English Teachers' Post-Pandemic Motivation in Macau's Higher Education System

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Abstract—**English teachers' post-pandemic motivational experiences within Macau's hybrid postcolonial context have not been extensively investigated, although teacher motivation is crucial to the quality of education and student outcomes. This qualitative study aimed to address this gap by interviewing 13 English teachers across Macau universities about their motivations. Semi-structured interviews were iteratively coded to identify key themes. The results indicated that intrinsic motivations included a passion for teaching and helping students, as well as an altruistic desire to contribute. Positive relationships between students and teachers motivated participants, while disengaged student behavior, a lack of participation in policies, unclear roles, and unbalanced workloads demotivated them. University culture, curriculum, and governance were viewed as a means of providing purpose and empowerment through social responsibility. The motivational sustainability process included recommendations regarding reducing teaching hours, improving teacher governance, improving research support, and clarifying faculty responsibilities as part of the motivational sustainability process. While the results were limited to an exploratory study, they provided insight into how to align practices with the intrinsic aspirations of Macau's university English teachers to re-engage them.**

Index Terms—**English teacher, teacher motivation, college English, higher education, Macau**

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, extensive research has been conducted on the significance of teacher professional development in enhancing student outcomes and teaching quality (Barni & Danioni, 2019; Osman & Warner, 2020; Slemp et al., 2020), along with the importance of motivation among language teachers (Liu et al., 2020). Due to the dominance of English as a foreign language in the world (Gong et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2022), many studies on the motivation of language teachers are focused on English language teachers in primary (Bai et al., 2019), secondary (Glutsch & König, 2019), and tertiary schools (Liu et al., 2020; Bardach & Klassen, 2021). Furthermore, it is indicated that teacher motivation is integral to the overall success of the language teaching program, as it can have a direct impact on student learning outcomes (Bardach & Klassen, 2021).

College English courses have some distinctive features compared to other disciplines taught at the university level (Arnó-Macià et al., 2020; Hyland, 2017). Given their focus on developing students' practical language abilities, College English places heavy emphasis on interactive communication skills like speaking, listening, and group discussion. These skills require face-to-face instruction, direct feedback sessions, and hands-on practice that are more difficult to replicate effectively online. In addition, College English aims to not only develop students' grammatical and reading proficiency but also their intercultural knowledge and awareness and ability to apply English confidently in future careers or academic pursuits. This multi-dimensional skill-building nature of College English poses additional pedagogical challenges for remote teaching compared to courses with more traditional lecture-based formats or independent study coursework. The specialized expertise and unique student-centered, interactive approaches typically employed by College English teachers further underscore the importance of understanding their experiences and perspectives during the disruptions caused by the past COVID-19 pandemic. For English teachers to adapt to the

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changing educational landscape, additional professional development opportunities or support systems may have been needed due to the pandemic. To design and implement effective training programs or support services, it is necessary to understand the motivations of English teachers of College English courses in Macau. Macau's special cultural and social context may have a distinct impact on their motivations. A comprehensive understanding of these motivations can provide insights into the challenges and opportunities specific to the region, resulting in targeted strategies and policies. It is therefore essential to determine how motivations change with the desire to become or remain a Macau English teacher following the pandemic.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In teachers' professional development, motivation appears to be one of the key factors regarding the sustainability of the education system (Yu et al., 2022). Teacher motivation is crucial to maintaining quality education over the long term (Liu et al., 2020). Highly motivated teachers are more likely to sustain their enthusiasm for teaching and remain committed to continued learning and growth in their profession. This translates into better student outcomes. Professional development initiatives that aim to boost teacher motivation need to focus on both intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

A. Theorizing Teacher Motivation

Teacher motivation has been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct influenced by both intrinsic elements (e.g. passion for teaching, desire to make a difference) and extrinsic factors (e.g. compensation, status) (Doo et al., 2020; Rahmati & Sadeghi, 2021; Sato et al., 2022). Seminal theoretical frameworks like self-determination theory have played a key role in categorizing teacher motivations based on their source of energization (Rahmati & Sadeghi, 2021; Sato et al., 2022). Intrinsic motivations are driven by inherent satisfactions like interest and enjoyment, while extrinsic motivations relate to separable outcomes like rewards or punishment avoidance (Sato et al., 2022). Extrinsic motivations have further been divided into less self-determined types driven by external regulation and more self-determined types driven by personal importance and meaning. The L2 Motivational Self System has also elucidated connections between teacher motivation and identity, showing how teachers balance different "ought-to selves" derived from varied role expectations and norms (Rahmati et al., 2018). Possible selves theory suggests identity comprises ideal self-images as well as feared selves individuals aim to avoid. These conceptual models have informed recent empirical research probing the multifaceted nature of teacher motivation.

A substantial body of research has investigated the intrinsic, extrinsic, and altruistic motivations underpinning teachers' entry into and persistence in the profession (Abdullah, 2023; Balyer & Özcan, 2014; Salı, 2013). Both pre-service and in-service teachers exhibit strong intrinsic desires to make a positive difference, derive fulfillment from teaching itself, and experience personal growth (Salı, 2013). However, extrinsic motivations like job security, financial stability, social status, and career fallback options also play a role for some teachers. Gender differences have been observed, with female pre-service teachers in Turkey and Oman demonstrating significantly higher intrinsic career motivations (Balyer & Özcan, 2014). Extrinsic factors became more central for many once working compared to their pre-training motivations, illustrating shifts in teachers' career trajectories (Rahmati et al., 2018). Beyond intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, altruistic desires to benefit students and society emerge as central for many teachers (Balyer & Özcan, 2014; Salı, 2013). However, those choosing teaching as a backup option report lower altruistic motivations. Overall, contemporary research reinforces that multifaceted, complex motivational profiles underlie teachers' career choices.

B. Interpersonal Behaviors, Identity Development and Demotivation Factors

Positive interpersonal relationships with students and colleagues represent another key motivational influence identified across settings (Burhan-Horasanlı & Ortaçtepe, 2016; Pishghadam et al., 2021; Song, 2021; Taqi et al., 2017). Students themselves are frequently cited as the primary motivator, tying closely to teachers' intrinsic desires to impart knowledge and support learner development (Kamstra & Salud, 2020). However, student disengagement, misbehavior, and lack of progress conversely demotivate teachers and undermine their sense of efficacy and accomplishment. Collegial cooperation, mentorship, professional growth opportunities, and administrative support likewise motivate teachers, while lack of community, competitiveness, or top-down leadership demotivates (Taqi et al., 2017).

To build positive teacher-student rapport, certain interpersonal teaching practices have been shown to enhance student motivation and prevent burnout (Derakhshan et al., 2022). Teacher behaviors like verbal praise, encouragement ("strokes"), empathy, humor, care, immediacy, and receptivity to questions strengthen social bonds and satisfaction (Burhan-Horasanlı & Ortaçtepe, 2016; Song, 2021). However, student perspectives reveal differences in practices deemed motivating across cultural settings and grade levels, highlighting a need for contextual attunement.

Teacher identity development represents another motivational influence, as perceptions of self, students, administrators, and societal expectations evolve over teachers' trajectories (Nue & Manara, 2022). Harmonizing different role identities and "ought-to selves" stemming from potentially conflicting expectations can be challenging but critical for motivation and commitment, especially at the university level (Guo et al., 2020). A Turkish study found that teacher identity negotiation involved balancing ideals with contextual realities, student needs, and emotionally

demanding conditions (Azari et al., 2020). Novice teachers face particular identity tensions as classroom realities clash with prior expectations, underscoring the need for mentorship and preparation.

Given its potential consequences for teacher attrition and burnout, demotivation stemming from challenging working conditions has received significant attention (Başok, 2020; Honarparvaran & Khaghaninejad, 2023; Ren & Zhou, 2023). Extensive workload, student behavioral issues, insufficient compensation, lack of resources, inadequate facilities, and absence of growth opportunities emerge as common demotivators. Teachers frequently cite a lack of input into decision-making, professional autonomy, and supportive leadership as factors undermining motivation. Those employed in higher education particularly struggle with pressures to conduct research and publish in English, often without adequate infrastructure or realistic expectations. Unfair promotion criteria, job insecurity, favoritism, and lack of constructive feedback from inspectors or administrators also demotivate teachers across settings.

C. Online and MOOC Teaching Contexts and Motivation Outcomes

A developing subfield examines the motivations for online teaching, mainly the desire for flexibility, broad accessibility, and instructional innovation (Cruz & Al Balushi, 2018). However, substantial preparation time, lack of student interaction, and the need for informal learning about online platforms also pose challenges that can undermine motivation. Mixed findings regarding the value placed on collaboration in virtual environments highlight ongoing questions about applying constructs like teacher community to digital contexts. Studies comparing MOOC instructors across institutions also found that, while platform limitations cause frustration, many still perceive enhanced professional opportunities through online teaching (Doo et al., 2020).

Finally, an active area of research involves delineating empirical linkages between teacher motivation and salient outcomes like job satisfaction, burnout, classroom performance, student motivation, and learner achievement (Cheloti & Njue, 2023). Multiple studies reveal negative associations between teacher motivation and burnout, suggesting motivational enhancement may counter emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of accomplishment. Students' perceptions of teacher enthusiasm and passion, fueled by underlying motivation, positively predict their own learning effort, engagement, and course satisfaction (Zhang & Zhang, 2020). In terms of classroom practices, highly motivated teachers invest greater effort in pedagogical planning, activity preparation, and student support. Motivation is interconnected with – but partially distinct from – teacher competencies, with both feeding into professional performance (Boset et al., 2017). Explicit motivational training, teacher vision programs, and improved working conditions carry the potential to strengthen teacher motivation and fuel broader development (Burhan-Horasanlı & Orta ҫepe, 2016).

D. Well-Being and Social Responsibility in Education Settings

Research on special educator motivation reveals strong intrinsic desires to make a positive difference for students as central, along with high levels of commitment and patience required to meet learning needs (Nue & Manara, 2022). Special education teachers derive fulfillment and meaning from assisting students with disabilities towards greater independence and confidence. Extrinsic motivators are less prominent in driving special educators compared to general teachers. As the focus shifts from student outcomes to teacher well-being, it is suggested that theories such as self-determination be integrated into conceptual models of teacher well-being to promote the development of human potential rather than dealing with pathologies (Zewude & Hercz, 2022). A detailed framework of ethical, educational, teaching, and research competencies for physical education teachers has been developed in China (Li & Hu, 2023) as part of a study examining core competencies. In addition, longitudinal research examined how resilience develops in early career English teachers, concluding that it follows a V-shaped trajectory that is influenced by both individual factors such as beliefs as well as contextual factors such as students (Duan et al., 2023).

Explicit social responsibility training can increase university students' sense of social responsibility and commitment to education. It was also found that teacher perceptions of corporate social responsibility influence organizational citizenship behaviors when mediated by job satisfaction and organizational identification (Cek & Eyupoglu, 2019), emphasizing the importance of corporate social responsibility initiatives. Some studies informed lifelong education policies in South Korea using surveys, literature reviews, and scenario planning to develop strategies for future policy plans (Jeong et al., 2023; Zhang & Jin, 2023). A variety of research methods, samples, and levels of analysis have been used to examine the relationship between teacher competencies, well-being, support, leadership, policy, and social responsibility in previous studies. These findings differ in their context, but collectively they emphasize the importance of addressing well-being as well as social responsibility within educational systems.

A special administrative region of China and a former Portuguese colony, Macau is a culturally and economically distinctive region. Macau is unique within the Chinese sphere due to its complex multicultural history and unique sociocultural character which is reflected in its higher education context (Xu & Sukjairungwattana, 2022). Despite facing pressures to integrate into mainland Chinese systems, Macau's universities retain their distinct regional identity.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Language teacher motivation across diverse international contexts is demonstrated to be complex. Although teachers' intrinsic desires to support learners emerge, context-specific demotivating factors such as student behavior and

institutional policies negatively impact their experiences. Well-being, practices, identity negotiation, and student outcomes are demonstrably influenced by motivation. In Macau's higher education system, which has been under-researched, there remain gaps in understanding teacher motivation. As a special administrative region of China and a former Portuguese colony, Macau has a unique cultural mix. Despite its rapid internationalization, its universities continue to recruit a large number of faculty members from beyond its borders. However, motivational dynamics influencing the trajectory of non-local teachers in Macau are not fully understood, creating a significant research gap. Since very few studies have been conducted on the motivation of English teachers in Macau's higher education system, and because this topic is especially relevant in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do English teachers in Macau's universities perceive their motivation in the local context?

2. What contextual factors enhance or undermine motivation from teachers' perspectives?

3. How can social responsibility initiatives enhance English teaching motivation in Macau's higher education system?

This proposed mixed-methods study incorporating surveys and interviews with teachers can provide data-driven, context-attuned recommendations to foster motivational resilience and efficacy among Macau's English teaching workforce. Findings will carry valuable implications for locally responsive motivational frameworks and human resource initiatives across rapidly internationalizing universities globally.

IV. METHODS

A. Research Context and Participants

As a result of the limited number of English teachers in Macau's universities, this study utilized a qualitative approach incorporating semi-structured interviews with 13 English teachers in four universities. Purpose sampling was used to recruit participants. Interviews aimed to elicit in-depth narratives of teachers' motivational experiences, well-beings, perceived contextual supports and challenges, and suggestions for enhancing the sustainability of English teaching motivations system-wide.

An interview guide was developed based on key topics from existing teacher motivation literature (Burhan-Horasanlı & Ortaçtepe, 2016; Rahmati & Sadeghi, 2021; Salı, 2013) including entry motivations, current rewards and frustrations, relationships, institutional factors, and motivational change over time. The guide was piloted with 3 teachers and refined prior to broader use. Final interviews averaged 40-60 minutes, were conducted in English and Chinese, and took place in teachers' offices, classrooms, or public cafes per participant preference. Signed consent was obtained before interviews assuring confidentiality. The information of the participants can be found in Table 1.

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

Participant	Sex	Affiliation	Position	Years of Teaching
Participant 1	Male	University A	Assistant Professor	10
Participant 2	Male	University A	Lecturer	4
Participant 3	Male	University A	Lecturer	4
Participant 4	Female	University A	Lecturer	2
Participant 5	Male	University B	Lecturer	11
Participant 6	Male	University A	Assistant Professor	3
Participant 7	Male	University A	Assistant Professor	10
Participant 8	Female	University C	Lecturer	2
Participant 9	Female	University B	Lecturer	18
Participant 10	Male	University B	Assistant Professor	18
Participant 11	Female	University C	Lecturer	19
Participant 12	Female	University D	Associate Professor	21
Participant 13	Female	University D	Associate Professor	26

B. Data Collection and Analysis

Thirteen English teachers (7 men, 6 women) from diverse home regions (the Chinese Mainland, Macau, Hong Kong, the Philippines, etc.) were interviewed between May and June 2023. Teaching experience in Macau ranged from 2-21 years. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. To aid in the qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts, the data was processed using NVivo 12 software.

Data were analyzed iteratively using open and axial coding techniques from Grounded Theory. Initial open coding identified salient themes relating to motivations, challenges, support sources, and sustainability suggestions. Reflexive thematic analysis was adapted to investigate the topic, and focused analysis consolidated these initial themes into 8 central categories. Finally, axial coding elucidated relationships between categories and subcategories to synthesize a coherent motivational framework grounded in teachers' experiences. Member checking was utilized to validate emerging findings from participants. Several techniques were employed to improve the reliability and validity of this qualitative study. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to share their motivational experiences in their own words, thereby increasing the authenticity and trustworthiness of the data collected. To inductively identify and consolidate themes grounded in participants' perspectives, an iterative coding process utilizing open coding methods

and axial coding methods from grounded theory was utilized. Participation and feedback were further bolstered by member checking through sharing emerging findings. Using triangulation across 13 interviews with teachers from a wide range of universities, key themes and motivational influences were consistent. Research positionality was considered through reflexive thematic analysis, which facilitated rigorous and transparent analytical procedures.

V. RESULTS

Through iterative coding of the interview transcripts, 8 key categories relating to English teacher motivation emerged: reasons for entering teaching, pandemic influences, student relationships, colleague relationships, professional growth, institutional expectations, demotivators, and enhancing sustainability. They can be further summarized into three types of motivations: Intrinsic, Altruistic, and Extrinsic Motivations (Figure 1).
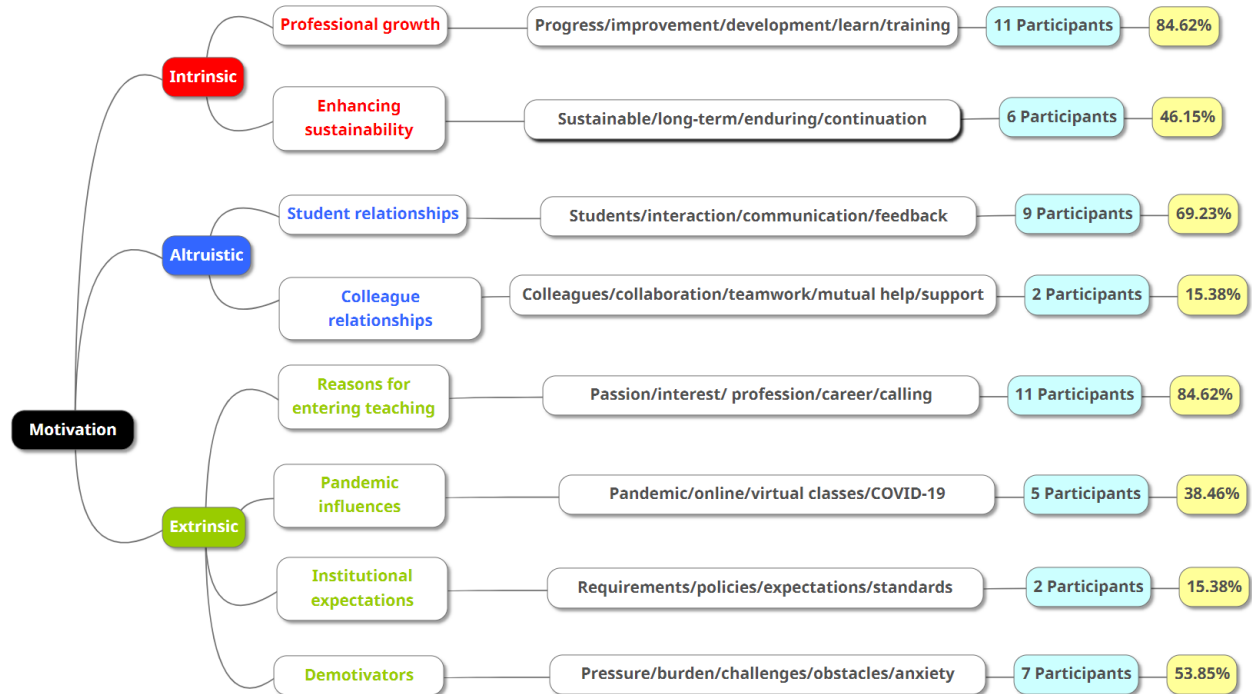

Figure 1. Types and Sub-Categories Motivations, Codes, Number of Participants and Their Percentages

A. Intrinsic Motivation

(a). Professional Growth

Teachers were characterized by a lifelong learning mentality that manifested itself in their desire to enhance their skills, expand their knowledge, and develop their pedagogical skills. Participant 7 (P7) emphasized the need to "make progress both in teaching and research" through ongoing growth by staying abreast of emerging technological tools for enhanced teaching. Some teachers, however, felt unsupported by their teachers during the rapid shift to online learning during the pandemic as they attempted to develop the technological and pedagogical competencies necessary to provide effective virtual instruction. Insufficient training compounded the challenges of navigating unfamiliar platforms and approaches. The lack of institutional preparation for remote teaching hindered professional development for some.

A predominant demotivating factor was overwhelming work expectations, including teaching, research, service, and administrative duties. Participants criticized unbalanced work models that "skewed too much towards research" (P8) that demanded excessive publishing. High teaching loads, including multi-hour classes with large enrollments, reduced research time. This overload diminished job satisfaction. Teachers also felt excluded from decision-making processes surrounding policies relating to work expectations, evaluation, and resource allocation.

(b). Enhancing Sustainability

A variety of perspectives were expressed by teachers when discussing their institutions' social responsibility. Several expressed appreciations for their universities' service-learning programs in their local communities. P9 remarked, "(The university) encourages students to be socially responsible professionals." Others, however, criticized the university's corporate and commercial interests. P5 states that "Management only considers student numbers and income." Many teachers voiced a desire for increased teacher involvement in decision-making and shared governance. According to P12, "Policies are too top-down, without teachers' input." Furthermore, some expressed concern about deteriorating

educational quality due to overemphasizing research productivity over teaching. P7 argued, "Research cannot be sacrificed at the expense of quality teaching and learning." Others identified a need for balancing commercial and social responsibilities. P4 noted that "a university wants international recognition, but must also serve local needs." Overall, it is indicated that perceptions of institutional responsibilities can be varied, and sometimes contradictory.

B. Altruistic Motivation

(a). Student Relationships

Students' relationships emerged as a central motivating force that drew many teachers into the profession and sustained their passion over time. Witnessing student growth and sharing in their learning journeys provided a profound sense of accomplishment (P3). As P7 explained, "interaction with students" and seeing their progress fueled persistence and passion for teaching. Student diversity and thoughtfulness relative to mainland Chinese contexts enriched these bonds for several teachers. Conversely, disruptive, unmotivated, or disengaged student behaviors demotivate participants by rupturing the teaching-learning process. As P9 described, "When I cannot see the fruit of what I'm doing...that's depressing." Cheating and talking in class signaled a lack of respect. Students "just staring at the screen" (P1) during online lessons exacerbated engagement challenges. Managing challenging behaviors exacted an emotional toll on teachers.

There were, however, times when student relationships were also a challenge, as larger class sizes made it difficult to provide personalized attention and foster close bonds between students and teachers (P13). During the pandemic disruptions, the shift to online learning modes limited interpersonal connections and real-time feedback loops that are more naturally facilitated in face-to-face classroom settings (P4, P6). In the absence of engagement, students were not turning on cameras or participating actively in virtual classes, resulting in uncertainty regarding whether learning was taking place effectively (P6). In addition to enhancing flexibility, asynchronous digital platforms made it harder for teachers to discern the comprehension and needs of students (P12).

(b). Colleague Relationships

When comparing the initial motivations for entering the teaching profession to factors such as a passion for the subject matter or a desire to nurture students, colleague relationships emerged as a less prominent factor. When participants began their teaching careers, positive collegial relationships continued to provide a supportive environment for retaining motivation and job satisfaction.

Several teachers highlighted the collaborative and encouraging nature of colleague interactions at their institutions (P11, P13). Having supportive peer networks to exchange ideas, collaborate on projects, and provide feedback promoted an environment conducive to professional growth and enthusiasm. Being part of a team motivating each other was valued in terms of camaraderie. The more experienced colleagues served as mentors for some participants who encountered new challenges such as developing online teaching competencies (P13) during the pandemic. Through this coaching, stresses were alleviated and motivation was sustained throughout periods of adjustment.

Meanwhile, most of the participants (P1-9, P10, P12) did not explicitly indicate that colleague relationships significantly affected their motivations either positively or negatively. It is therefore evident that collegial support strengthened intrinsic motivations when present, but its absence did not necessarily dampen core drivers such as passion for a particular subject.

C. Extrinsic Motivation

(a). Reasons for Entering Teaching

Teachers were driven by distinct motivations that drew them to the teaching profession. Some were driven by a long-standing passion for English (P1) and saw teaching as a way to nurture language talents (P2). Many teachers enjoyed the interactive nature of teaching, which provided them with the opportunity to witness student growth and gain a sense of accomplishment (P3). Some participants (P4) also found the intellectual aspect of teaching to be attractive, such as the fact that participants engaged in research-like processes when they prepared lessons.

Several teachers (P5, P9) were inspired to become teachers as a result of early exposure through their own educational backgrounds. Another common motivator (P6, P12) was aligning with one's academic major in English or education. Some believed teaching to be intrinsically motivating (P10), while others appreciated the way it combined passion with a sustainable livelihood (P11). The appeal of the university environment, including enjoying interactions with colleagues and appreciating a supportive environment for balancing teaching and research responsibilities, also contributed to reasons for entering and remaining in the profession (P13). There was a minority of respondents who did not explicitly state their initial motivations (P7).

Generally, a combination of personal interests, passion for the subject, alignment with educational backgrounds, desire to facilitate student growth and future talents, as well as pragmatic career considerations around financial sustenance underscored the diverse motivational forces that drove this sample of English teachers to pursue their chosen profession.

(b). Pandemic Influences

The pandemic necessitated an abrupt shift to online delivery, posing multiple challenges. The lack of in-person contacts and immediacy often hindered student engagement, as P4 described: "It's very difficult to know if they are really listening." Some students kept cameras off, avoiding visual presence. Classroom rapport and relationship building also suffered without face-to-face interactions. Teachers struggled to adapt active learning techniques like discussions to the virtual environment. Online instruction requires considerable preparation time to redesign materials and learn new technology interfaces. Teachers described needing to "rethink the classroom" (P2) through a digital lens. Staying abreast of evolving institutional platforms like Canvas while simultaneously modifying pedagogical approaches imposed heavy demands, especially without formal training. While mostly negative, some teachers cited the benefits of remote work like flexibility, less oversight, and strengthened technology skills. According to P6, pandemic-driven online shifts yielded both "negative and positive effects overall." However, most voiced a preference for in-person teaching which they found more pedagogically engaging and intrinsically rewarding.

When discussing work stresses, research requirements were most cited, especially recently increased expectations. P13 explained "the main stress now is the research requirement from the university, because the timeline feels too rushed." Heavy teaching loads and large class sizes also contributed to feeling overloaded. Administrative duties and job uncertainty added further stresses. Overall, most felt work stressors had accumulated in the return to campus amidst raised performance expectations.

(c). Institutional Expectations

In terms of faculty motivation, institutions placed varying expectations on them. Initial institutional expectations were viewed by some as relatively relaxed, allowing them to concentrate primarily on teaching without excessive research demands (P13). Participants noted a rapid shift towards more stringent research requirements and quantitative metrics for outputs, which disrupted the initial appealing work-life balance. Research over teaching responsibilities became a dominant priority in the new institutional priorities (P8). Unrealistic deadlines for meeting high expectations for publishing in high-quality journals created immense pressure (P13). In addition to balancing teaching, research, and service commitments, maintaining job satisfaction while producing quality work was challenging (P13).

Top-down administrative directives lacking transparency bred feelings of coercion rather than autonomous motivation (P8), leading to a sense of lack of autonomy and exclusion from decision-making processes surrounding these policy changes (P8). There was also uncertainty surrounding shifting evaluation criteria and promotion requirements, resulting in a perceived lack of institutional support (P8). The high teaching load and large enrollments constrained the amount of time available for research activities that institutions anticipated (P8). In addition to this overload, concerns were raised regarding the development of skills for effective online teaching during crises such as the pandemic, which limited professional growth. Institutional expectations significantly influenced motivations - when perceived as balancing teaching/research and complemented by autonomy, they enabled professional enthusiasm. It is important to note, however, that abrupt policy changes prioritizing unrealistic research pressure without voice and transparency led to demotivation among researchers.

(d). Demotivators

Many factors contribute to the well-being and burnout of teachers. Heavy workloads were frequently cited as having a detrimental effect on job satisfaction and work-life balance. P6 and P13 expressed concern that unreasonably high-performance expectations increased anxiety, with P13 stating that it was impossible to publish quality papers in such a short period of time. Several participants also expressed emotional exhaustion from online teaching during campus closures. According to P2, communication with students online and outside the classroom takes a significant amount of time. However, relationships with colleagues emerged as a key mitigating factor. Several participants mentioned collaborating to share expertise and provide emotional support. P11 stated that encouragement from colleagues and students' progress helps counter negative workplace experiences. Kinship helped counter negative workplace experiences. Furthermore, it is important to maintain well-being by employing personal coping strategies, such as exercise and leisure activities.

Despite numerous pressures, most participants emphasized seeking balance and maintaining motivation. Reflecting on stress, P11 stated "appropriate pressures can generate power, but if it is too much, it becomes counterproductive." Many participants valued the support and collaboration found in relationships with colleagues, as P13 explained, "We can help proofread for each other and give suggestions." Enhancing wellbeing through leisure, exercise, and self-care was also cited. In terms of sustaining motivation, setting clear goals, adopting a growth mindset, and prioritizing student learning emerged as crucial strategies. P8 stated, "My competitive nature drives me to continually strive for greater effort." Others emphasized maintaining perspective: "You have to do your job well before considering other things" (P1). Overall, participants exhibited conscious resilience building to manage an intensifying higher education environment.

VI. DISCUSSION

A. Intrinsic, Altruistic, and Extrinsic Motivations

Based on the results of this study and the literature review, the three types of motivation identified for English teachers within Macau's higher education system are generally consistent with previous research on teacher motivation. In this study, however, the following contexts and nuances are of particular importance:

The intrinsic motivations of passion for teaching, desire for professional growth, and interest in the subject matter align with findings from other studies (Salı, 2013). It was found that institutional support and a balanced workload were intrinsic motivators in this study, which may be of particular interest to Macau higher education institutions. As a result of altruistic motivations, helping students grow and nurturing future talents is consistent with previous research that has highlighted the significance of fostering student relationships and contributing to society. This finding echoes many studies that have focused on special education teachers who strive to positively impact marginalized communities (Nue & Manara, 2022). The extrinsic motivations identified, such as job security, financial stability, and institutional expectations, align with the existing literature on the role of external factors in teacher motivation (Rahmati & Sadeghi, 2021). It is important to recognize, however, that the study also emphasizes the unique challenges experienced by English teachers during the pandemic, including the sudden transition from classroom to online teaching and the need for professional development in digital teaching techniques. Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of institutional factors and policies in shaping teacher motivation, a finding that is consistent with previous research highlighting the influence of working conditions, decision-making involvement, and support systems (Taqi et al., 2017).

Each type of motivation influences and reinforces the others, resulting in complex interplay. The relationships between these motivations can be summarized in the following figure:
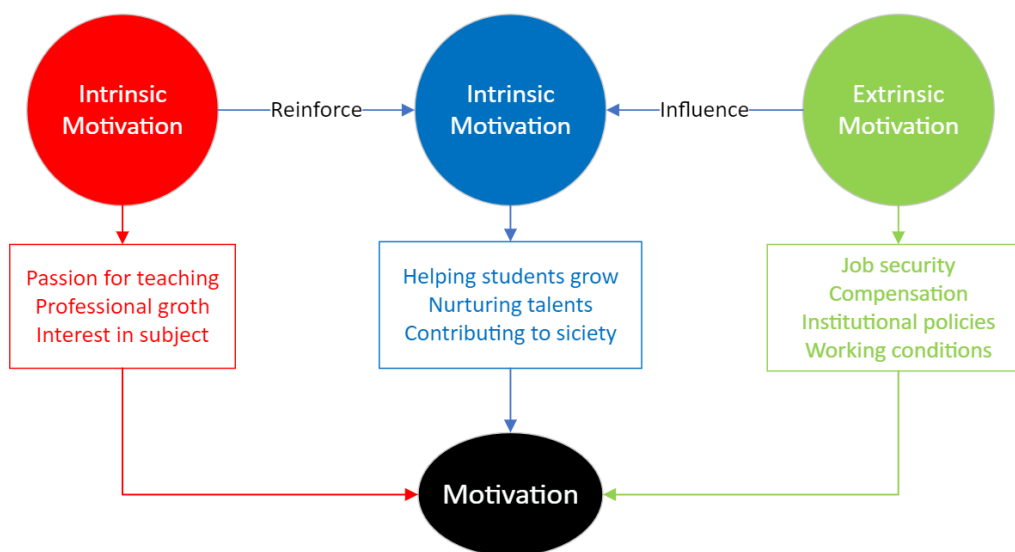

Figure 2. The Relationships Between the Motivations

The interplay between these three types of motivation is dynamic and can shift over time. Early on in a teaching career, intrinsic and altruistic motivations may be more prominent, but as teachers advance, extrinsic factors such as job security, compensation, and institutional support may become more important. For teachers to remain motivated and committed over the long term, a synergistic and balanced relationship between intrinsic, altruistic, and extrinsic motivations is ideal. As institutions and policymakers recognize the interconnected nature of motivations and the potential for each type to reinforce or undermine the others, they should strive to create environments that nurture and align all three types of motivations.

B. Perceptions of Motivation

RQ 1: How do English teachers in Macau's universities perceive their motivation in the local context?

In line with previous research, English teachers in Macau universities expressed predominant intrinsic motivations centered on enjoyment of teaching itself, passion for the subject matter, desire to grow intellectually, and interest in advancing student learning (Osman & Warner, 2020). Making a positive difference in society by elevating English proficiency also reflected strong altruism and prosocial values, consistent with studies identifying such motivations among educators globally (Gong et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2022). This fusion of intrinsic and altruistic aims formed the primary motivational foundation. While intrinsic and altruistic factors took priority, findings also echoed past research in revealing a secondary role for extrinsic motivations related to job security, income stability, social standing, and external influences. However, these extrinsic motives were eclipsed by intrinsic and altruistic drivers for most teachers. Previous studies concur that internal desires furnish teachers' dominant motivational force (Barni et al., 2019).

During the pandemic, key supports for intrinsic motivation were undermined, including rapport and efficacy between teachers and students. Pandemic teaching has been shown to be highly demotivating, consistent with studies finding

pandemic teaching highly demotivating (Honarparvaran & Khaghaninejad, 2023; Ren & Zhou, 2023). The majority found online formats to diminish their motivational resources, despite some appreciating flexibility. Macau teachers' motivation and job satisfaction are significantly influenced by positive student and colleague relationships, confirming past research findings. In addition to disruptive student behaviors and disengagement, collegial cooperation and mentoring were also significant demotivators.

C. Enhancing and Undermining Factors

RQ 2: What contextual factors enhance or undermine motivation from teachers' perspectives?

Following the theory of self-determination (Slemp et al., 2020), teacher autonomy, input into policy, and flexible working conditions were believed to be important factors for maintaining motivation. As compared to top-down directives on outputs, shared governance practices that valued teachers' voices were more effective in promoting intrinsic motivation. Transparency and compassion motivated teachers when expectations were not clearly communicated. A collaborative professional community that allows teachers to mutually support development, discuss challenges openly, and receive feedback fueled efficacy and engagement (Barni et al., 2019). Isolation and competitiveness undermined intrinsic desires to cooperate.

As in studies worldwide, teachers in Macau perceived mounting work expectations and role overload to be powerful demotivators because they caused burnout and limited their personal time. High teaching loads (Table 2) were deemed unsustainable in light of research and service commitments. As a result of disrespectful and disengaged student behaviors, teachers experienced significant demotivation, disrupting their sense of purpose, self-efficacy, and instructional goals (Taqi et al., 2017). Over time, classroom management challenges resulted in a depletion of intrinsic motivation. During the pandemic, a lack of training and guidance regarding online teaching hindered some teachers' professional growth, reflecting literature citing that lack of development opportunities is demotivating (Başok, 2020). An important motivating resource is ongoing skill enrichment.

TABLE 2
CURRENT TEACHING WORKLOAD IN UNIVERSITIES IN MACAU

University	Position	Teaching hours/week
1	Lecturer	15
	Assistant Professor	12
2	Lecturer	12
	Associate Professor*	12
3	Lecturer and Assistant Professor (teaching)	16
	Assistant Professor (research)	12
4	Lecturer	12
	Associate Professor*	12

*Assistant Professor is not applicable to these universities, and the information in this table was collected independently from the preview interviews, the numbers 1 to 4 are used for the universities rather than the letters A to D.

D. Higher Education System and Social Responsibility

RQ 3: How can social responsibility initiatives enhance English teaching motivation in Macau's higher education system?

As a dominant recommendation for enabling manageable workloads, reduced course loads, class sizes, and teaching hours emerged as a prominent recommendation. Research indicates that excessive teaching hours undermine motivation and retention (Honarparvaran & Khaghaninejad, 2023; Ren & Zhou, 2023). Increasing teacher voice in policy decisions regarding evaluation, expectations, and resource allocation was considered paramount to supporting autonomy and preventing demoralization. Similarly, studies have demonstrated that perceived inadequacy in reforms demotivates teachers by dismissing professionalism (Osman & Warner, 2020). It may be necessary to strengthen research mentoring, writing groups, statistical assistance, conference funding, and protected research time to assist teachers struggling to achieve unrealistic publication targets. Empowering institutional support and community has been shown to improve motivation and research self-efficacy. The findings of this qualitative study may not be generalizable to a large number of teachers. Further investigation is required to explore how motivational processes differ across contexts. A quantitative analysis of teachers' motivation levels before and following a pandemic could help clarify how crises affect teachers' motivational trajectories. Furthermore, longitudinal studies examining motivational shifts across career stages merit attention. A comparison of public and private institutions may reveal divergent challenges.

In collaboration with teachers, universities may integrate social responsibility into their culture, curriculum, and governance to counteract the motivational decline caused by commercialization pressures and give teaching and learning a greater sense of purpose. In addition to providing meaningful service opportunities (Duan et al., 2023; Jeong et al., 2023), community outreach programs involving teachers and students volunteering to teach English together may provide meaningful service opportunities (Li & Hu, 2023); Moreover, partnerships between universities and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working to address social issues could provide teachers with engaging collaborative projects or events for their students to engage in topics such as sustainability or equality, thereby enhancing motivation by integrating classroom learning with real-world experiences (Başok, 2020). It would also be

beneficial to teachers to receive professional development training that incorporated social responsibility into English curricula to help them feel motivated and align their teaching with broader values, including planning lessons for critical thinking (Salı, 2013).

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Within Macau's unique higher education context, this qualitative study provides valuable insight into the motivations of English teachers. The findings indicate that intrinsic motivations such as passion for teaching and subject matter, as well as altruistic desires to contribute to society, form the primary drivers for English teachers. The overall motivational experiences, however, are strongly influenced by extrinsic factors including institutional policies, compensation, and support systems. Disengaged behavior, excessive workloads, and a lack of participation in governance undermine motivation, whereas positive relationships with students and colleagues enhance it. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers-student connections were strained and online pedagogy shifts were necessitated without adequate training, disrupting key motivational resources.

English teachers should be motivated long-term by multi-pronged approaches involving reduced teaching hours, inclusive decision-making, research support infrastructure, transparent promotion criteria, and balanced expectations for their roles. While increasing commercial pressures, integrating social responsibility into university culture, curriculum, and governance may provide a meaningful purpose to re-engage teachers. It is concluded that the study illuminates ways to enhance the sustainability of English teaching within Macau's internationalized tertiary education environment by optimizing intrinsic and altruistic motivations while providing motivating extrinsic conditions.

This exploratory qualitative study has several limitations despite its contextualized insights. As an interview-based investigation, the sample of 13 participants from four universities may not represent the motivational experiences of all English teachers in Macau. These findings could be enriched by more comprehensive quantitative research that measures motivation levels. Longitudinal studies may also provide additional information about motivational trajectories across career stages. An analysis that compares public and private institutions may reveal differences in policy implications. A future study that incorporates these expanded methodological and sampling approaches may allow for a deeper understanding of language teacher motivation within this postcolonial, culturally hybrid regional context and beyond. Despite this, this foundational investigation provides an initial empirical basis for motivational enhancement efforts tailored to the specific needs of Macau's English teaching personnel.

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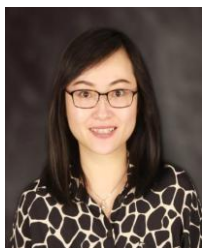
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