Improving EFL Teachers' Professional Experiences and Motivation: An Ecological Approach

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Abstract

This article explores in-service EFL teacher (de)motivation in secondary state schools in Spain. Possible solutions to teachers' negative professional experiences and demotivation were proposed by 23 Spanish EFL teachers. These suggestions are examined applying Ecosystems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1993). Using this framework, the present qualitative study offers an ecological understanding of the improvements needed in the EFL teaching profession, in which the importance of the context is reinforced since they were found to affect teachers and their motivation. Data were collected through in-depth online and face-to-face semi-structured interviews and recurrent classroom observations. Innovation and training, teaching support, a reduced teacher-student ratio and empathizing with students were some solutions proposed to solve teachers' motivational problems. This ecological standpoint shows that teachers are negatively affected by factors beyond their control and therefore, the intervention of policymakers to upgrade teachers' working conditions was found to be key to protecting teachers' extrinsic motivation and to preventing the deterioration of their intrinsic motivation.

Keywords: English Language Teaching; Demotivation; Ecosystems; Ecological Perspective; Improvements; Solutions

Learner motivation is an issue of crucial importance in education, but the same prominence has not been given to teacher motivation in the classroom (Dörnyei, 2018; Lamb & Wyatt, 2019). The scarce research on this domain of enquiry signals that a more thorough investigation of language teacher motivation is needed. Teachers are in charge of preparing the next generation of citizens and shaping students' future. Solutions that boost teacher

motivation are needed since this is known to affect student motivation for better or for worse (Lamb, 2017). Researchers have sought solutions to teachers' challenges and demotivation (Brackett et al., 2010; Dörnyei, 2001; Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014; Hiver & Dörnyei, 2015; Mercer et al., 2016), but teachers' own suggestions bring a different perspective to this issue, particularly coming from an under-researched area such as Spain where teachers have been found to be dissatisfied with the education system (Caraker, 2016; Pedró et al., 2008). Although researchers have attempted to find solutions and strategies to improve teacher motivation and enhance their professional experiences, teachers still struggle to maintain their motivation and to remain in the profession (Kell, 2018) and therefore, this terrain requires further, cautious scrutiny. This article will suggest solutions to EFL teachers' negative experiences and demotivation by embedding the findings in Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1993) nested ecosystems model.

Literature Review

Teacher Demotivation

Teacher motivation is a complex concept that has attracted attention in the last decades and has been found to influence student motivation and performance (see e.g., Atkinson, 2000; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). To support demotivated teachers, it is primordial to understand the meaning of the concept of demotivation. According to Dörnyei (2001, p. 143), demotivation refers to "specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action" but this does not imply that all positive influences have disappeared; some of them have been reduced by extrinsic and negative causes but some positive motives may still remain. Thus, teacher demotivation is not the opposite of teacher motivation and teachers can feel both motivated and demotivated by a range of factors. The present article will focus on demotivators and other factors which affect teachers negatively during their professional career and the possible solutions.

Demotivators affecting teachers in mainstream education and in the second language (L2) field include, but are not limited to: lack of social recognition (Kim & Kim, 2015; Schutz & Zembylas, 2009; Spear et al., 2000), a heavy workload (Connie, 2000; Doyle & Kim, 1999; Nikolov, 1999; Roth, 2014; Thorburn, 2017), lack of support (Dinham & Scott, 1998), students' negative attitudes and behavior (Addison & Brundrett, 2008; Linares et al., 2009; Sugino, 2010), or poor relationships and pressure from others in the school (Hettiarachchi, 2013; Roth, 2014). Contextual pressures associated with curricula, performing to a certain standard, school administration, and conforming to others' teaching methods have also been found to affect teachers' autonomous motivation to teach (Pelletier et al., 2002). As a response to these demotivators and others, researchers have attempted to find solutions to negative factors in the teaching profession.

Solutions to Teacher Demotivation and Other Challenges

Researchers have scrutinized demotivators and challenges aiming to find solutions. Butler (2007) employed a self-report measure of goal orientations and suggested that sharing problems with colleagues could help teachers to cope with problems independently. This would build a supportive community of peers that was deemed as a way of overcoming demotivation by teachers in Australia, Japan, and Spain in the study of Brereton (2019).

In terms of external intervention, providing emotional training could help teachers to not only survive but also flourish in their profession (MacIntyre et al., 2019). English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers with a high emotional quotient have been found to be more satisfied and to understand their students' feelings better in Iran/Shiraz (Hekmatzadeh et al., 2016). Along the same lines, those teachers with greater Emotion-Regulation Ability (ERA) are able to maintain positive emotions and to reduce or modify undesirable emotions and if teacher-training programs included a focus on ERA, teachers would be benefitted by experiencing less burnout, greater job satisfaction, thus being more effective in the classroom, and staying longer in the profession (Brackett et al., 2010).

Additionally, Shoaib (2004) proposed strategies to enhance teacher motivation in Saudi Arabia by using large-scale interviews. This study identified several flaws in the teaching profession and suggested solutions that are mostly managed by governments and institutions. At the same time, this investigation recognized some actions that can be taken by teachers themselves to enhance their profession and promote their motivation such as training, further development, and self-regulatory strategies. Although major changes pertain to those in power such as the government or the national and institutional administrations, teachers can also get involved in certain actions that may result in positive improvements in their careers.

Many challenges teachers face have been claimed to be "potentially within their control" (Kottler et al., 2005, p. 111), and researchers have pointed out strategies that teachers can utilize to solve some of these challenges. Dörnyei (2001) advocated a set of self-motivating strategies for teachers based on Corno and Kanfer's (1993) control strategies and these included reflecting on the lessons, analyzing their own anxiety, observing other teachers, improving their teaching, and arranging teacher study groups to solve problems cooperatively. Additionally, Hiver and Dörnyei (2015, p. 14) reviewed some core strategies by Gold and Roth (2005) that "well-adjusted" teachers could use such as getting involved, enlisting others' support and maintaining distance to reflect on the situation objectively. These possibilities could help teachers to make use of healthy coping behaviors that would assist them in facing and tackling challenges in their teaching experiences.

In the field of positive psychology, ideas have been proposed for teachers to avoid excessive negative feelings by focusing more on positive emotions such as keeping a gratitude journal, developing a teacher-student relationship of respect and trust, reflecting on teachers' initial reasons for choosing a teaching career, reflecting on the rewards teaching has, or writing narrative descriptions of the teachers they would like to become (MacIntyre et al., 2019; Mercer et al., 2016). Along these lines, Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) recommend visualization techniques, such as visual narratives looking forward in time, revisiting images of past teaching experiences and support groups to help teachers develop their resilience and to fight against adversity. Furthermore, generating creative tension which may stimulate teachers towards an improvement has also been proposed by doing peer observation, self-observation, collecting student feedback, focus-group interviews, and action research (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014). Any of these proposals could trigger teachers' reflection and encourage them to work towards an improvement.

Some of the above-presented strategies could be immensely helpful for teachers; however, these suggestions would increase the amount of time teachers spend dealing with work-related issues. In consequence, these recommendations may discourage demotivated or stressed teachers. They may not have the resources or time to focus on themselves or their

wellbeing by trying any of the above ideas. Thus, the fact that teachers may not have the resources such as time or energy to respond to the challenges of their profession implies the need for outside intervention. Those hierarchically above teachers should make changes to ease their teachers' profession, especially when teachers cannot regulate the causes of demotivation on their own.

Bronfenbrenner's Nested Ecosystems Model

Teacher motivation has been studied by using diverse theoretical frameworks such as self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; see Roth, 2014 for a review), achievement goal theory (Butler, 2014), self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1986; see Wyatt, 2018 for a review), and possible selves theory (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014; Sahakyan et al., 2018). These theories focus on the individual and therefore, on the microsystem. Ecosystems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) provides an understanding of the microsystem but also a wider perspective which includes different systems and contexts affecting the teacher.

For the research described in this article, Bronfenbrenner's Ecosystems theory (1979, 1993) has been used as a framework to analyze the research findings. The application of ecosystems theory to teachers as individuals who are influenced by contexts and interrelated processes emphasizes the importance of research which takes into account not only events that occur in the classroom but also a broader contextual influence on teachers and their motivation. Solutions to EFL teachers' negative experiences and demotivation proposed by participants in this study can be analyzed through Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1993) nested ecosystems model since these solutions belong to distinct ecosystems, (i.e., enhancing teacher motivation is not solely the responsibility of teachers).

The notion of ecological environments has been used in the field of psychology to explore human development and behavior. These ecological settings inhabit within one another (i.e., affect each other) as complex nested systems and can be employed to understand language learning and teaching. Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1993) nested model focuses on human development and behavior within and across several interdependent settings called ecosystems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem.

The microsystem is the immediate environment of the teacher and the innermost layer of the ecosystems. Solutions which are produced or controlled by teachers have been included here and this is the context that has the biggest influence on the teacher. Secondly, the mesosystem embraces the connections and relationships between two or more settings in which the developing person (the teacher) is and "a mesosystem is a system of microsystems" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This system encompasses interactions between people and contexts in the microsystem; those solutions that involve relationships with others are part of this system. Thirdly, the exosystem includes the links and processes between two or more settings, in one of them the developing person (the teacher) is not included but is indirectly influenced by the events and changes in that setting, such as factors that are present in teachers' professional experiences but cannot be fully controlled by them, for example changes in their working conditions. Although teachers are not active in the exosystem and do not have decision-making power within this context, they are affected by factors in this system. Finally, the macrosystem is the outermost and overarching setting in which ideologies, beliefs, lifestyles, culture, and other characteristics of all systems are included and influence the individual. This system embraces a larger cultural and social context and

comprises the education system, the government, and the society at large. These last systems constitute those solutions that are beyond the teachers' control.

In a later review, Bronfenbrenner (2005) further developed the theory by discussing the Process–Person–Context–Time model in which proximal processes were the key factor in development. However, the present study has employed the earlier version of the theory to analyze the research findings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1993) because the data collected did not focus on the Time context. Thus, to preserve the integrity of the mature form of Bronfenbrenner's model, the early version of the theory (1979) has been used.

Researchers have applied Bronfenbrenner's theory in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) to examine the influences of the use of computer technology in language classes (Van Lier, 2000, 2002, 2004), to investigate the dynamic nature of L2 learners' willingness to communicate in language classrooms (Cao, 2009; Peng, 2012) and to explore language anxiety (Gkonou, 2017). Kramsch (2002, 2008) and Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) also used an ecological standpoint to focus on multilingualism, language socialization and acquisition. Ecological perspectives can contribute to understanding processes of learning and teaching based on inter-influential socio-cultural systems.

Van Lier (1997, p. 785) points out, "Bronfenbrenner's (1979) view of ecology as a set of nested ecosystems that are densely interconnected will enable an organic description of context, moving from the micro to the macro and definitely moving beyond the classroom walls." More recently, scholars have been encouraged to adopt an ecological perspective to understand the complex relationships among factors and the environment in the field of SLA (Larsen-Freeman, 2018). Instead of limiting research to individual factors, there is need for a broader approach and Bronfenbrenner's model (1977, 1979) allows for this orientation. Thus, this ecological approach to solve teacher demotivation and other challenges will focus on a wider angle, in which extrinsic forces are thought to have an influence on teachers and their motivation, and therefore, solutions ought to arise from diverse contexts.

This paper, which is part of a larger qualitative investigation on teacher (de)motivation in Spain (Gadella Kamstra, 2020a), will aim to discuss the following research questions:

- In what ways could EFL teachers' negative experiences and demotivation be analyzed from an ecological approach?
- What are the possible solutions suggested by practicing teachers to EFL teachers' challenges and demotivation?

Methods

Context and Participants

This qualitative study was carried out in secondary state schools in Spain. The central administration of elementary and secondary education manages the existing education system, and it makes decisions with respect to the curriculum, recruitment, and funding along with the regional education offices (European Commission, 2015). Schools have limited autonomy in terms of management, pedagogy, and internal organization (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development; OECD, 2018). More importantly, low investment in education (OECD, 2019), recurrent law changes (Gratacós & López-Jurado, 2016), and the complicated access to teaching that involves bureaucratic procedures and competitive examinations are potential drawbacks for teachers in public institutions in Spain. In light of

these professional challenges, teachers in state schools in Spain would be able to identify demotivators and possible solutions.

Teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) in public institutions, entirely funded by the government, were invited to take part. The non-probability sampling was purposive and therefore, only in-service EFL teachers in secondary state schools were invited. Twenty-three Spanish EFL teachers with an average of twelve years of teaching experience (mean = 12.08) participated; three males and twenty females. They will be identified here as Tx (e.g., T1 for Teacher 1). The present article draws on semi-structured interviews and classroom observations as the research instruments. All participants gave written consent to participate and ethical approval was provided by the researchers' institution to conduct this study.

Regarding the interview data, there were approximately thirty hours of audio-recorded data and the interviews lasted an average of eighty minutes. A sample of the interview questions can be found in Appendix A. Fifteen of these interviews were conducted online and eight interviews were arranged to be face-to-face in the schools where the participants worked. As part of the classroom observation data, five EFL teachers were observed: two in each of Tenerife and Gran Canaria and one in Madrid. Altogether, there were fourteen 60-minute classes observed. These were logged by the main researcher and a second observer with extensive experience in L2 teaching who supported the data collection by taking part in two of these observations. Trustworthiness (validity and reliability in quantitative studies) was improved by having the support of a second observer who enabled the comparison of the data and a more transparent interpretation of the data (Dörnyei, 2007).

Data Collection

As part of the recruiting process, practicing EFL teachers in secondary state schools in Madrid, Tenerife and Gran Canaria were invited to take part in the project via postal mail and email. Social media posts also raised interest from EFL teachers in other cities in Spain. Five teachers confirmed their willingness to be observed three times, which served to shed light on teachers' attitudes and behavior more than a one-off observation would have. As part of the data collection process, interviews with the observed teachers were arranged after at least one class had been observed, so that data from the interviews supported the observation data. Factors mentioned by participants in the interviews were often found as instances in the observed classes. At the same time, after observing at least one class, the interviews helped to clarify situations, comments or verify the researcher's understanding of certain events in the classes. Classroom observations followed an observation protocol which was used by both observers.

The semi-structured interviews followed an interview guide with thirty questions that triggered conversation about important topics for the study. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility, although certain topics were included in all the interviews: initial motives, relationships with others, job satisfaction, motivating and demotivating factors, and ways of improving the profession and their motivation.

Data Analysis

Data from the handwritten observation sheets and the audio files were transcribed verbatim, manually. This was done as part of a discontinuous process in which reorganization and adjustments of the codes were made depending on the emerging results throughout the

analysis. Topics were identified, highlighted, and coded using relevant words, sentences, or paragraphs. The frequency of the codes from the research tools facilitated the creation of overarching themes and helped to identify patterns in the data and to uncover categories, which were necessary for reaching conclusions. The codes can be found in Appendix B. The data analysis showed interconnected findings, for example, between different contexts, which related well to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (1979, 1993), and this fostered a more thorough understanding and representation of the results.

Results and Discussion

Microsystem

More than half of the participants (15 out of 23) suggested innovation and training as a solution. Some interviewees considered that teachers who are demotivated, "would be more motivated if they changed the way they teach" (T21). New approaches to delivering language lessons may influence teacher motivation; teachers would no longer perceive their profession as monotonous because these approaches "are new for students, they are new for teachers too […] you are learning another thing and it is not the same" (T18). Four interviewees considered that learning a student-centered or a "cooperative" (T19) approach would improve their teaching effectiveness. Importantly, participants reported that learning how to respond to students' diversity (mixed abilities and individual needs) improved their motivation (Gadella Kamstra, 2021a). Thus, innovative approaches, training and learning could help teachers feel better about their performance in the classroom and as a result, foster their motivation and self-efficacy beliefs (Gadella Kamstra, 2021a; Watt, 2018). Intellectual stimulation motivates teachers and engaging in training will increase teachers' knowledge (Richardson & Watt, 2006; Watt & Richardson, 2007; Sinclair, 2008). Teachers' need for self-actualization and challenges are motivating factors that may keep teachers in the profession (Matei et al., 2007). Further training and development may also enhance their motivation (Shoaib, 2004). These arguments support this study's results. During the classroom observations, using interactive and innovative resources, such as movies, supported T1 to capture students' attention while enhancing their motivation. Students who were disruptive in previous observed classes seemed to be engaged with this approach. In agreement, empirical research shows that teachers' use of motivational strategies influence teacher motivation along with student motivation and achievement (Bernaus et al., 2009). Student motivation brought about through innovative and different teaching methods could increase teacher motivation. Thus, training in motivational strategies could promote student motivation and as a result, teacher motivation.

Nine participants proposed that when teachers confront difficulties, analyzing the problem could increase their motivation. Reflecting on a problematic situation may lead to finding a solution to the issue. More importantly, "once you get the real reason behind, try to implement some changes" (T20) because teachers should "take action rather than complaining all the time" (T15). Related to this suggestion, one interviewee suggested that reflecting on past lessons could trigger an improvement in future lessons: "why did this work so well with this group of students and maybe not well with another group and try to improve" (T22); this is one of the techniques mentioned by Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014). Analyzing the problem and reflecting on the difficulties could help teachers find a solution and overcome their stress and demotivation, along with improving their wellbeing. Teachers should "stop and think what's wrong, why do you feel like this […] and how could we

change it" (T7). Researchers have suggested that teachers should analyze the problem, reflect on their practices, and try not to avoid the challenges. These solutions have been promoted as self-motivating strategies (Dörnyei, 2001), as a way to avoid excessive negative feelings (Mercer et al., 2016) and as a core strategy for teachers (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2015) and these suggestions align with findings of this study. Lamb and Wyatt (2019, p. 531) also encourage "reflection on practice" as the basis for self-awareness that could elicit change in teachers' beliefs and practices. Scholars have often contemplated the idea of analyzing the problem as a solution to teacher demotivation or other negative influences. Thus, although the importance of teacher education has been stressed, reflective practices are also encouraged and should be part of teacher education and training (Gadella Kamstra, 2021a, 2021b).

Mesosystem

More than half of the participants (14 out of 23) proposed teaching support as a solution to teacher demotivation and other challenges. Four interviewees believed that "having more staff" (T16) was necessary to improve their conditions. Similarly, three participants perceived co-teaching as a solution since it would allow them to divide groups and "to work in (sic) some skills more thoroughly" (T4). Hiring teaching assistants could be a solution: two participants stated that they lessen teachers' workload by taking care of the administrative tasks such as "calling families [and] office work" (T14). Five other participants mentioned the need for native assistants to help teachers with the large number of students and with students' practice of some skills. Two participants suggested having more assistant teachers "especially for those students with special needs" (T17) because teachers are not often trained to help them, and this assistance would improve teachers' ability to favor all students. Additionally, in the observed classes, there was evidence of teaching support and its benefits. Three teachers in training helped T3, supporting students and reducing the number of tasks and responsibilities the lead teacher had. It seems logical that teachers suggest teaching support as a solution since teachers are often affected by their workload (Addison & Brundrett, 2008; Thorburn, 2017), the number of students in the classroom (Ellis et al., 2011), inadequate administrative support (Kim & Kim, 2015) and lack of support in the school (Brereton, 2019; Dinham & Scott, 1998). This solution could address several challenges and according to these participants, improve their performance and enrich their profession.

Several participants (13 out of 23) also maintained that cooperation and communication would be a way to battle demotivation, stress, and other challenges. Observing colleagues could increase teachers' chances of learning and improving their practices by finding new techniques (T11, T15 and T22), which could potentially enhance their motivation. On a similar note, sharing with colleagues from the same school or other institutions, getting feedback, working together, expressing their emotions, and feeling connected as part of a community were some of the suggestions by four other participants (T9, T11, T20, T22). A simple "come to my class" (T22) could favor those teachers who are struggling, and it seemed to particularly help one of the participants; "learning by listening, learning by what I see, that would be motivating for me" (T9). Sharing their experiences and expressing their emotions with colleagues, friends or relatives would also combat stress and demotivation, as was discussed by this teacher; "I try to share my experiences of that day with some other teacher or with a member of my family, with some friends" (T5). In agreement with these proposals, seeking professional help (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2015), observing other teachers and arranging teacher study groups and support groups to resolve problems cooperatively were

recommendations proposed by various researchers to solve problems and promote teacher motivation (Dörnyei, 2001; Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014). Furthermore, opportunities for development, adequate professional relationships and ties, professional input, and a favorable environment have been found to improve the teaching profession (Brereton, 2019; Butler, 2007; Packard & Dereschiwsky, 1990; Shoaib, 2004), and could support the fact that this solution, cooperation and communication, enhances teacher motivation.

Nearly half of the participating teachers (9 out of 23) highlighted the importance of empathizing with students as a solution to students' misbehavior, which was a common demotivator (Gadella Kamstra, 2020a). They claimed that instead of reacting negatively, teachers should empathize with them.

Excerpt 1

Understand [...] the psychological moment [...] these teenagers are living, you don't have to take what they do in a personal way [...] they don't know you, they don't hate you [...] you have to try to understand them, not to cause them more problems. (T4)

Some teenagers may not understand the importance of learning a language when they are in high school, but if teachers empathize with them, instead of taking their behavior personally and letting it affect their motivation, they could build a healthy teacher-student relationship while maintaining teacher motivation. This solution could inspire teachers to listen to students "about solutions they propose to get a better atmosphere in the lesson" (T6). A participant reported having connected with students in a positive way by trying "to be in students' position" (T14) and another interviewee mentioned the significance of understanding students who may not be willing to learn but have to sit "seven hours in a chair" (T21). Four participants implied that talking and listening to students would help to overcome behavioral problems, and two interviewees claimed that this could increase their own motivation to teach (T6 and T15).

In the observed classes, empathetic relationships, showing interest in students and caring for them seemed to encourage teachers and students to develop positive relationships. Participants would let students choose the activities, diverge from the teaching plan to allow time for topics learners liked and teachers would give learners another opportunity to submit their work by adapting to students' individual circumstances. These examples from observed classes show that if teachers empathize, the teacher-student relationship can flourish and, ideally, the teacher and the students can be more motivated to teach and learn in this harmonious atmosphere. Students may not change their interest in learning English, but they may respect the teacher as a professional and this can foster their good behavior in class, affecting teacher motivation positively (Gadella Kamstra, 2020a). In support of this finding, researchers agree that there should be understanding between teachers and learners since good relationships depend on the capacity to empathize with others (Mercer, 2016) and communicating with students is a positive practice that fosters better relationships (Jiang et al., 2019). This beneficial solution can avoid excessive negative feelings and trigger respectful and trustworthy teacher-student relationships (MacIntyre et al., 2019; Mercer et al., 2016). However, teachers may need emotional training in this empathic ability to understand their students better and modify unwanted emotions. These training programs have been found to be extremely valuable for teachers (Brackett et al., 2010; Hekmatzadeh et al., 2016)

but may not be available to them or they may lack the resources to attend (e.g., time or money).

Exosystem

More than half of the participating teachers (14 out of 23) suggested a reduced workload as a solution; having more free time and fewer lessons would be an important change in their profession. On this point, three teachers (T16, T17 and T21) considered this solution would improve their motivation and their professional experience and would allow more time to prepare and mark:

> **Excerpt 2**
>
> *Working fewer hours so I would be, I would have more energy, I could prepare classes better, I wouldn't have to mark, correct and assess so many students, and prepare and mark so many exams, that would help me to feel fresher, so as a result, more motivated [...] I think that we work long hours and we have lots of classes and makes this job tiring, so all those elements, hamper really or foster demotivation. (T17)*

Similar to T17 above, other teachers agreed; "what demotivates me is [...] not having time" (T1). Having "breaks" (T11 and T12) between lessons instead of having several classes in a row would help them to feel less stressed and more motivated (T16). Having excessive administrative tasks was also demotivating and was said to be a reason a teacher could "quit this job" (T2). Participants mentioned reducing the amount of paperwork to lessen the workload that, in turn, would increase teacher motivation, diminish stress, and enable more free time for leisure. Other studies on language teacher demotivation have proposed this solution (Butler, 2007; Shoaib, 2004). Time constraints have been found to affect teachers' psychological needs and their autonomous motivation to teach in mainstream education (Roth, 2014). This solution is particularly important since teachers often choose the profession because the working hours allow time for family (Richardson & Watt, 2006); however, if the workload hinders this attractor, teachers may leave the profession.

Another solution suggested by fourteen interviewees is a reduced student-teacher ratio. Participants considered that having fewer students would be a way of improving their teaching conditions. Having more groups would reduce the number of students per class and it would also be easier to help language learners improve their language skills. Limiting the number of students in the classrooms could affect teachers and their motivation positively. One participant stated that "very crowded classes" (T16) was the main demotivator for her and having 38 students was not suitable for learning a language. Another teacher also stressed the effect of the ratio on her motivation; "if we have fewer students, better work conditions, less [sic] lessons, I would [sic] see myself motivated. If things don't change, I don't know" (T6). Similarly, six interviewees affirmed that reducing the student-teacher ratio would be a way of decreasing their levels of stress and the amount of work to correct, which, in turn, would lessen the workload. This solution would also assist teachers to "motivate them [students] strongly" and "get better results" (T14) because the ratio makes it difficult to respond to students' "diversity and personal problems [...] not only academic ones" (T6). The ratio has been found to be a demotivator in the literature (Aydin, 2012; Ellis et al., 2011; Hettiarachchi, 2013) and reducing the ratio has been proposed as a solution by researchers in

other contexts (Shoaib, 2004). This solution would allow teachers to have more time to prepare motivating and diverse activities and to offer more individualized support.

Another solution is to establish limits between one's job and private life. More than half of the participating teachers (13 out of 23) referred to this solution to solve motivational issues and stress. Establishing limits appears to be a solution that the teacher can manage; however, the workload may not allow the teacher to take full control, and thus, this solution has been included as part of the exosystem. Teachers should be able "to retreat, stop working and rest" if they felt their wellbeing was being affected because "it is healthy to stop" (T13). This solution could improve teacher motivation as was the case of T13 whose motivation was enhanced after learning to switch off from work. Participants reported feeling "more motivated" (T4) and "less stressed" (T4 and T9) if they found the balance between their work and their free time in which they could do things they enjoy. When asked about giving advice to a demotivated teacher or about ways to diminish sources of stress, participants emphasized the importance of not allowing your work to interfere in your private life (T6, T18 and T19) and having free time, switching off from work and doing things you enjoy (T2, T4 and T15), which conforms to other research findings (Brereton, 2019; Earley & Bubb, 2004) in which the prominence of work-life balance was highlighted and appeared to be aligned with teacher wellbeing. Some participants acknowledged that "we take to our houses the situations we have lived in our work and that is not good" (T6), which attests to teachers' awareness of the necessity of finding a balance and of establishing limits to unwind from their job responsibilities.

Macrosystem

Nearly half of the participating teachers (10 out of 23) proposed communication between the government, the administration and the teachers to improve their motivation; "if the administration hears what we have to say, to take us into account, not for the picture, then I guess we will feel more motivated" (T13). Four participants (T2, T3, T9, and T10) reported welcoming a greater interaction to voice their problems and challenges in the classroom, and other participants (T11, T13, T20, and T21) highlighted the importance of taking part in designing the education system and laws that could be achieved by ensuring "more dialogue" (T20). Constant law and curriculum changes also discouraged participants. Empowering teachers to take part in the education system design and guaranteeing cooperative decisions would be rewarding for teachers and could trigger motivation while enabling a more realistic view of the classroom. These suggestions coincide with other research findings in which increasing teachers' decision-making power promoted motivation (Aydin, 2012; Shoaib, 2004) and opening communication channels assisted in overcoming demotivation (Brereton, 2019).

Interestingly, seven participants proposed monitoring teachers as a way of improving their motivation. Monitoring can "move" teachers to act and improve (T17) or work towards upgrading their motivation. This solution can help to identify those teachers who could improve with guidance and a superior's advice and feedback might be taken more into consideration and have "a higher impact" (T12). Supervising teachers and providing useful feedback and support could encourage teachers to seek help and find a solution to their demotivation and it might also inspire teachers to improve their practices. Some teachers find their motivation improved when trying to perform to the best of their abilities and when having clear objectives and knowing how to improve. In the literature, fair and objective

teacher evaluation has been found to be a motivator (Packard & Dereschiwsky, 1990) and a source of satisfaction for teachers (Barrs, 2005). Supervision was also proposed as a way of enhancing teacher motivation in other studies (Shoaib, 2004). In addition, strategies that generate creative tension (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014) have been suggested in order to stimulate teachers towards improvement, and fair monitoring could have a similar effect on teachers; it may enlighten them and provoke reflection.

Conclusions and Implications

Hiver and Dörnyei (2015) contend that teaching is the most important profession in society, and it is a profession in crisis. The present article offers solutions to teacher demotivation and other challenges in the teaching profession. Each of the participating teachers in this study demonstrated awareness of the detrimental factors that affected their motivation and performance and offered possible solutions. Most of the proposed solutions are extrinsic to teachers and, therefore, were not found to be "potentially within their control" as maintained by Kottler et al. (2005, p. 111). This may suggest that participants are not aware of ways of improving their motivation by themselves and external bodies should seek solutions to solve these extrinsic demotivators. At the same time, these findings indicate that participants are strongly affected by extrinsic elements that need to be addressed to enhance teacher motivation. The fact that school administrators and even some governments exploit and abuse teachers' intrinsic commitment has been recognized (Dörnyei, 2001; Doyle & Kim, 1999) but the strong presence of extrinsic demotivators in the present study signals that intrinsic motivators may not be enough to guarantee lifelong teacher motivation and, therefore, intervention is required.

Challenging job conditions should not be ignored, and national governments should invest in and prioritize education, especially because teacher motivation has been reported as increasing if the job conditions are improved, as shown in the exosystem. Reducing the workload would enable teachers to establish limits between their work and private life and by limiting the student-teacher ratio and providing teaching support in the classroom, teachers could enhance their delivery and self-efficacy beliefs. Governments could also organize collaborative networks with and between teachers to ensure communication and cooperation for the advancement of the profession. Policymakers could institute a monitoring body to constructively support teachers who struggle during their practice. More importantly, understanding the value of the above-mentioned solutions is key for improvements to occur.

Pre-service and in-service teacher education should include training to promote innovation, to increase their ERA, to learn to empathize with others and to engage in reflective practices. These programs are beneficial for teachers if they have the resources to attend these courses, improve their teaching, and as a result, enhance their motivation. Providing these training opportunities should be a main priority for those in charge. Furthermore, teachers would also gain from understanding the existence of the four ecosystems and their effect on themselves and on students, who are also influenced by these different contexts. Raising awareness of the ecosystems would ensure that teachers understand these extrinsic influences and how they can affect their own behavior and motivation but also those of their students.

This investigation has discussed some of the common challenges that teachers face every day. Nowadays, the recent worldwide pandemic has affected peoples' daily lives, including teachers and their students. Educational contexts have had to adapt to the various restrictions

and measures that have generated more obstacles in the teaching profession. Although this study was conducted prior to the pandemic, the factors affecting teacher motivation may have been accentuated as a result of this crisis (Gadella Kamstra, 2020b). It could be assumed that examining teacher motivation during these times could suggest more worrying findings.

Future research should aim at exploring the improvement of language teacher motivation by replicating the study with a larger sample in diverse contexts. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological approach has aided in comprehending EFL teachers' challenges that originate in distinct systems. This ecological perspective reinforces the need that others should also expend effort to battle teachers' negative experiences and demotivation. Policymakers and high stakes' intervention are required to upgrade teachers' job conditions, safeguard teacher extrinsic motivation and avoid the worsening of their intrinsic motivation.

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Appendix A

A Selection of the Interview Questions

ROUTINE
– On a working day would you say that you look forward to going into the class to teach? Why?
– What happens after the class is over? How do you feel?

RELATIONSHIPS
– Would you say that your relationship with the administrative staff, your colleagues and your headmaster/headmistress affects your attitude towards working in the school?
– Are these relationships important for your teaching?

IMPROVEMENT
– What changes do you think are necessary in the language teaching profession in general in Spain?
– If you could change the situation in your school regarding teaching, what would you change?
– Is there anything you would like to improve as a teacher? Why? How?

MOTIVATION + DEMOTIVATION
– Do you consider yourself motivated to teach?
– What demotivates and motivates you when you are teaching?
– Generally speaking, do you believe that the teachers with whom you work are motivated?
– No, which solutions would you suggest that could improve teachers' motivation? Would it help you?
– How could you improve your own motivation?

REWARDS

– What sort of rewards (if any) do you get from your current job?
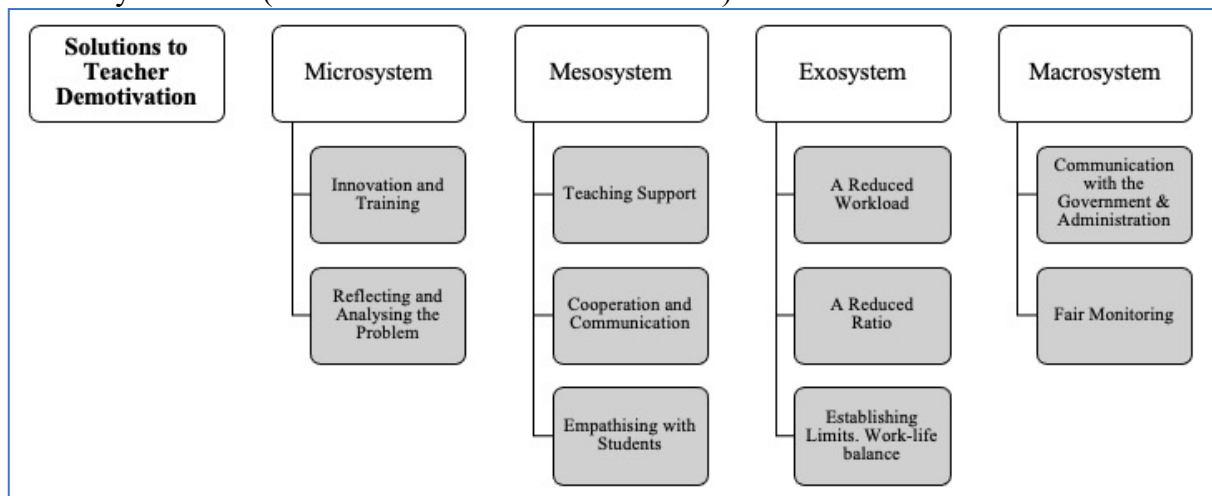– What rewards would you like to have?

FUTURE
– Do you see yourself as a teacher in 5 years' time? In 10 years' time? And how?

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Appendix B

Summary of Codes (Solutions to Teacher Demotivation)

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