

Exploring Factors Influencing In-Service Teachers' Motivation to Teach English in Thailand: An Exploration of Possible Language Teacher Selves

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Abstract

The motivation of in-service English language teachers in Thailand was examined through the lens of possible language teacher selves. With English as a lingua franca and Thailand's emphasis on English proficiency, understanding teacher motivation is crucial. The qualitative narrative approach was adopted, involving semi-structured interviews with three participants having a minimum of three years of teaching experience. The study addressed the gap in literature regarding English teachers' possible selves and retention. The findings revealed the interplay of intrinsic and altruistic motives, self-concept, and career aspirations. Participants' motivations aligned with their ideal, actual, ought-to, and feared possible selves. Their reasons for teaching were in harmony with their aspirations, current self-perception, perceived obligations, and the desire to avoid negative outcomes. The findings have relevance for tailored professional development, student-centered approaches, recognition of non-native speaker strengths, and strategies to enhance teacher well-being. While limited by sample size and design, this research contributes to understanding teacher motivations and their implications for educational institutions.

Keywords: *English teachers, possible language teacher selves, motivation*

Introduction

Of approximately 7.8 billion individuals, 1.5 billion people globally were proficient in English by 2023 (Statista, 2023), emphasizing the significance of English as a global lingua franca. Thailand, as an ASEAN country, has adapted to this linguistic shift (Crocco & Bunwirat, 2014), where English education plays a crucial role in the face of increasing global connectivity (Baker, 2012). Consequently, English teachers in Thailand bear the responsibility of equipping students with language skills and knowledge.

To enhance language teaching methods and elevate students' language skills, both private and public educational institutions across Thailand have employed significant numbers of native and non-native English-speaking teachers (Ulla, 2018). Students generally hold a more positive view of native English-speaking teachers in comparison to non-native speakers (Grubbs et al., 2010). Nevertheless, the former are stronger language models but somewhat lacking in explaining grammar concepts, whereas the latter excel in teaching grammar lessons (Walkinshaw & Duong, 2014).

Foreign teachers, regardless of their previous occupations, have various reasons and aspirations for relocating to Thailand. These motivations include seeking freedom from rules and limitations, the desire to be global citizens, or the pursuit of excitement and new experiences (Hickey, 2018). Thailand, aiming to improve its students' English skills, seeks the assistance of foreign teachers. Despite challenges like language barriers and homesickness, foreign teachers, including non-native speakers facing issues such as lower pay and job insecurity, still decide to teach. The question then arises: What motivates them to teach in the face of such challenges?

Literature on teacher motivation exists, especially in the realm of second language (L2) teaching (Afrianto, 2014; Osguthorpe & Sanger, 2013; Topkaya & Uztosun, 2012; Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2014), but there remains a gap in qualitative exploration of L2 teacher motivation using the "possible selves" theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and in particular Kubanyiova's (2007, 2009) concept of "possible language teacher selves." Existing research provides insights into the interplay between language teachers' perceptions of their ideal, ought-to, and feared selves and the factors influencing their professional choices (Kubanyiova, 2009; Hiver, 2013; Kumazawa, 2013; Smid, 2018;

Sahakyan et al., 2018). However, there is still a distinct gap in understanding the motivations of English language teachers in Thailand, particularly concerning teacher retention.

The knowledge gap relating to the motivations of in-service English language teachers in Thailand presented a research opportunity to gain a nuanced understanding of English language teachers' unique motivations, hence contributing to a more comprehensive idea of the role of possible selves in shaping teacher motivation and retention.

A qualitative study was conducted, using the concept of possible language teacher selves, to explore the motivation of English language teachers. Three English language teachers with diverse backgrounds and a minimum of three years of teaching experience in Thailand were selected as participants. Semi-structured interviews were employed to collect diverse stories and perspectives, aiming to explore in-service English language teachers' motivation in Thailand.

Literature Review

Teacher's Motivation to Teach

According to McDonough (2007), motivation is the driving force behind actions in English language teaching, influencing teacher retention and students' language learning outcomes. Motivated teachers seek engaging teaching methods, fostering a successful learning environment. Bergmark et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of understanding motives for entering the teaching profession to attract more educators, improve training, and enhance teaching quality.

Three primary teacher motives exist: Extrinsic (salary, holidays), intrinsic (personal interest, fulfillment), and altruistic (positive impact, helping students) (Moran et al., 2001). Reeves and Lowenhaupt (2016) underscored altruistic motives as significant in choosing teaching as a career. Altruism, including helping, making a difference, and contributing to society, is a motivation for educators (Afrianto, 2014; Flores & Niklasson, 2014; Osguthorpe & Sanger, 2013). Intrinsic motivation, linked to dedication and enthusiasm, is also valued (Erten, 2014; Sinclair, 2008).

Despite entering for altruistic reasons, teachers often leave due to workload, pupil behavior, and salary (Dolton & Klaauw, 1995). The profession's complexity and demanding nature contribute to a high attrition rate (Ingersoll et al., 2018). Burnout, inadequate support, and job dissatisfaction are significant predictors of quitting (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Madigan & Kim, 2020). Foreign teachers in Thailand face unique challenges, including language barriers, homesickness, and non-native status-related issues (Frederiksen, 2014; Hickey, 2018).

Possible Selves Theory

The possible selves theory involves imagining one's future self, known as possible selves, which includes three main categories: Ideal selves, ought-to selves, and feared selves (Markus & Nurius, 1987). In other words, possible selves refers to ideas of what people might become, would like to become, and are afraid of becoming. This can be based on how they see themselves now and how they were in the past. The possible selves theory initially was primarily focused on social psychology (Markus & Nurius, 1987), but later practical applications of this framework in applied linguistics began to emerge, as highlighted by Hiver (2013). The possible selves theory is associated with providing incentives and envisioned futures that could significantly influence an individual's motivation (Erikson, 2018). The theory can be illustrated through qualitative case studies focusing on the interplay of possible selves and factors involved, analyzed and presented using narrative inquiry techniques. In this way, researchers can investigate how teachers invest in the professional development process to improve their learning pedagogy and skills, in terms of the congruence of ideal and ought-to selves, combined with goal-setting and attitudes toward professional development (Kammayee & Tepsuriwong, 2024). To bridge the gap between academic attainment and academic possible selves among low-income and minority teens, some extensions of possible selves theory have incorporated the "authentic" notion of the "true self," linked with plausible strategies and connected with social identity (Oyserman et al., 2006).

Possible Language Teacher Selves

Possible selves theory (Markus & Nurius, 1987) is embraced in this article. It involves imagining future selves, which include ideal, ought-to, and feared selves. This framework, initially coming from social psychology, was used in applied linguistics in the late 2000s (Hiver, 2013), and is associated with enhancing motivation (Erikson, 2018).

Possible Language Teacher Selves is an extension of Possible Selves Theory, introduced by Kubanyiova (2007, 2009). It includes three constructs:

1. Ideal Language Teacher Self: Represents desired professional identities, motivating teachers to excel and achieve their goals.
2. Ought-To Language Teacher Self: Reflects societal, educational, and institutional expectations, shedding light on the pressures teachers feel.
3. Feared Language Teacher Self: Encompasses negative versions of teachers' identities, revealing anxieties and potential barriers to effective teaching.

Karimi and Norouzi (2019) recently found the constructs to be reliable measures. Teachers' fears about their future selves can limit their sense of control (Yuan, 2016). Fearful selves might encompass undesirable outcomes, while desired selves involve positive aspects (Dunkel & Anthis, 2001). A teacher's focus on ideal or feared selves depends on their tasks (Hamman et al. 2010).

Empirical Studies

A series of studies have focused on teacher motivation and possible language teacher selves. Kubanyiova (2007, 2009) explored Slovakian EFL teachers, highlighting the influence of a teacher development program on their teaching approaches and the importance of the gap between desired and actual selves in driving learning and growth. Hamman et al. (2013) investigated 10 teacher candidates from a large southwestern US university and the regulative role possible selves had on their learning-to-teach behaviors. They found the participants regulated behaviors via strategies, employed future thinking to obtain information about progress, and derived motivation about themselves as teachers. For many, possible selves changed, relatively quickly, due to experiences, mentors, and reflection. Smid (2018) explored the motivations of Hungarian students aspiring to become English teachers, with a focus on how their possible selves shaped their motivation. Intrinsic motivation and ideal selves directly influenced their motivation, but indirect influences came from feared selves, language learning experiences, and extrinsic motivation.

A qualitative study with seven Korean English teachers conducted by Hiver (2013) revealed a dynamic interplay between their actual and possible language teacher selves. Their motivations primarily revolved around addressing self-perceived shortcomings, especially in language proficiency. Alexander et al. (2020) examined teacher motivations, self-perceptions, and external perceptions in relation to teacher retention with 1,165 in-service teachers in Australia. Intrinsic and altruistic factors were key motivators, with teacher self-concept playing a pivotal role.

Changes over time and with experience can occur. Interviews of novice English teachers in Japan by Kumazawa (2013), showed that the initial differences between their possible and actual selves initially dampened motivation. However, on self-reflection, changes occurred in self-concept and motivation increased. Sahakyan et al. (2018), working in Armenia with six English language instructors, studied the progress of teachers' motivation in relation to their ideal and ought-to selves. Initial possible selves rooted in past experiences were transformed over time into a practical self-concept balancing ideal, ought-to, and feared selves.

These studies offer insights into the intricate relationship between language teachers' possible selves and their motivations. Despite the valuable insights provided, a notable gap exists within the context of English language teachers in Thailand, especially concerning teacher retention. Nattheeraphong's (2020) study focused on L2 motivation among underprivileged students in Thailand and left a void in understanding how possible language teacher selves influenced the motivation and retention of in-service English language teachers. Consequently, the aim of the

present study was to explore the motivation of such English language teachers in Thailand through the lens of possible language teacher selves, bridging the gap in existing knowledge.

Research Questions

1. What are the factors influencing the in-service teacher's motivation to teach English in Thailand?
2. How does the role of possible selves influence the motivation and retention of in-service English language teachers in Thailand?

Methodology

The methodology utilized was a narrative approach, well-suited for qualitative research, to explore participants' experiences and motivations. It involved analyzing data from case studies, surveys, and observations (Harappa Education, 2021). This narrative method focused on uncovering themes in each participant's unique story, providing a nuanced understanding of their motivations for teaching English in Thailand. Narrative methodology can be effective for studying possible selves as it encourages individuals to envision future versions of themselves, unlike questionnaires or structured interviews (Whitty, 2002).

Participants

Participants in this study were in-service English language teachers currently teaching in Thailand with a minimum of three years of experience, encompassing both Thai and foreign teachers. The focus on those with at least three years of teaching aimed to ensure depth of experience, enabling insights in a variety of contexts. Inclusion of teachers representing different nationalities aimed to capture cultural diversity inputs. Participants were selected through connections from the researcher and the advisor.

Data Collection

Potential participants were contacted through personal messages, explaining the purpose and value of the study. To ensure diverse perspectives, participants were chosen from various nationalities, institutions (public and private), and educational levels (primary, secondary, tertiary). They provided an overview of their teaching experience, motivation, and current context. The screening ensured they met the criteria of at least three years of teaching experience in Thailand. Rapport was established through pre-existing relationships and introductions during interviews fostered mutual comprehension. Participants were informed of ethical guidelines, including the right to withdraw and confidential data handling, and gave informed consent. A final selection, with selected participants scheduled for interviews, considered diversity and potential insights.

Instruments

One-on-one semi-structured Zoom interviews were used with the three in-service English teachers in Thailand to gain insights into their opinions, behaviors, experiences, and perceptions regarding their language teacher identities. The interviews consisted of 16 questions focused on three key themes, including possible selves, professional development decisions, and language teaching experiences. These interviews aimed to provide a structured approach for understanding participants' perspectives (Seidman, 2006) and yielded consistent and reinforcing insights (Hayes, 2005).

Research Procedure

The following steps were undertaken:

1. The research proposal and other required documents were submitted for IRB approval by the researchers.
2. Participants were recruited by the authors via email correspondence. Then Interview consent was obtained from them after their agreement to participate.
3. Individualized Zoom interviews were scheduled and a one-hour interview was conducted in English and recorded.

4. The interviews were transcribed and then organized within the chosen framework by the researchers.
5. Motivations were identified by the researchers through a comparison of participants' responses to semi-structured interview questions.

Data Analysis

The recorded audio data was transcribed using a technological transcription program and edited by the researchers. Participant responses were categorized based on the semi-structured interview questions (Appendix A). Data were presented through individual narratives, including participants' backgrounds, personal and professional histories, and exploration of their motivations as English teachers. This approach provided a comprehensive view of their experiences and goals.

Results

Narratives of three in-service teachers in Thailand, each with a minimum of three years of teaching experience, were analyzed in detail. They reflected on their English teaching journey and motivations, covering their background, actual selves, and possible language teacher selves (ideal, ought-to, and feared). Demographic information relating to these participants is given in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic Information of Participants

TEACHER (AGE)	NATIONALITY	GENDER	POSITION	DEGREE(S)	TEACHING EXPERIENCE
X (26)	Filipino	Male	Part-Time Teacher	BSc (Physical Sciences) MA (Applied Linguistics for English language teaching)	6 years
Y (39)	American	Female	Online Tutor	BA (Theatre) MA (Material and Visual Culture) Certificate of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages CELTA)	8 years
Z (55)	Malaysian	Female	Full-time University Lecturer	BA (ESL) MA (ESL) Working on completing a doctoral degree in leadership	29 years

Possible Selves Story: Participant X

Background. Male Participant X, a 26-year-old teacher from the Philippines, had teaching experience in Thailand for about six years. Now located in Nonthaburi and holding a bachelor's degree in Physical Science, he teaches science. Additionally, he worked part-time as a lecturer in English Language at a Thonburi university. During his free time, he enjoyed social media and Netflix. He is an introvert and had no prior teaching experience in the Philippines, but his family's background in teaching influenced his career choice. While teaching in a foreign country initially did not attract him, an invitation from family in Thailand changed his perspective. He quickly recognized the importance of English in Thailand and enrolled in a master's program. Now he aspires to build a long-term career as an English teacher, particularly in a university setting.

Actual language teacher self. Participant X acknowledged his current career dissatisfaction and a desire for continuous improvement, setting goals to enhance contentment. He described himself as adaptable and not goal-oriented. Recognizing his strengths and areas for growth, he was aware that his introverted nature's impacts on student relationships, particularly in communication-intensive roles like teaching. As a part-time English teacher, he aspired to work full-time, showing determination to improve career prospects. He is actively searching for opportunities aligned with his long-term goals.

Ideal language teacher self. Participant X envisioned an ideal English teacher as someone with strong communication skills, deep language knowledge, passion, and an active teaching style. He recalled how a passionate teacher with an active approach inspired him to engage and observe.

As an introvert, he recognized the need to enhance student relationships and stated, "I need to be more sociable to my students ... as an English teacher, I need to have a lot of communication skills ... I need to build [a] stronger relationship [with] my students." Additionally, he believed pursuing higher qualifications, such as a master's or PhD, would expand his career prospects, allowing for research and other opportunities beyond teaching.

Ought-to language teacher self. In his teaching role, Participant X was tasked with creating lesson plans, teaching materials, and striving to engage students through innovative activities. While juggling student and parent expectations, he acknowledged that certain factors, like fatigue, hindered full compliance.

When teaching adult learners like KMUTT staff, he prioritized professionalism and subject expertise. In all his lessons, he ensured preparation and effective delivery to meet his students' expectations. He reflected:

Because they are adult learners ... So they are quite older than me How can I make them follow my instruction? Or follow what I'm teaching so I have a kind of a reflection of how should I do that? First, I need to be more professional, be more knowledgeable enough with your topic. So that everything that they ask, I could answer. And everything I need to deliver, I can do it well, I can teach them well.

Feared language teacher self. Participant X, a part-time lecturer teaching English to university staff, aimed to meet adult learners' expectations. He contemplated his role, saying, "I need to be more professional, be more knowledgeable ... so I think I reach their expectation for them."

He was concerned about the repetitive nature of the teaching routine, fearing it would diminish his motivation and that of his students.

Possible Selves Story: Participant Y

Background. Female Participant Y, a 39-year-old from Louisiana, pursued theater and art studies despite having no interest in acting. She later earned a master's degree in Material and Visual Culture in London, focusing on women's dress in Laos. Her English teaching journey began part-time and evolved into a full-time role, complemented by work with various organizations and teacher training.

She currently was pursuing a master's in Applied Linguistics in Thailand, she enjoys non-fiction reading, traveling, and immersing in local cultures. Participant Y values research-based opinions and is open to changing her views.

Initially, she viewed Westerners teaching English in Southeast Asia negatively, considering it temporary for those without qualifications. However, circumstances led her to Laos, where teaching became fulfilling and impactful, contributing to society. She realized the significance of her role. She commented: "This skill in Lao is life-changing. It really is. ... in Lao, this particular skill takes people very far."

Seeking an international school in Laos, she encountered limited options, low pay, and a toxic environment. She desired anonymity and moved to a bustling Thai metropolis, finding the similarity in the primary language comforting.

Actual language teacher self. Participant Y, despite a strong teaching background and a CELTA certification, often has been considered technically underqualified. She recognized the advantages of being a native English speaker and white, saying "[these qualities] can only take [me] so far." To be more competitive and advanced, she understood the need for additional qualifications. Becoming a university professor in Thailand carries significant social standing and respect. It represents a prestigious appointment but also acts as a stepping stone to enhance one's appeal to future employers. She said:

You need qualifications if you want to be able to keep moving up. Working university professors in Thailand have a lot of social standing and the job is very highly respected Working at a university will dramatically change potential employer's outlook of me as a teacher.

Ideal language teacher self. Participant Y preferred a classroom setting within a structured environment. She expressed her desire, saying,

Right now, it's not what I want. Like if this [tutoring online] is what I thought life was going to be forever, I'd be bored. But it suits what I need for my life right now. But yeah, I want to be back in a classroom.

As a teacher, she aimed to enhance students' independence and emphasized that nobody was perfect. Creating a safe space for open discussions was crucial, even if challenging. She valued qualities like humility and compassion in teachers. She disliked the term "lecturer" because it implied a one-way communication. She wanted to avoid being an authoritarian teacher who stifled student participation and who feared making mistakes.

Ought-to language teacher self. As an online English tutor, Participant Y conducted one-on-one teaching sessions, focused on explaining concepts, provided examples, and facilitated discussions to enhance students' language skills. She customized lessons based on each student's unique needs, pace, and areas of improvement, including conversational English and IELTS exam preparation.

She recognized varying expectations in language learning, including the desire for perfect grammar and pronunciation, or the belief that teachers should possess complete language knowledge. Participant Y was mindful of these expectations, understood the challenge they posed and that teachers cannot be expected to know everything.

Feared language teacher self. Participant Y faced challenging situations that extended beyond teaching, such as students showing signs of self-harm or being in abusive situations. She described these situations as making her "feel powerless" and uncertain about the best way to help while respecting boundaries. She explained as follows:

You want to help, but there are still boundaries as a teacher. And sometimes when you want to help, what you think you should do may not be helping. And I think for me, those are the biggest concerns when I'm facing them, basically just human issues.

Dealing with social exclusion or silent suffering issues can be emotionally difficult for teachers, and these situations do not get easier to handle over time. Despite valuing a safe space, these circumstances can test a teacher's adequacy and raise doubts about the best course of action.

Possible Selves Story: Participant Z

Background. Participant Z, a 55-year-old woman from Malaysia, taught at a private university in Thailand. She described herself as friendly and helpful, with a background in English education. Her teaching journey began in a local school where she taught Malay. Despite early challenges in classroom management, she found joy in sharing knowledge and interacting with students, realizing that teaching was her calling.

Growing up with limited English proficiency, Participant Z was initially afraid to speak in English and felt "really stupid" for not knowing how to use the language. However, her determination to overcome these challenges stemmed from her belief in the importance of English. This belief led her to decide to teach English to help others learn the language. She said:

I think because of the difficult experience I had, I would like to help more people to know [how to] speak English. That's how I came to decide to teach in English because I believe English was a very important language. It's like opening a world that you have not seen before.

After her graduate studies, Participant Z taught in Singapore before the college relocated to Thailand, where she continued her teaching career.

Actual language teacher self. Participant Z had reached a stage in her teaching career where she felt great comfort with her knowledge and was genuinely excited about entering the classroom. She experienced increased happiness and ease in her teaching abilities compared to the past.

As a non-native English speaker, Participant Z acknowledged her challenges, particularly with aspects like prepositions and pronunciation. She accepted her non-native status and focused on contributing her knowledge rather than striving for native-like proficiency. She believed that most students do not need to speak like a native but only require a practical understanding of the language for daily life.

Participant Z found value in her own experiences as they allowed her to easily relate to students' confusion and explain concepts in a way they could understand. Her struggles with English make her an empathetic teacher who comprehended the challenges students faced in language learning.

Ideal language teacher self. According to Participant Z, an ideal language teacher should have a genuine love for teaching and be genuinely concerned about their students' well-being. She emphasized the importance of a teacher's willingness to help struggling students understand.

Moreover, she believed that ideal language teachers should possess expertise in their subject matter, a deep understanding of the learning process, and a strong commitment to ongoing learning and development.

If given the opportunity, Participant Z would like to create her own English grammar textbook, drawing from her extensive teaching experience. While she had the knowledge, she acknowledged that it would require time to put everything together. Additionally, she aimed to enhance her technological skills to support both online and in-person teaching, emphasizing the importance of continuous learning and improvement in her profession.

Ought-to language teacher self. In her current role, Participant Z juggled administrative duties and teaching English classes. She recognized the fundamental responsibilities of a teacher, which involved class preparation, student assessment, and progress reporting to the department.

She believed that she could fulfill the basic requirements and expectations by planning and preparing for classes as anticipated. However, she acknowledged that constraints like limited time could hinder her from investing more effort in her classes or providing individual feedback in large classes. She reflected on the tension between her desires and the reality she faced, saying,

Now, sometimes I would like to do more for the classes, but time is not on my side for instance. So that could be problematic. Because I can't implement what I really want to do because of limitations, or I would like to give individual feedback for students but in a very big class. How can I do that without sacrificing my sleep? So that's the tension between desire and the reality.

Feared language teacher self. Participant Z feared stagnation in learning, believing it halted personal growth and "harms the brain." Participant Z often found unfamiliar words, especially the difficulty in pronouncing them acceptably, to be intimidating. In instances where she was corrected in class, she viewed it as an opportunity for learning rather than feeling embarrassed. She dreaded becoming too teacher-centered and was concerned about forgetting her students in lesson planning.

Summary of Results

Table 2 provides the condensed overview of the participants' selves.

Table 2 Overview of Participants' Possible Selves

TEACHER	ACTUAL	IDEAL	OUGHT-TO	FEARED
X	Dissatisfied due to introverted nature, seeks to improve, and build student relationships.	Proficient teacher with strong communication skills, interactive classroom.	Prepares engaging lessons, professional and knowledgeable.	Stuck in repetitive routine, has challenges in student relationships.
Y	Finds fulfillment in teaching, values impact on individuals.	Safe, open classroom, humility, compassion, continuous improvement.	Tailors lessons, adapts to different expectations.	Handles challenging student issues while maintaining a safe space.
Z	Joy in teaching, comfortable with knowledge, values shared experiences.	Create a comprehensive textbook, student-centered emphasis, continuous learning.	Balances admin and teaching, effective communication.	Stagnant learning, forgetting student needs, losing growth mindset.

Discussion

This study delved into the motivations of in-service English language teachers in Thailand by exploring their possible selves as educators. The findings revealed a complex interplay between motivations and self-concept, offering insights into the factors shaping their motivations (Hamman et al., 2013).

The primary finding underscored that participants' motivations were chiefly rooted in intrinsic and altruistic factors, in line with their possible selves as English language teachers. This aligns with prior research in Australia (Alexander et al., 2020), which highlighted similar intrinsic and altruistic motives. For instance, Participant X's drive for self-improvement and university teaching resonated with his ideal and ought-to possible selves, while Participant Y's commitment to societal impact aligned with her actual and ideal selves. These motivations reflect an acknowledgment of Thailand's growing emphasis on English proficiency as life-changing. This connection mirrors Osguthorpe and Sanger's (2013) observations about the desire to positively impact students' lives among teacher candidates.

The second significant finding was that participants' possible selves strongly influenced their motivations and career aspirations. Their ideal possible selves as English teachers served as powerful motivators, while their feared possible selves encouraged them to take action to avoid undesirable outcomes. This finding echoes Smid's (2018) research highlighting the direct impact of ideal selves on motivations for learning and teaching English. Participant Y's determination to enhance students' experiences aligns with Lutovac's (2020) findings that teachers' possible selves motivate support and encouragement.

The third key finding indicated that participants' desire to persist in teaching aligned with their possible selves and career trajectories. This agrees with Kubanyiova's (2009) emphasis on the gap between desired and actual selves driving learning and growth. Participant Z's commitment to refining her teaching skills and creating a comprehensive English grammar textbook aligned with her ideal and ought-to possible selves. The participants' aspiration to continuously learn and maintain student-centered approaches reflects how teachers' possible selves drive learning and development.

For all three participants, it is also possible to discern the use of strategies to attain their ideal and ought-to possible selves to meet goals, which agrees with Hamman et al. (2013). Agreement was also found with Kammayee and Tepsuriwong's (2024) data. The teachers' motivation to invest in professional development was shown by preparing engaging lessons and tailoring lessons, and showing a desire to construct a comprehensive textbook.

Finally, in line with Karimi and Norouzi (2019), we found the concept and frame of possible selves to be a reliable and useful way of engaging with, supporting, and potentially motivating, teacher candidates.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the motivations of in-service English teachers in Thailand, offering a nuanced understanding through the lens of possible selves. The findings reveal the intricate interplay of intrinsic motivations, self-concept, and career aspirations that drive teacher commitment.

By analyzing participants' ideal, actual, ought-to, and feared possible selves, we uncovered the complex web of motivations influencing their choices as educators. The alignment of these possible selves with motivations and career paths underscores the significant impact of self-perception on teacher motivation.

The implications of the study for educational institutions is that it highlights the importance of tailored professional development, student-centered teaching, recognizing non-native speaker strengths, supporting continuous improvement, prioritizing teacher well-being, and aligning strategies with inner motivations. These insights offer practical guidance for schools and policymakers striving to foster teacher growth, enhance student experiences, and improve education quality.

In summary, this research contributes to the literature on teacher motivation, emphasizing the role of possible selves in shaping career aspirations and commitment. As education evolves, understanding teacher motivations remains crucial for developing effective strategies to improve teacher well-being, enhance education quality, and increase teacher motivation and retention.

Limitations

This study had its limitations, such as a small sample size, the use of convenience sampling, reliance on self-reported data, and utilizing a cross-sectional design. Future researchers might consider larger, more diverse samples, longitudinal studies, and a mixed-methods approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of teacher motivation and possible selves.

Ethics Declaration

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (Approval code: KMUTT-IRB-COE-2023-089)

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Part I: Background

1. Can you tell me some things about yourself?
2. When did you start teaching English?
3. How did you end up in the field of teaching?
4. What caught your interest in teaching English?
5. Why did you choose to teach in Thailand?
6. So far, how do you feel where you are at in your English teaching career?

Part II: Ideal Language Teacher Self

1. How has your career shaped your life?
2. What are some goals you would like to achieve as an English teacher?
3. What are some important traits an English teacher should have?

Part III: Ought-to language teacher self

1. What are some duties and responsibilities you are required to do as a teacher?
2. Are you able to do what people expect you to do as an English teacher?
 - a. If yes, what do you do?
 - b. If no, what do you plan to do?
3. Are there any other factors that influence your ability to become an ideal teacher?

Part IV: Feared language teacher self

After discussing your ideals and responsibilities as a teacher...

1. Do you have any worries regarding your responsibilities?
2. What are some things you might be afraid of in your career?
3. What do you want to avoid as an English teacher?

Part V: Conclusion

1. Do you think you will continue/leave after teaching English for a certain length of time?
 - a. Why or why not?