community	211	5 (24-28)	.73	20.20/25	2.14
Division of labor	211	4 (29-32)	.71	13.50/20	2.1

The above findings indicated the existence of some primary and secondary level contradictions in the Iranian public in-service L2 teachers' motivational activity systems. At the primary level, the mismatch between ideals and contextual realities created conflicts within the subject. Secondary level contradictions included subject-tools (inability to answer some learners' questions), tools-object (facilities, methods, and textbooks not appropriate for teaching English), rules-subject (low income), rules-tools (unfavorable attitude toward English), rules-object (the mismatch between the amount of time allocated to the teaching of English as a school subject and the aim of developing all language skills and subskills), community-subject (students' disinterest and parents' high expectations), community-tools (learners' inability to use language), division of labor-object (inappropriate appointments resulting in unhelpful decisions), and division of labor-subject (extra workload). These contradictions are illustrated in Figure 4 using dashes.

Figure 4
Contradictions in the L2 Teachers' Motivational Activity Systems



Despite these contradictions, most L2 teachers were committed to remaining in the profession. Interviewees 02, 03, 04, 06, 07, 09, 11, 12, and 13 did not work in a second job, had not thought about leaving L2 teaching, and would not change their job even if they got the opportunity to do so:

Extract 8: I have never thought about leaving my job and if I were born a second time, I would become an English teacher again (interviewee 04).

Interviewees 01 and 14 both worked in a second job although the former, unlike the latter, did not intend to change profession. Interviewee 05 intended to remain in teaching but

move from L2 teaching to the teaching of mathematics. Interviewee 08 did not have a second job though he had thought about adding another profession to his current L2 teaching without, of course, taking any measures in this respect. Interviewee 10, however, was the least committed L2 teacher among the participants.

Motivation Change

This section reports the findings of the study regarding the changes in motivation experienced by the present L2 teachers. Before the examination of the participants' motivational trajectories; however, an account of their initial motives to join L2 teaching profession is presented first. This is to observe the historical nature of AT studies, which is a prerequisite to investigating change in an activity system.

Helping the younger generation to learn English, as a way of contributing to society, was the most reported initial career motive among the participants. Eight L2 teachers shared the aim expressed in extract 9.

Extract 9: I wanted to pass on my knowledge of English to the younger generation so that they could pass the University Entrance Exam successfully. (interviewee 13)

A previous English teacher was the next major source of encouragement for the participants to become L2 teachers. Six out of 15 participants were inspired by their own English teachers to enter the L2 profession. Other important initial career motives were an interest in communicating in English, a general interest in teaching, a specific interest in becoming an English teacher, the influence of a teacher parent, good income prospects, social prestige, and administrative pressure. Extract 10, below, is an instance of how interviewee 11 became an English teacher due to the pressure from an administrator.

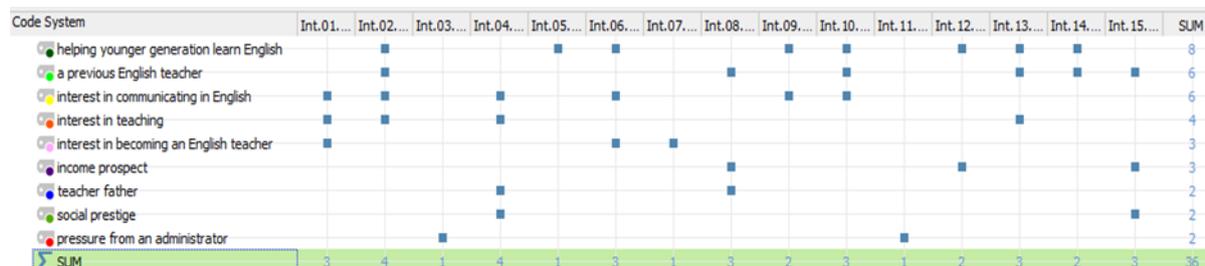
Extract 10: I started teaching as an elementary school teacher, but the head of the Education Department told me that I had to teach English. I was really afraid of the language and my knowledge of English was not good at all. Later, when I started teaching English, I began to learn it myself and to like it at the same time.

A summary of the qualitative findings reported above is presented in Figure 5. As shown in Figure 5, most participants had more than one initial motive to join the L2 profession. In addition to interviewees 03 and 11, who entered L2 teaching as a result of administrative demand, interviewees 05 and 07 initially intended to study math and sociology, respectively, and only later decided to become English teachers. This could possibly explain the unipolar nature of their initial motives.

Relevant quantitative data analysis (items 3-9 on the subject component of L2 teachers' motivational activity system specifically pertaining to initial career motives) further revealed that 73.4% (a proportion of those participants who chose Agree and Strongly Agree) of the participants entered L2 teaching profession due to an interest in communicating in English. Contributing to society was a source of initial career motive among 68.3% of the participants while an intrinsic interest in teaching English was the third reason to choose L2 teaching as a profession with a proportion of 56%. Good income prospects served as a motivational force among 53.7% of the participants followed by choosing teaching as the last resort (21.5%), others' recommendation (14.4%), and parents' influence (11.9%). The qualitative and quantitative results were approximately convergent except on the motivational

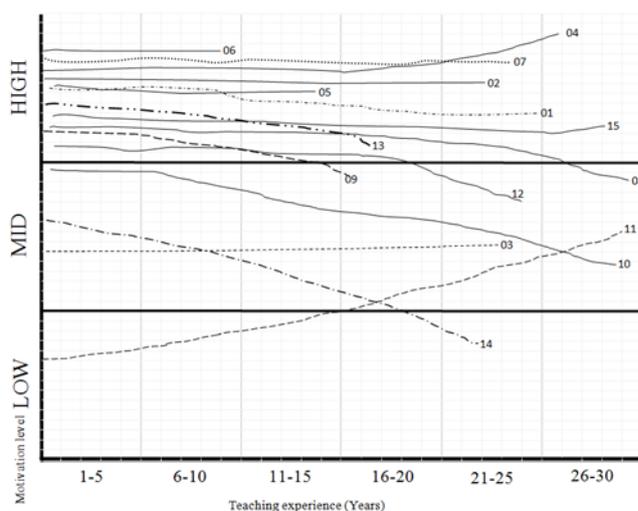
role of a previous teacher. The divergent findings on this item could be ascribed to the nature of the relevant questionnaire item which focused on a whole host of others, including a previous English teacher along with friends and relatives.

Figure 5
L2 Teachers' Initial Motives to Join the L2 Profession



Regarding the level of initial motivation, most participants were highly motivated initially and over two-thirds of them experienced a change in their initial motivation (Figure 6 in which different line styles are used to distinguish individual participants).

Figure 6
L2 Teachers' Motivation Timelines



As shown in Figure 6, interviewees 02, 05, 06, and 07 retained their initial high motivation. Interviewees 03 and 11 enjoyed an increase in their level of motivation as their proficiency in English improved and, in case of interviewee 11, as a result of admission to a master's degree program as well. Admission to a higher-level program also resulted in enhanced motivation in interviewee 04 while the origin of improved motivation in interviewee 15 was rooted in a recent change in English textbooks. However, the level of motivation in the remaining participants decreased due to low income (interviewees 01, 10, and 13), unfavorable attitude toward English (interviewee 08), students' disinterest in learning English (interviewees 09 and 12), and lack of confidence in one's own linguistic proficiency (interviewee 14). The reasons mentioned here for motivation change were the ones jotted down by the participants for fluctuations in their motivational timelines in addition to the motivating and demotivating factors identified in the interview data.

Motivating Strategies

In an attempt to represent L2 teachers' voice in the most effective strategies to generate and sustain motivation among L2 teachers and to resolve the motivational contradictions identified in the current study, the present research took account of repair actions proposed by the participants. A motivating strategy targeted at the L2 teachers' concern with their ability to answer learners' questions, as a subject-tool contradiction at the secondary level, was providing L2 teachers with the opportunity to live-in English-speaking countries for some period during their professional career:

Extract 11: If the government could send English teachers to English speaking countries for six, or at least three, months so that they could live there and actually use English, their proficiency would improve, and they would feel motivated. (interviewee 13)

A similar strategy was proposed by interviewee 11. Interviewee 14 believed that the tension could be resolved by offering "effective in-service training programs."

A strategy directed at the ideal-reality tension within subjects was proposed by interviewee 15:

Extract 12: When talking about motivation, most people think of money. Money is a good short-term incentive, but it would certainly have limited long-term effects. As you know, we have the hierarchy of needs. You know Maslow. The most important need is "self-actualization" [used in English by the interviewee]. One should have the opportunity to achieve their highest potential at personal and social levels.

Concerning the issues with the tools component, the L2 teachers desired the provision of adequate facilities (interviewees 05, 07, 09, and 12), giving teachers the autonomy to use the most appropriate teaching methods based on their own contextual realities (interviewee 06), and involving teachers in materials development (interviewee 12):

Extract 13: One of the most important motivating strategies can be providing schools with appropriate educational technologies and facilities. Another strategy could be involving L2 teachers and incorporating their views in materials development. (interviewee 12)

Regarding the tensions in rules, some L2 teachers (interviewees 01, 08, and 10) believed a pay raise would be an effective motivating strategy:

Extract 14: I think the authorities should do something different from what they did for us. They should increase teachers' salary and offer low-cost housing so that teachers, including L2 teachers, could afford living costs. (interviewee 10)

Moreover, some participants (interviewees 01, 03, 07, and 12) suggested policymakers adopt a proper attitude toward English and respect L2 teachers for what they do:

Extract 15: Respect is very important. English is the language of science and technology and we are English teachers. You may even pay someone less than what they deserve, but they still work for you because you appreciate what they do. (interviewee 01)

Finally, in a direct reference to teachers' agency in resolving motivational contradictions, interviewees 02, 03, and 04 postulated that L2 teachers were the most immediate responsible agents for their own motivation. In a representative remark, interviewee 02 stated:

Extract 16: I think it all depends on teachers. Teachers should find their own way. L2 teachers should be up to date in terms of everything, including linguistic knowledge, professional knowledge, the use of technology, etc.

Descriptive statistics obtained from questionnaire data (items 15, 16, 17, 18, and 21 pertaining to students' success, tools, and rules) also revealed that 93.8% of the participants believed that positive learning outcomes on the part of the students could motivate language teachers. On the other hand, lower agreement proportions of 41.3% and 32.5% on the tools and rules components, respectively, suggested that policy makers take effective measures to resolve contradictions in these two components to enhance L2 teachers' motivation.

Discussion

The present study aimed at investigating Iranian state-sector in-service L2 teachers' motivation. As shown, most of the participants joined L2 profession with a combination of different motives, including the altruistic motivation to serve the younger generation, an intrinsic interest in teaching and communicating in English, and extrinsic sources such as influential others and administrative demands. Furthermore, most L2 teachers began their profession with a high level of motivation, which was retained during the initial three to five years. Later, however, their motivation changed due to contradictions within and between various personal, interpersonal, and contextual components. An instance of a primary contradiction identified in the current research includes the tension within the subject component in terms of achieving their ideals in the face of practical realities. Examples of secondary level contradictions include the ones between L2 teachers (subjects) and language (tool), facilities and the object of teaching a foreign language as well as shortage of allocated time to English studies (rule), and the ensuing contradictions created in the aim (object) of teaching English.

Evidence for the multifaceted nature of initial career motives and motivation change has also been found among L2 teachers in Korea and China by Kim and Kim (2015) and Yuan and Zhang (2017), respectively. These researchers reported that their participants were driven to L2 profession by a combination of intrinsic, extrinsic, and altruistic motives, including interest in teaching and English, job security, and the desire to serve the society. Concerning motivation change, Gao and Xu (2013) observed fluctuations in Chinese rural L2 teachers' commitment to their profession as a result of a mismatch between ideal and contextual realities, while Yuan and Zhang (2017) documented positive change in motivation brought about by professional development, self-efficacy beliefs, and social interactions with significant others. The mismatch between ideal and reality has also been identified as a demotivating factor in the current study. Moreover, self-efficacy beliefs as well as a supportive community have been reported by Song and Kim (2016) to exert a positive influence on L2 teachers' motivation. What distinguishes AT-informed examinations of L2

teachers' motivation from similar non-AT studies, however, is their potential to categorize different motivating and demotivating factors into various personal, interpersonal, and contextual factors in terms of the components of an activity system and, thus, illustrate the dynamic relationship between these factors. This presumably assists in taking repair measures apposite to problematic components.

Another finding of the study is that teachers working in similar contexts go through variable motivational trajectories. The L2 participants of the present study could be divided into those who retained their initially high motivation, L2 teachers whose level of motivation increased due to changes in textbooks and developments in their own professional and linguistic knowledge, and teachers whose motivation declined as a result of contextual contradictions. Variable motivational developments among subjects working in identical contexts are explained through the concepts of teacher beliefs and agency in the AT framework. In fact, Song and Kim (2016) discussed the findings of their study on (de)motivation factors among Korean L2 teachers from an AT perspective around these two concepts. In the present study, such teachers' beliefs and values as serving the younger generation helped them tolerate contextual tensions. Moreover, using such strategies as establishing a good rapport with their learners and being patient, the L2 teachers exercised their agency in resolving contradictions in their motivational activity systems and remained committed to their profession. Therefore, another characteristic of AT is taking account of the significant role played by the subjects of an activity system in managing contextual contradictions, which is evident in the direct reference to teacher agency in repair actions proposed by some L2 teachers. As already cautioned by Song and Kim (2016), however, emphasizing the role of agency is not to be interpreted as ascribing a less significant role to contextual factors. In some of the motivating strategies proposed by the present participants, the role of context has been clearly singled out. Examples include the teachers' call for a positive attitude toward profession, involving L2 teachers in decision-making processes, and a revision of educational rules. These findings lend support to the application of positive psychology in language education (Mercer et al., 2016), which relies on the three concepts of positive emotions (e.g., interest in teaching), positive traits (e.g., patience and self-confidence), and positive institutions (e.g., improved working conditions) to enhance L2 teachers' efficacy.

The limitation of the present study and similar AT-based investigations has been succinctly explained by Song and Kim (2016) in terms of lack of access to real-time dynamic thought processes behind the participants' recollection of ideas. The present researchers also observe AT-informed studies of L2 teachers' motivation are further limited by involving a small number of participants, lack of standard scales, and the difficulty of eliciting historical-developmental account of motivational trajectories through quantitative data collection approaches. Measures were taken in the current study to address these limitations, including collecting data from a rather large number of participants and making use of a researcher-developed questionnaire. Nevertheless, the quantitative data collected in the present study are very limited, and the present questionnaire requires further refining and validation before being applied as a standard AT-informed L2 teachers' motivation scale. Despite its limitations, however, the study has some theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it serves as another example of an AT-informed study illustrating what conducting AT research takes in terms of data collection and analysis procedures. Moreover, it contributes to the growing body of the relevant research by introducing L2 teachers' voice in designing effective motivation enhancement strategies as a new aspect warranting attention. Furthermore, the identification of sudden surges in L2 teachers' motivation during some points in their professional career, and the significant role played by such joined forces as positive emotions and institutions lends support to the Directed Motivational Currents model

(Dörnyei et al., 2016; Henry et al., 2015). Thus, the proposal to apply positive psychology in language education and links AT to other relevant theories.

Practically, identification of demotivation factors and their systematic categorization into motivational contradictions provide stakeholders with a vivid image of the problematic components. This can in turn clarify the involving agents' responsibilities in resolving motivational tensions. This is a substantial issue since high levels of motivation can not only bring about successful learning outcomes but also positively affect teachers' professional learning and growth in both language (Kim et al., 2014) and mainstream education (Durksen et al., 2017).

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Appendix A

Activity Theory Informed L2 Teacher Motivation Scale

No.	Statement	Scales				
		SD	D	N	A	SA
1	I have the qualities of a good English teacher.	SD	D	N	A	SA
2	Teaching English is a career suited to my abilities.	SD	D	N	A	SA
3	I am interested in communicating in English.	SD	D	N	A	SA
4	I have always wanted to be an English teacher.	SD	D	N	A	SA
5	I became an English teacher because of my parents.	SD	D	N	A	SA
6	Others (friends, relatives, previous (English) teacher...) advised me to choose teaching English as my career.	SD	D	N	A	SA
7	I chose teaching as a last-resort career.	SD	D	N	A	SA
8	I became an English teacher to help my society.	SD	D	N	A	SA
9	I became an English teacher because of its good income prospects.	SD	D	N	A	SA
10	Teaching English allows me to influence the next generation.	SD	D	N	A	SA
11	Teaching English allows me to provide social service to the society.	SD	D	N	A	SA
12	Teaching English allows me to reduce social inequalities.	SD	D	N	A	SA
13	Teaching English helps me improve my own knowledge of English.	SD	D	N	A	SA
14	I know my teaching is effective in helping my students to learn English.	SD	D	N	A	SA
15	My students' success in learning English motivates me to continue my job as an English teacher.	SD	D	N	A	SA
16	Using English motivates me.	SD	D	N	A	SA
17	English textbooks are motivating to me as an English teacher.	SD	D	N	A	SA
18	Methods used to teach English motivate me as an English teacher.	SD	D	N	A	SA
19	I am satisfied with professional development opportunities in my job.	SD	D	N	A	SA
20	I am satisfied with my promotion prospect.	SD	D	N	A	SA
21	Educational rules and regulations motivate me to work hard.	SD	D	N	A	SA
22	I am satisfied with my fringe benefits.	SD	D	N	A	SA
23	I am satisfied with my current salary.	SD	D	N	A	SA
24	English teachers enjoy high social respect.	SD	D	N	A	SA
25	Teaching English allows me to be related with others.	SD	D	N	A	SA
26	I have a good relationship with my students.	SD	D	N	A	SA
27	I have a good relationship with my colleagues.	SD	D	N	A	SA
28	I have a good relationship with my managers.	SD	D	N	A	SA
29	I would like to be involved in determining students' learning objectives.	SD	D	N	A	SA
30	My working hours are too long.	SD	D	N	A	SA
31	My colleagues work as much as I do.	SD	D	N	A	SA
32	My colleagues and I share responsibilities as English teachers.	SD	D	N	A	SA

Author Note

Teymour Rahmati has a PhD in Applied Linguistics from Urmia University and is interested in research on teacher education. His recent research has appeared in *Assessing Writing* and *RELC Journal*. Please direct correspondence to t_rahmatitaleshi@yahoo.com.

Karim Sadeghi has a Ph.D. from the University of East Anglia (U.K.) and is a professor of TESOL at Urmia University (Iran) and an adjunct professor at Bahçeşehir University, Turkey. He is the founding editor-in-chief of *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research* (indexed in Web of Science and Scopus) and serves on the editorial board of several national and international journals including *RELC Journal* (SAGE), *Research in Post Compulsory Education* (Routledge), *TESOL Journal* (Wiley), and *Language Testing in Asia* (Springer). He was selected as Iran's top researcher in Humanities and Social Sciences in 2013 and in English Language/Applied Linguistics in 2018. His recent publications have appeared in *RELC Journal*, *System*, *Assessing Writing*, *English Teaching* and *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. Please direct correspondence to kerimsadeghi@gmail.com.

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