

# EXPLORING THE FACTORS BEHIND THE LACK OF INTEREST IN TEACHING AMONG INDONESIAN EFL STUDENT TEACHERS: MOTIVATIONS AND IDENTITIES

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**Abstract:** Teachers' motivations and identities have been popular topics of discussion among researchers. What has been missing in the discussion, though, is the investigation of the motivations and identities of student teachers who studied at an EFL teaching program but were unmotivated to be teachers. Therefore, this study investigated this missing topic in the Acehnese context in Indonesia. Five student teachers participated in this study. To collect the data, a reflective journal and a semi-structured interview were used. Codes were written, and themes about the student teachers' motivations and identities emerged. This study showed three key findings. First, the student teachers uninterested in teaching were affected by extrinsic motivations to study in an EFL teaching program. Second, the student teachers progressively accepted their identities as EFL student teachers and shaped their desired and undesired future career identities. Third, fears and hopes fluctuated along with feelings of uncertainty about their future identities.

**Keywords:** *student teacher; teacher identity; teacher motivation.*

## INTRODUCTION

Teachers are the backbone of a country's educational development. According to Indonesia's Law no. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers, Article 7, Paragraph 1, Indonesian teachers are required to adhere to professional principles including dedications, passions, motivations, idealisms, commitment, and responsibility (Lestari & Afriandhani, 2019). In Indonesia, studying in a teacher education program is the first requirement to be a teacher. Given that student teachers are in the early stages of their career journeys and that the principles of the law are closely linked to their identities and motivations, it would be beneficial to look into a study on the related topics in the Indonesian context.

Teacher motivation is an important subject since it is one of the main reasons why students perform well. Teachers who are motivated can influence students' academic success (Nyakundi, Raburu, & Okwara, 2019). One component of teacher motivation is the desire to become a teacher, but there are other factors as well, such as the desire to follow teaching as a lifetime's career (Dörnyei, 2021). Motivation can influence "what attracts individuals to teaching, how long they remain in their initial teacher education courses and subsequently the teaching profession, and the extent to which they engage with their courses and

the teaching profession" (Sinclair, 2008, p. 80).

In particular, for EFL teachers, the need to understand their motivations has long been articulated (Dörnyei, 2003). There have not been many findings from studies on the motivation of ESL/EFL teachers. The cause for this could be that for almost thirty years, researchers focused on students' motivation since they thought this was the only requirement for success in language learning (Erkaya, 2013). Over a decade, studies on EFL teacher motivation in an international context have revealed several topics, including the motivating elements for university EFL teachers (Tsutsumi, 2014), the motivation of two EFL in-service teachers (Song & Kim, 2016), the factors that affected EFL teachers to enter the teaching profession (Kim & Kim, 2015; Koran, 2015; Richardson & Watt, 2018), and the relationships between teachers' motivation and burnout (Roohani & Dayeri, 2019).

In the Indonesian context in particular, a few studies on EFL teachers' motivation have been conducted. Wati (2011) conducted a study on identifying the success of the Riau province's English teachers' preparation program for elementary school English teachers. Tambunan, Hamied, and Sundayana (2018) looked at teachers' motivation in Binjai, North Sumatera Province in terms of their commitment to and contentment with their job. Meanwhile, Karea (2016) examined the

motivational factors that influenced secondary-trained EFL teachers in Jambi City to study at a secondary EFL teacher education program and work as primary schools' teachers after graduating from the program. Mukminin, Kamil, Muazza, and Haryanto (2017) studied the motives of female Indonesian student teachers in the Jambi context to choose a career as EFL teachers. Lestari and Arfiandhani (2019) investigated Indonesian preservice EFL teachers' career motivation in the Yogyakarta context.

Particularly related to student teachers, since they start their career by being enrolled in a teacher education program, it is imperative to examine their motivation at an early stage as student teachers. According to Stellmacher, ohlemann, pfetsch, and Ittel (2020), little is known about the motivations behind student teachers' career choices, despite the fact that this is an important topic of study.

The primary professional area that should foster student teachers' enthusiasm for learning to teach and help them establish their identities as teachers is teacher education (Gholami, Faraji, Meijer, & Tirri, 2021). However, not all students who enroll in teacher preparation programs choose to pursue a career in teaching (Lestari & Afriandhani, 2019). According to Richardson and Watt (2018), there is a group of teachers who are not motivated to teach because they are not happy with teaching as a career and have low intrinsic motivation. As a result, they are less willing to teach. This type of teacher needs to be investigated more to find out why they chose a teaching career, although they are not interested in teaching.

Motivation is important for student teachers while enrolled in a teaching program. According to Abdullah, Al Ghafri, and Al Yahyai (2019), the lack of motivation becomes a contentious topic in the teaching process. Regardless of how good the educational programs are, a student who is disinterested in learning is unlikely to profit from them.

A further important component in understanding teachers or student teachers is identity. Teacher identity means who teachers are, their beliefs about who they are, and why they want to be teachers. (Garner & Kaplan, 2019). Identity is a dynamic construct in terms of how a teacher sees himself or herself and who a teacher desires to become (Marschall, 2022). Teacher identity starts developing during teachers' preservice education. They shape their pre-teaching identities. Student teachers can develop their pre-teaching identities through reflective activities, which will help them

expand their comprehension of their roles and teaching responsibilities (Tsybulsky & Rozanov, 2019).

Teachers' motivation is closely related to teacher identity. As Flores (2020, p. 2) argues, teacher identity is "how teachers see themselves as teachers including elements related to self-efficacy, motivation, pedagogical views, perspectives on relationships with pupils and colleagues; emotions; commitment; professional values, and beliefs about teaching and learning and about being a teacher". Bullough (1997, p. 21) emphasizes that it is imperative to understand student teachers' perspectives on learning and teaching and themselves because they are the basis of "meaning making" and "decision Making" for student teachers. Teacher identity formation, as defined by Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004), is the process of gaining practical knowledge that is distinguished by an ongoing integration of what is seen to be individually and collectively relevant to teaching. It means that teacher education can be a foundation for student teachers to gain knowledge about teaching, experience new things, face and solve problems, reflect on themselves and their career choices, and reshape their identities.

Over the past 20 years, there has been a surge in scholarly interest in exploring the topic of teacher identity, as identity influences our comprehension of language teaching and learning (Richards, 2021). In the Indonesian context, for example, many investigations have been conducted on EFL teacher identity (see Analisti, 2021; Kamil, 2022; Syahnaz, Ramadhani & Dewi, 2023; Upa & Mbato, 2020; Yumarnamto, 2019) and EFL pre-service teacher identity (see Dewi & Fajri, 2023; Imelwaty, Abrit, & Kemal, 2022; Mbato & Wijaya, 2020; Raharjo & Iswandari, 2019; Tanjung, Musthafa & Wirza, 2021).

Based on the existing literature mentioned above, thus far, no research has focused on the motivations and identities of student teachers studying in an EFL program but they do not wish to be EFL teachers. Most research tends to focus on the motivations and identities of those who are committed to the teaching profession. Therefore, using the specific Acehnese EFL context in Indonesia, this study examined the motivations and identities of the student teachers who were not interested in being EFL teachers but studied in an EFL teaching program.

## **METHOD**

This study used a qualitative data collection method to collect the data from the student

teachers. Five student teachers (1 male and 4 female) from an EFL teaching program at a university in Aceh were included in this study. The rationale behind selecting only five participants was that they could provide the depth of data required for this study. As Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe, and Young (2018) note, in a qualitative study, fewer participants are required when more useful data is gathered from each individual. The participants were purposively chosen based on a criterion: they were the EFL student teachers in an EFL teaching program, yet they did not wish to be teachers in the future.

The data for this study were collected mainly from student teachers' reflective journals and semi-structured interviews. To allow the participants to write reflections of their stories, as suggested by Barkhuizen (2014), the researcher gave the participants a set of questions and blank spaces. Then, based on their personal experiences and reflections, the participants filled in the blanks to create a narrative. Written reflections were employed to collect preliminary data about the participants' reflections on their motivations and identities for choosing an EFL program (see Rahmi, 2023).

To follow up on the narrative they had created in their reflections, the participants were also asked to participate in a semi-structured interview. It is frequently necessary for semi-structured interviews to have an interview guide with questions geared toward achieving the study purpose. It is not intended to be read verbatim or in the same order with each interview; rather, the guide is meant to lend structure and focus to the natural flow of dialogue for each particular interview. An interviewer might resort to the follow-up probing questions that are typically included with the main open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview guide as needed (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). The use of semi-structured interviews is well-known as a useful method to gain data from ideas and lived experiences of participants under study (see Galletta, 2013). From the ideas, a semi-structured interview was beneficial in this study to gain data more deeply related to the research questions. A semi-structured, one-to-one, 30-minute interview with each participant was held to explore the motivations and identities of the student teachers who were not interested in teaching but chose an EFL program to study. A smartphone sound recorder application was used to record the interview.

This study's data was analyzed qualitatively.

The researcher employed thematic analysis (TA) to analyze the data in this study. The researcher followed the six steps mentioned in Braun and Clarke's (2012) thematic analysis process. First, after the data have been fully transcribed, the researcher familiarized herself with the data by reading it several times. Second, developing preliminary codes, such as giving an example of a code that could be categorized into focused idea. Third, the process involved navigating from codes to themes in a quest for themes. In addition, it involved reviewing the coded data to find instances where the codes overlap. Fourth, researcher reviewed possible themes, which allowed the themes to emerge with numerous considerations that aligned with the current study by adding or removing unnecessary material. Fifth, following a review of potential themes, researcher selected the central concepts to be covered in this study. Sixth, researcher wrote the report of the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Motivation for entering teaching*

#### *Having no other choices*

The participants all contended that their lack of other options was what drove them to enroll in the EFL teaching program. Pocut, Inong, and Putroe acknowledged that their failure on entrance exams prevented them from successfully enrolling in their preferred higher degree program. The three extracts below show their comments.

I attempted the entrance exam for the medical faculty three times in three separate years, but I was not successful. That indicates being a doctor is not my destiny (Pocut, Interview).

I decided to enroll in an EFL teaching program because I failed the entrance exam for a psychology faculty position. My path, I believe, was the EFL teaching program (Inong, Student Teacher Journal).

My fate prevented me from enrolling in the medical faculty because I failed the entrance exams both times. In the end, I decided to pursue my higher education through an EFL teaching program (Putroe, Student Teacher Journal).

As demonstrated in the next two extracts, Agam and Meutia claimed that their family circumstances compelled them to enroll in the EFL teaching program. Given his father's health issues, Agam thought the EFL program was the best option for him, and Meutia followed her mother's wishes to enroll in the program.

My father had a stroke, which had a serious impact on him. The financial situation of our family was also badly impacted by his illness. Studying in an EFL teaching program was the best option available at the time. I could visit my father whenever I wanted because the university is near my hometown (Agam, Student Teacher Journal).

I wanted to study at an economic faculty, specifically in the management program. My mother disagreed, though. In the end, I selected an EFL teaching program that honored my mother's requests (Meutia, Student Teacher Journal).

According to the findings, the participants' decisions to enroll in the EFL teaching program were influenced by both personal and family issues.

Based on the above findings, it can be concluded that the participants' motivations for enrolling in the EFL teaching program were to avoid the negative effects of not attending any universities and running afoul of their parents. This motivation can be categorized as extrinsic motivation, which means "behaviors done for reasons other than their inherent satisfactions" (Ryan & Deci, 2020, p. 2).

#### *Stepping stone for future career dream*

Every participant acknowledged that their academic journey did not end with the EFL program. They saw their studies in the program as a stepping stone toward their master's degree, the next rung on the educational ladder. The extracts below include the specifics of their remarks.

English is closely related to the profession of public relations, which is what I want to do. Since I hope to study overseas, English is also important to me (Meutia, Interview).

I was inspired to enroll in University X's EFL teaching program because I observed a lot of its graduates going on to pursue master's and doctoral degrees abroad. I want to continue my master's degree abroad (Putroe, Student Teacher Journal).

My second option was to enroll in University X's EFL teaching program. My goal is to graduate early and without difficulty, so that I can get ready to pursue a master's degree (Agam, Student Teacher Journal).

Because I've always wanted to travel and study abroad, I enrolled in an EFL teaching program. It

can be fulfilled by mastering English (Pocut, Teacher Journal).

In order to fulfill my dream of studying at a master's program overseas, I will need to work hard (Inong, Interview).

The participants' motivation for selecting the EFL program was not the teaching itself but rather English, which they saw as a component that would support their aspirations to pursue master's programs at foreign universities.

The above findings suggested that following EFL teaching program completion, the participants would pursue a master's degree. This motivation can be defined as extrinsic motivation as well. That being said, the master's degree represented the external goal that the student teachers in the EFL teaching program were trying to achieve (see Ryan & Deci, 2020).

This study's findings showed only extrinsic motivations affected the student teachers' decision to study at an EFL teaching program: having no other choices and the EFL teaching program as a stepping stone for master's studies. Previous studies, however, revealed that intrinsic and altruistic motivations also influenced student teachers' decisions to study at an EFL program (see Lestari & Arfiandhani, 2019; Lomi & Mbato, 2021; Mukminin et al., 2017).

#### *EFL teacher is not future's desired identity*

##### *Impatient and incompetent to be teachers*

The student teachers believed they lacked the necessary skills to work as teachers. When describing themselves, Inong, Agam, and Putroe thought of themselves as impatient teachers, while Pocut thought of herself as an inept teacher. Their opinions are reflected in the extracts that follow.

Teachers need to have patience. I don't have much patience (Inong, Student Teacher Journal).

My patience is as flimsy as tissue. I will become irritated if I am teaching students and they are unable to comprehend the material (Agam, Student Teacher Journal).

If I become a teacher, I doubt I'll have patience. I can't even begin to imagine how difficult it must be for teachers to instruct 36 students in multiple classes (Putroe, Student Teacher Journal).

I am not confident enough with the knowledge I have. I don't think I could teach as competently as I could if asked to (Pocut, Interview).

The information above demonstrated how the student teachers' ineptitude was connected to their interactions with students.

### *Common profession*

After living with most of her family members who were teachers, Meutia was likewise uninspired to become a teacher. Here is a detailed explanation of the extract.

The majority of my family is in the teaching profession, and my family even owns a private school. I tried to do something else because I was not interested in teaching for that reason (Meutia, Interview).

The findings showed that Meutia had no intention of teaching because she was too familiar with the field and thought that switching to a different career.

The findings from the “impatient and incompetent teachers” and “common profession” themes suggest that the student teachers defined themselves in relation to others, including students and family. These findings are in consonance with Fisher’s et al. (2020) study, which claims that social context and interpersonal interactions play a mediating role in the construction of an individual's identity.

### *Low income profession*

By reflecting on their identities as the son and daughters of the Indonesian teachers, the participants were unmotivated to be teachers after they saw their parents working as teachers and paying a low salary. The details are below.

Being the son of an Indonesian teacher, I witnessed firsthand how difficult it was to be a teacher! My mother was overworked, and her salary was not worth it (Agam, Student Teacher Journal).

My mother is a teacher. The pay for teachers is extremely low in Indonesia. Thus, my decision to not become a teacher was primarily motivated by financial considerations (Putroe, Student Teacher Journal).

My father was a biology teacher. Based on his work experiences, I could conclude that teaching is a difficult profession and teachers have low pay (Inong, Student Teacher Journal).

The low salary aspect, which demotivated the participants to be teachers, corresponds with Syamananda’s (2017) research, which revealed

that low salary was the demotivating factor for L2 teachers working at a university in Thailand.

### *Confirmed identity*

The student teachers had accepted who they were—EFL student teachers—despite the fact that their limited options forced them to enroll in the teaching program.

I have accepted that I am an EFL teacher student. My lecturers, who completed the EFL teaching program and were accepted into international universities, were the factors that affected my acceptance. This indicates that alumni from this department are eligible to pursue studies overseas. I could study abroad too, if that was possible for them (Agam, Interview).

I used to be hesitant to respond that I was enrolled in an EFL program when people asked where I studied. Nevertheless, I'm happy to be an EFL student these days. The EFL teaching program is awesome, in my opinion (Inong, Interview).

I have become more confident after completing several semesters of study in the EFL teaching program. I was unhappy when the study started. But after getting to know some amazing lecturers, I believed they would be able to help me fulfill my goal of studying overseas (Pocut, Interview).

I have no regrets about enrolling in this EFL teaching program. Of course, there is some dissatisfaction because my primary goal was to enroll in a management program. Studying overseas was always one of my dreams. Getting good grades here is necessary to fulfill that dream (Meutia, Interview).

Despite my initial desire to discontinue the program of study, I am currently content with my status as an EFL teacher student. My studies now matter to me (Putroe, Interview).

According to the excerpts above, the student teachers' acceptance of their identities as EFL students was influenced by two main factors: they thought the program was amazing and studying abroad would help them advance their careers in the future.

### *Other professions as desired identities*

Although the student teachers had accepted their identities as EFL student teachers, they still did not desire teachers as their future identities. Their ideal

## **Rahmi Rahmi**

*Exploring the factors behind the lack of interest in teaching among Indonesian EFL student teachers:*

### *Motivations and identities*

careers would have involved tourism, culture, international relations, translation, and public relations rather than teaching. Their remarks are displayed in the extracts below.

I'm still not sure which of my two dream careers to pursue. First, I want to work in the tourism and cultural industries. My second career goal is to become a lecturer. I would like to pursue my master's degree further, if that is possible. Teaching is not something I will turn down; in fact, I enjoy it. However, I refuse to teach students younger than eighteen (Inong, Student Teacher Journal).

I want to work as a PR consultant, so after I graduate, I want to pursue a master's degree in public relations. My goal is to become a PR consultant because I enjoy interacting with a wide range of people (Meutia, Interview).

I'm interested in becoming a translator after studying media translation. In the future, I also want to work for an international organization as an intercultural consultant (Putroe, Student Teacher Journal).

I would like to work in the tourism and translation sectors (Pocut, Interview).

Working as a diplomat abroad and for a global institution like the UN is my dream job. I have a passion for international business as well. (Agam, Student Teacher Journal).

It's interesting to note that Inong gave careful thought to a future in teaching, as evidenced by the data above. But rather than becoming a teacher at a school, she decided that her future identity would be a lecturer at a university.

The findings described in the themes "confirmed identities" and "other professions as desired identities" prove Olsen and Buchanan's (2017) claim that student teacher identities are dynamic; they integrate past, present, and future to understand their professional lives. In the past, they did not expect to enter the EFL teaching program; in the present, they had accepted their identities as student teachers; in the future, however, they hoped they could construct their professional identities not to be teachers.

### *Uncertainty of future identities*

#### *Fears*

Concerns about their future identities and careers plagued all five of the student teachers in different ways. Being the only son and daughter in their

family, Inong and Agam feared that pursuing higher education would present obstacles. Agam was also worried that he would fail his master's program. Some extracts from their comments are provided below.

I fear I will encounter obstacles in my career pursuits because I am the only female child in my family. My family does not encourage female children to pursue higher education. However, I disagree with that idea. It is unfair that I cannot pursue a career simply because I am a woman (Inong, Interview).

I'm worried that I won't be awarded a scholarship to pursue my master's degree abroad. Then, since my father has been ill, I replace his role in my family since I am the only son in my family. I am worried that if I study abroad and spend two years away from home, what will happen to my family? (Agam, Interview)

Putroe and Pocut, meanwhile, were afraid they might not get a chance to work at the job they wanted. The excerpts that follow provide more information.

I'm quite concerned about the fact that there are fewer job openings than graduates overall. I am afraid I will not be qualified enough when I apply for a job in the future (Putroe, Interview).

Regarding where I want to work, I have a lot of ideas. In the future, I fear I will not be able to secure any of my dream jobs (Pocut, Interview).

Furthermore, fear for Meutia was having a future identity as a teacher. She argued,

Teaching is what I'm afraid of and sad about. I am not a teacher yet, though. I still have time to work toward becoming a public relations consultant (Meutia, Interview).

The results demonstrate that Meutia made a concerted effort to pursue her ideal career in order to try get over her fear of becoming a teacher.

### *Hopes*

All participants hoped to pursue their master's degrees abroad. The following extracts include their comments.

I take my education very seriously because I hope to continue my education overseas, even though I'm not sure what I want to do with my life yet (Inong, Interview).

I have such high expectations for myself. I would like to continue my studies at Harvard University. I see myself working in the Indonesian embassy in Washington, DC, as a diplomat in the future (Agam, Interview).

I hope I can continue my master's degree overseas. Since I now have a network of people in the cultural field, I think I will work in that field. I see myself working for a multinational corporation and always dressing nicely in the future. Due to my work in the intercultural field, which involves relationships with other nations, I lead a busy life (Putroe, Interview).

I want to continue my study of literature in Canada because I want to be a writer. If I cannot be a writer, that is okay. I also hope I can be a motivator for children in Aceh (Pocut, Interview).

I'm confident I can pursue my goal of earning a master's degree in management and communication media overseas, which will enable me to work as a public relations consultant (Meutia, Interview).

The results above indicated that while all participants aspired to attend postgraduate programs at foreign universities, their expectations for their future careers varied. While Inong was still hesitant to mention her desired future identity, Agam, Putroe, Pocut, and Meutia all expressed their clear hopes for their future professional identities.

The fears and hopes of the student teachers due to the uncertainty of future identities, as explained above, are in line with Lutovac and Kaasila's (2013) study. They distinguished the student teachers' future-oriented identity work between two types: irresolute, which is defined as lacking clarity, uncertainty, and powerlessness regarding the future, and decisive, which is defined as goal-directed, balancing potential selves, and placing a strong emphasis on learning and self-development.

## CONCLUSION

Despite their disinterest in teaching EFL, the student teachers had no other choices but to enroll in an EFL teaching program. They were unmotivated to be teachers because they considered teachers to have a low salary and were incompetent, and teaching was not a new thing. Despite their rejection of teachers as their future identities, they accepted their present identities as EFL student teachers. The factors that affected

their acceptance were the positive things they experienced in the program and the consideration that the program could benefit their future dream identities.

The student teachers expressed their fears and hopes in relation to their view of their future identities. In terms of fears, they related their gender identities to the failure of developing themselves; due to their status as male and female in family, they were afraid that they could not study abroad. They also had fears that they could not have the job they desired and that the future would lead them to be teachers. Also, the student teacher hoped that they could continue their studies at the master's level. They believed that their master's degree could help them shape their desired future professional identities.

The motivations of student teachers who were not interested in teaching and their identity construction were examined in this study, which contributes to the fields of teacher education in general and EFL teacher education in particular. It was novel to focus the investigation on these particular participants in the fields of EFL teacher education, motivation, or identity. For example, this research reveals a new dimension of extrinsic motivation in teacher education that have not been thoroughly discussed in previous studies. With the absence of altruistic and intrinsic motivations, extrinsic motivation had a strong potential to be the only factor that kept student teachers in the EFL program.

This study's findings could be used to inform the Indonesian EFL teaching program's policy makers to design optional courses in the program as an alternative to enhance student teachers' knowledge in particular fields based on their interest. Given that student teachers were more interested in advancing their careers in other fields than teaching, this is crucial. Future research should connect the findings of the current study with student teacher agency since motivation, identity and agency are related to each other.

However, the present study is not without limitations. This study was a small-case study that examined the identities and motivations of student teachers studying in the EFL program in an Acehese-specific context but who had no interest in becoming EFL teachers. The study's conclusions should not be applied to all Indonesian EFL student teachers as a result. Further study on similar issues on a larger scale in different contexts should be conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of why student teachers are not interested in selecting teaching as their career.

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