



Full length article

Exploring student teachers' motivation change in initial teacher education: A Chinese perspective

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H I G H L I G H T S

- Student teachers enter the teaching profession with mixed motivations.
- Their motivations change through cognitive engagements and social interactions.
- Specifically, four different factors interactively mediate motivation changes.
- The external policy as a “double-edged sword” influences teacher motivations.

A R T I C L E I N F O

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Informed by a multiple, integrated perspective on teacher motivations, this study explores ten student teachers' motivation change throughout a pre-service language teacher education program in China. Drawing on data from the participants' personal reflections, focus group interviews, and individual interviews, this study reveals how the participants' motivations were shaped and reshaped through their professional practice and social interactions in relation to their self-efficacy, outcome expectations, professional autonomy, and social support in their learning context. This study concludes with some implications for policy makers and teacher educators on how to cultivate and promote pre-service teachers' motivations and commitments towards teaching as a life-long career.

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1. Introduction

Despite the increasing importance of English in international business and cultural exchanges, teacher shortage and attrition have remained a serious issue in language teaching and teacher education (Gao & Xu, 2014; Lee & Yuan, 2014). Particularly in many English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) contexts (e.g., mainland China and Hong Kong), new teachers continue to exit the classroom with detrimental impacts on students' linguistic development and academic learning (Trent, 2016). In order to address the problem of teacher attrition and promote the quality of language teaching and learning, educational policy makers, curriculum designers, and teacher educators have emphasized the critical role of pre-service language teacher education programs in developing and sustaining student teachers' motivations towards teaching, which can

influence “how they approach the complexities, challenges, disappointments, and rewards of teaching” (Richardson & Watt, 2010, p. 149) in their current learning and future work.

The past decades have witnessed a surge of research interests in teacher motivations in both general education and language teaching (e.g., Gao & Trent, 2009; Roness & Smith, 2010). Previous studies have shown that language teachers usually enter the teaching profession with mixed motivations, which can be altruistic (e.g., a desire to teach children and make a difference in their lives), intrinsic (e.g., an interest in English or in teaching itself), and extrinsic (e.g., salary and job security) (Gao & Xu, 2014; Watt & Richardson, 2008). A highly engaged and committed teacher usually holds prominent altruistic/intrinsic motivations, which can support and guide their professional learning and continuing career development (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). To date, limited attention has been paid to the process of student teachers' motivation change in initial teacher education (Reness & Smith, 2010). Although a few studies (e.g., Sinclair, 2008; Tang, Cheng, & Cheng, 2014) have looked into how pre-service teachers' motivations

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shifted in relation to various personal (e.g., their previous learning experiences) and contextual (e.g., their teaching practicum) factors, little research has addressed student teachers' motivation change from a multiple, integrated perspective focusing on their self-efficacy, outcome expectations, professional autonomy, and social support (Lee & Yuan, 2014). Previous researchers (e.g., Sinclair, Dowson, & McInerney, 2006; Siwatu, 2007) have shown that student teachers' motivations are strongly influenced by how they perceive their capabilities in teaching (i.e., self-efficacy) and the potential results their teaching can generate (i.e., outcome expectations). Others have also emphasized the relationship between student teachers' motivations and their embedded teacher education programs where they may receive (or lack) professional autonomy and social support (e.g., Manuel & Hughes, 2006; Tang et al., 2014). In order to deepen our understanding the complex, dynamic, and situated process of motivation transformation (Richardson & Watt, 2010), it is thus important to adopt an integrated perspective that incorporates student teachers' self-efficacy, outcome expectations, as well as the professional autonomy and social support afforded by their specific institutional and socio-cultural contexts.

The present study seeks to examine whether and how a group of pre-service language teachers' motivation transformed in the Government-funded Normal Program (also known as "Free Teacher Education program") in China. The Government-funded Normal Program is an important policy attempt made by the Chinese government to address the problems of teacher attrition and shortage and promote its educational equity and development. Different from some policy interventions (e.g., the "Teach for America" program in the US) which provide alternative teacher hiring routes with relatively limited training (Chudgar, Chandra, & Razaque, 2014), the Government-funded Normal Program seeks to enlist and prepare high-quality teachers through formal teacher education (i.e., four-year university-based teacher education programs) and allocate them to work in underdeveloped rural regions in China (Wang & Gao, 2013). Thus, focusing on student teachers' motivations to teach in the program, this study cannot only shed light on the complex process of motivation change through learning to teach (Richardson & Watt, 2010), but it can also generate useful implications for policy makers, educational leaders, and teacher educators on how to address the issues of teacher shortage and attrition and prepare motivated and qualified teachers.

2. Student teachers' motivation change: A multiple, integrated perspective

Despite a surge of research interests over the past decades (e.g., Richardson, Karabenick, & Watt, 2014), there is an absence of a universally agreed definition of teacher motivation due to its multidimensionality and intricacy (Sinclair, 2008). In general, as a cognitive-affective construct, teacher motivation can be interpreted as a complex set of personal values and beliefs that can explain why teachers enter the profession as well as why and how they expend efforts and persist in teaching (Rots, Kelchtermans, & Aelterman, 2012).

Drawing on current motivation research in teacher education and educational psychology (e.g., Richardson & Watt, 2010; Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008), this study draws on a multiple, integrated perspective (Sinclair, 2008) positing that the formation and development of teaching motivations are inextricably linked to teachers' *self-efficacy, outcome expectations, professional autonomy, and social support* in their situated institutional and socio-cultural environment (Lee & Yuan, 2014). First of all, from a socio-cognitive perspective, "self-efficacy", defined as people's "beliefs

in their capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1995, p. 2), can determine how much effort they will expend and how long they will persist in face of obstacles (Schunk et al., 2008). Pre-service teachers with high self-efficacy tend to believe in their abilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), and thus are likely to gain satisfaction and foster motivations towards teaching. As Schunk (1990) points out, self-efficacy is an important outcome of individuals' self-regulated learning. By fostering different self-regulation skills and strategies, such as goal setting, strategic planning, and self-reflection (Bronson, 2000; Zimmerman, 2002), student teachers can reap a sense of self-efficacy from their ongoing practice and enhance their confidence in dealing with difficult situations, thus contributing to their motivations towards teaching (Zimmerman, 2008).

"Outcome expectation", referring to individuals' evaluative perceptions regarding whether their investment and engagement will lead to certain desirable results (Lee & Yuan, 2014; Schunk, 1990), is another contributing factor to motivation change (Schunk et al., 2008). Relating to the temporal dimension of motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011), "outcome expectation" can transcend individuals' direct experiences and function as catalysts or impediments for their future actions and change (Rots et al., 2012). Pre-service teachers might feel more encouraged in their learning when they believe it will produce positive outcomes (e.g., students' academic development) and when they value those outcomes, and vice versa. As suggested by previous researchers (e.g., Schunk et al., 2008), there is a complex relationship between self-efficacy and outcome expectations, and such a relationship can impinge on student teachers' motivations to teach. For instance, in Lee and Yuan's (2014) study, the student teachers with high self-efficacy expressed little motivation towards teaching as they felt their current efforts in learning to teach could not lead to their desired outcomes (i.e., students' academic learning and personal growth) given the potential obstacles (e.g., heavy administrative work and exam-driven culture) embedded in their future work contexts. On the other hand, Siwatu's (2007) research shows that, while the student teachers demonstrated high outcome expectancy beliefs in the innovative teaching approaches they learned in the pre-service program, their lack of self-efficacy in applying these approaches to their future classrooms resulted in a decline of motivations to teach. Therefore, in teacher motivation research, it is of great importance to pay attention to both self-efficacy and outcome expectations because they collectively impact on teaching motivations.

In addition, recent motivation research heralds a move towards the integration of motivation and socio-cultural contexts. This emerging line of research (e.g., Tang et al., 2014; Watt & Richardson, 2008) posits that motivation arises from a dynamic and integrative relationship between individuals and their situated sociocultural environment. In order to promote student teachers' motivations in the process of learning to teach, previous researchers (e.g., Pearson & Moomaw, 2005; Rots et al., 2012) have emphasized the pivotal role of both "professional autonomy" and "social support" afforded by the embedded learning contexts. "Autonomy" refers to the conditions under which people engage in activities naturally and spontaneously (e.g., out of their interests) without external coercion (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For pre-service teachers, being autonomous means they are able to take responsibilities for their own professional learning by appropriating various cultural artefacts (e.g., a theoretical idea or the school curriculum) and (re)constructing their social relationships in their situated communities (Johnson, 2009), which can promote their motivations towards teaching (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005).

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