



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Factors Hindering EFL Master's Students' Motivation in Research Engagement: A Self-Determination Perspective

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Nov 12, 2024	Engaging in research activities is critical for English-as-a-foreign-language teachers to enhance professional practices and continuing professional development. In many countries in the Global South, including Vietnam, much research has been deployed to document the status of teacher research and its contextual influences. Not much is known about the motivational hindrances that affect EFL teachers' involvement in research activities. This qualitative case study, utilizing Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory, was carried out to shed light on factors hindering EFL master's students' motivation in research engagement. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with six graduate students in an English teacher education program and analyzed via cross-case thematic analysis. Findings indicated that internal and external factors significantly hindered participants' motivation in research engagement. The former was found to have more significant detrimental effects than the latter. The participants perceived their professional selves as not being teacher-researchers as they should be. This research proposed helpful suggestions for university management and EFL master's students to advance research engagement as a transformative form of CPD in a research-oriented master's pursuit.
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### INTRODUCTION

Continuing professional development (CPD) is central to education and educational reforms. Every English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) teacher must partake in conscious and planned PD-related activities to stay abreast of the ever-changing educational system (Borg, 2010). Among many CPD-related activities, EFL teachers pursue a master's degree through which they can improve their professional practices through research engagement (Richards, 2010). In recent decades, teachers' research engagement has stood out as an important focus in English Language Teaching (ELT). It directly reflects broader educational tendencies toward improving teaching practices through evidence-based approaches (Xu, 2014). Therefore, EFL teachers transform themselves into teacher researchers and change agents via research engagement.

Since the 1980s, the open-door policy has ushered in significant improvements in education in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2015). Moving into the 21st century, enhancing English language education is a critical strategy for developing Vietnamese human resources. In 2008, the Vietnamese government approved The National Foreign Languages Project, which aims to improve its school system through which a competency-based approach is prioritized. Since then, national policies and educational institutions have continuously encouraged EFL teachers to engage in research activities (Phuong et

al., 2017). However, the focus has been on encouraging tertiary lecturers to engage in research. This focus results in a disparity in examining research experiences and practices of other teacher populations, particularly master's students. Research in master's programs is regarded as the teacher's professional training in their research competence. Improved research competence transfers teachers into teacher-researchers who are viewed as critical and innovative (Nguyen, 2020). However, some master's students demonstrate low research engagement, although their program's orientation strongly emphasizes teacher research. This discrepancy between the program's objectives and students' actual research engagement raises a critical question about factors hindering their motivation in doing research. This case study, therefore, grounded on the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), explored Vietnamese EFL master's students' perceptions of factors hindering their motivation in research engagement. It also tried to know what factors had a significant demotivating impact on their research engagement.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Research engagement

Research engagement has long been a topic of interest for researchers. Heng et al. (2020, p. 965) viewed it as "academics' involvement in various research-related activities including, among others, initiation of research ideas and projects, the conduct of research, writing of research reports, and dissemination of research findings". Research engagement is an effective form of teachers' PD to boost professional practices in the educational field. Borg (2010) referred to engagement in research and engagement with research. While engagement in research relates to teachers as researchers partaking in research, engagement with research is when practitioners use others' research to improve their teaching. Studies have shown that research's effects on teachers' personal and PD are as follows:

- Increasing teachers' autonomy and sense of collaboration (Sachs, 2000)
- Gaining knowledge in research and classroom management skills (Kis, 2004)
- Becoming more reflective and analytical about classroom issues (Atay, 2006)
- Being better in continuing professional development (Williams & Coles, 2007)
- Drawing personal self-awareness to teachers' teaching practices (Atay, 2008)
- Comprehending the nature of teaching and learning more deeply (Richards, 2010)
- Contributing to broader enhancements to teachers' institutions (Borg, 2010)

Vu (2021) and Ngo et al. (2022) conclude that teachers' research engagement assists them in proposing solutions to classroom problems and informing pedagogical implications to other researchers and teachers. It facilitates interpersonal and cognitive skill development (Snowball & Shackleton, 2018). Teachers' interpersonal development bolsters their self-efficacy, enthusiasm, and dedication to teaching practices. Cognitive development includes a broadening understanding of teaching, constructive beliefs, and favorable attitudes toward educational issues.

### Teachers' research engagement in graduate studies

In-service teachers are involved in many CPD forms to achieve personal and institutional goals, update pedagogical knowledge, and cope with classroom challenges (Viáfara & Largo, 2018). Among these forms, graduate studies stand out as a formal training form on teachers' teaching. Embarking on graduate studies helps teachers to improve their professional practices via research engagement. Continuously conducting research transfers teachers into teacher researchers and change agents who are considered critical and innovative in their institution and inform pedagogical implications to other teachers. Research engagement in graduate studies of the Vietnamese educational system

aims to equip learners with advanced knowledge and research competence to establish a team of ethical scientists. Research engagement is critical in improving teaching and learning quality, especially in English language education. Research provides teachers with evidence-based findings and enhances instructional effectiveness. Ultimately, research contributes to better student learning outcomes and a more dynamic learning environment.

### **Teacher motivation in research engagement**

According to Gardner and Lambert (1959), motivation refers to individuals' motives to engage with a social group and learn its culture. Dörnyei and Ottó (1998, p. 65) regard it as "the dynamically changing cumulative arousal in a person that initiates, directs, coordinates, amplifies, terminates, and evaluates the cognitive and motor processes". Literature has acknowledged the significance of teacher motivation as a vital condition for their successful research engagement (Heng et al., 2020; Dang, 2021). Teachers with intrinsic motivation engage in research voluntarily, driven by their desire for personal growth, their need to address classroom problems, and the goal of accommodating students' dynamic needs (Nguyen, 2015). Teachers exhibit a genuine passion for research, which further fuels their commitment to engaging in research-related activities (Phuong et al., 2017). Conversely, they are also motivated by extrinsic motivators. These factors can include career advancement opportunities, such as job promotions and rewards and incentives (Farsani & Babaii, 2019). This dual influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation reflects how teachers engage in and with research (Vu, 2021). However, they might encounter significant challenges hindering their research engagement motivation (Ngo et al., 2022).

### **Self-determination theory**

Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory (SDT) was adopted as the theoretical framework for this study. SDT assumes people are motivated to learn and master knowledge to satisfy three psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness). As people learn, they are driven by intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985) describe intrinsic motivation as the desire to engage in an activity because of personal interests. Extrinsic motivation originates from external motivators for engaging in the activity. Under the SDT, people can transition from extrinsic to intrinsically motivated through the "internalization" process (Deci & Ryan, 1985). This process includes introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation. Introjected regulation evolves into internally controlled regulation and manifests as people's ego-involvement. Secondly, identified regulation can be internally controlled where people acknowledge and endorse activities' values, contributing to a higher willingness to engage in the activity. Lastly, integrated regulation refers to people endorsing and aligning the activity's values with their interests.

Deci and Ryan's (1985) model aligns well with this research's aim of elucidating how internal and external factors affect people's intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Using the SDT helps comprehend internal and external factors hindering Vietnamese EFL master's students' motivation in research engagement.

### **Related Studies**

Many studies have been carried out to investigate EFL teachers' research engagement and its contextual influences. Besides facilitating factors, several factors hindering their research engagement motivation have been well revealed.

Snowball and Shackleton (2018) indicated that these factors stem from internal sources. Firstly, teachers have low personal interests, a lack of research knowledge and skills, and perceived irrelevance to their teaching position. Expanding upon their ideas, Heng et al. (2020) synthesized that academic discipline is another factor. They claimed that "academics in *hard* disciplines publish more than their peers in *soft* disciplines" (Heng et al., 2020, p. 969). Besides, low research self-

efficacy emerges as another concerning demotivator. Some studies (Kwiek, 2016; Shafiee & Sotoudehnama, 2019) agreed that research-engaged teachers tend to possess both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation for research and demonstrate a strong sense of research self-efficacy. Other environmental factors hindered their motivation to engage in research. Gao et al. (2010) reported that different institutional challenges, particularly time constraints, prevented language teachers from engaging in research. Heng et al. (2020) indicated that the lack of collaborative assistance from research professionals and the lack of incentives and rewards for doing research were the other two significant demotivators of EFL teachers' research engagement. From a broader perspective, Heng et al. (2020) found that the lack of national support and policies greatly influenced teachers' motivation to engage in research.

Much Vietnamese research has been conducted to understand factors hindering motivation in research engagement among EFL teachers. Phuong et al. (2017) investigated what hampered EFL lecturers from doing research. Their findings align with those of Snowball and Shackleton (2018), who mention the roles of external factors on teacher research engagement. Moreover, Nguyen (2015) examined factors influencing the research productivity of Vietnamese academics. Nguyen (2015) and Phuong et al. (2017) agreed that the lack of institutional policies and the unavailability of research resources and facilities are key institutional factors. Recently, Ngo et al. (2022) conducted a phenomenological study on the multi-layer contextual influences on lecturers' research engagement.

The existing literature presents factors hindering EFL teachers' motivation in research engagement among various teacher populations. In Vietnam, studies (Huynh, 2016; Ngo et al., 2023; Nguyen, 2015; Phuong et al., 2017) have enriched the literature by researching this issue, particularly among tertiary lecturers. However, none targets factors hindering EFL master's students' motivation in research engagement from the self-determination perspective. The current research, therefore, aims to address the gap by answering this research question.

What internal and external factors hinder EFL master's students' motivation in research engagement?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research design**

A qualitative approach was believed to suit this study best because the aim was to explore factors demotivating EFL master's students in research engagement. A cross-sectional case study was designed to achieve the research aim. Yin (2003, p. 13) stated that a case study is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident". It is "the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system" (Creswell, 2013, p. 73).

### **Research setting and participants**

This research was carried out at a Mekong Delta, Vietnam public university that offers a master of education (M.Ed) program in TEFL. This program is research-oriented and requires learners to partake in varied research-related activities. It typically lasts twenty-four months. To enroll in this program, learners must possess a TEFL-majored or EFL-majored bachelor's degree. The second standard requires learners to pass the entrance exam in which they indicate their competitive potential in English proficiency and pedagogical knowledge. After learners complete all coursework, they must publicly defend their research-oriented thesis. Upon completing this program, learners are expected to polish their personal pedagogical knowledge, research competence, and teacher professional skills to become efficient practitioners.

The purposive sampling technique was used for participant selection in this research. This technique is deployed in qualitative research when a deep understanding of a particular event or a group of

people is the research goal (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Moreover, it is implemented in case studies to concentrate on some instances to obtain in-depth insights into a particular circumstance (Creswell, 2014). In this case study, this technique was deployed to recruit participants with specific criteria aligning with the research aim.

Six EFL teacher master's students satisfied two criteria to be selected as participants. Firstly, they were currently master's students in TEFL at a local university in the Mekong Delta. Secondly, they have completed at least one research project in their academic life.

**Table 1. Participants' demographic**

Pseudonyms	Gender	Years of teaching	Bachelor's degree	Educational institution	Number of research completed
Amos	Male	10	TEFL	High school	1
Olivia	Female	13	TEFL	High school	2
Esther	Female	12	English studies	High school	1
Eva	Female	5	English studies	Language center	1
Ana	Female	4	TEFL	Language center	2
Adam	Male	6	English studies	Language center	1

### Data collection and analysis

Semi-structured interviews were implemented to comprehend factors hindering EFL master's students' motivation in research engagement. There were two rationales for choosing semi-structured interviews to collect data. Firstly, they boost conversational aspects and promote adaptability for interviewers during the interview process (Gillham, 2005). Secondly, they facilitate natural discussions and allow interviewees to share their experiences (Fraenkel et al., 2012). In this research, face-to-face interviews were conducted and audio-recorded with all participants during the academic year of 2023-2024. Interviewees and interviewers used Vietnamese to exchange information more comprehensively. The interview duration was between 50 minutes and 60 minutes.

In each interview, open-ended questions were used to gather data. As Robson (2011, p. 283) stated, open-ended questions are "flexible, allow you to go into more depth and clear up any misunderstandings, encourage cooperation, and can produce unexpected and unanticipated answers". There were four parts to the interview question section. The first part collected the participants' demographics. The second and third parts were to know internal and external factors hindering their motivation in research engagement, respectively. The final part examined which of the two types affected the participant's research motivation more.

Cross-case thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2012) was deployed to analyze qualitative data. After data was collected, interview recordings were transcribed. Interview transcripts were translated into English by the researchers, rechecked by two experienced interpreters, and sent to all participants for clarification. Transcripts were comprehensively read and reviewed to grasp the underlying ideas and patterns. Coding followed to categorize related quotes into themes and sub-themes. Themes were scrutinized to ensure they accurately represented the data and were pertinent to research questions. The next step involved naming the themes to align with the research questions. The final step was writing up a detailed description.

### Trustworthiness

Three strategies were used to triangulate qualitative data and establish validity and trustworthiness for this research. First, participants at various career stages from both public and private sectors were recruited. Second, the member-checking technique was implemented by sending interview

transcripts to participants for clarification. Finally, thematic analysis was used to ensure the consistency of emerging themes, and direct quotes were cited to illustrate sub-themes made within these themes.

## RESULTS

This research aimed to know factors hindering EFL master's students' motivation in research engagement. Findings were derived from primary themes identified during the data analysis process.

### Internal factors

Regarding internal factors, participants believed that their affected well-being, low interest in research, and lack of research knowledge and competence hindered their motivation for research engagement. They subsequently acknowledged their irrelevance to teaching positions, and low academic self-discipline and efficacy were perceived as key demotivators.

#### Affected well-being

The participants confessed that their physical and mental well-being are critical prerequisites for research activities. They experience significant fatigue due to balancing multiple personal and institutional tasks, which hampers their focus on long-term research efforts.

"I believe my well-being is related to my psychological and physical health. When I intended to start my research, I encountered many personal and institutional tasks. This caused my fatigue. It was like 'lực bất tòng tâm' (So much to do, so little done). When people struggle with many things or encounter numerous unexpected problems, their health does not allow them to engage in research. [...]. It is very difficult for someone with weak health like me to pursue academic research for the long term". (Amos)

"I also need to consider my health before conducting my research. When I am tired, I cannot think about studying and research. I also fear my research might not be valuable or well-received, discouraging me so much. Moreover, I am a bit of a pessimistic person, too. I am so scared that it will not be recognized socially and institutionally when I complete my research. Even in someone's eyes, it is like a joke or a waste of time". (Anna)

#### Low interest in research

The participants expressed low-level enjoyment in research and engaged in very few research-related activities in and out of their settings. They only researched as required by their institutions or master's programs.

"I do not enjoy research engagement. I have done some research as required by my institutions, but not as formal academic research. As for my formal research, I researched by reading by myself and looking at my friend's master's thesis, and then I followed that step by step". (Esther)

"My purpose in pursuing postgraduate studies is solely for my career advancement in my institution. Research engagement is just a mandatory part of postgraduate studies. So, I see it more as a compulsory requirement to graduate rather than what I am genuinely interested in". (Adam)

One of the participants mentioned her new interest in research engagement during her graduate studies. However, because she was a new research apprentice, she only focused on her fields of interest.

"I started being fond of research recently, but I only love specific fields in TEFL, not every field. If a field is unrelated to my interests and strengths, I will not research it. There are some specific topics of interest, but not all. Probably because I am good at them, so I am into them. If I am not good at them, then *no*". (Anna)

### **Insufficient research knowledge and competence**

Although all the participants conducted some research, they confirmed that insufficient knowledge and competence greatly hindered their research engagement. They found the research process quite complicated and challenging.

“Research knowledge and skills are very important to me. When I do research, I think I need to understand how I am doing it and which direction to take, and I must have a vision of what result I aim for and how to achieve it. When I did my research during my post-graduate study, I felt overwhelmed by the data collected. I now know how to work most effectively with it. It was challenging for me to code the qualitative data and understand the emergent themes”. (Amos)

“Lack of research knowledge and skills negatively affected me, constantly causing me to delay. My research path at that time was uncertain. Sometimes, I wanted to give up on my research because I did not know how to write next. I think it was because I had not read enough articles. At that time, I was a research apprentice. Everything was novel, so every step of the research path was tough for me”. (Eva)

### **Perceived irrelevance to current teaching position**

The participants highlighted that they researched because it was mandatory. They also felt that their research was irrelevant to their current teaching roles. Moreover, when they came up with research findings, the findings did not meet their expectations for addressing their teaching-related issues.

“I firmly believe that when teachers conduct research and have their findings, they must apply them practically in their current and authentic teaching rather than just being on paper for social recognition. When I did my research, the results did not meet my expectations and were irrelevant to my current teaching problems. It could not help me in my teaching practices”. (Amos)

“The irrelevance to my teaching roles could demotivate teachers! When teachers come up with some research findings, they should be applicable. If they are not practical and applicable, they will also lose motivation, making them unwilling to participate. However, my research was beyond my expectations. However, I could not use it to teach my learners”. (Eva)

One participant recognized interconnected relationships between teaching and research. However, because of her recent personal working changes, she would focus on teaching and building a community of practice rather than conducting research independently.

“I researched and used its findings to improve my teaching practices. However, because of my changes in the working context and learner population, research does not usually relate to my current teaching position. [...] My future goal is to build a community through which teachers can share and learn from each other's experiences. I do not intend to do more research or collaborate with other teachers”. (Anna)

### **Lack of academic self-discipline and efficacy**

The interviewed participants viewed academic self-discipline as a vital element in research engagement. They believed that without strong academic self-discipline, they might procrastinate, lose focus, and fail to achieve optimal outcomes in their research.

“Academic self-discipline is essential to conduct research. In academic research, teachers must always outline what they must do step-by-step. That is how their process flows smoothly. Because besides my professional duties at my school, I have to take care of other aspects of my life. On some days, when I get home from work, although I did plan some research-related activities that night, my tiredness does not allow me to do so anymore”. (Eva)

“When I conducted my research, I planned research procedures quickly and tried to do everything simultaneously because I had many tasks to complete. Therefore, the results seemed a little bit not good. We need more self-discipline. Looking back, I think that academic self-discipline truly matters when doing research. Teachers without discipline procrastinate in academic research, lack enthusiasm, and will not focus 100% on it, and will keep postponing and shifting tasks”. (**Adam**)

One participant stated that teachers with little or no research self-efficacy might be unable to complete their research.

“If teachers are not confident in their research, it will cause research anxiety and lead them to encounter research obstacles. Sometimes, their research results might not be appropriate or significantly influential, or their methodological direction might be wrong, so they will not find a good solution to address their research questions and gaps”. (**Amos**)

### **External factors**

Concerning external factors, participants pointed out some that hindered their motivation in research engagement. There were time constraints, a lack of research policies, resources, and incentives, and a lack of collegiality.

### **Time constraints**

When asked about the time for research activities, the participants indicated a limited duration for their research engagement. They had other commitments to many personal and institutional tasks and responsibilities.

“Honestly, I do not have much time for research. I try to do research myself when I am required to participate and have my name on a list for a research conference or a report. I have to spend time with my family and other social relationships. Truly, if it is just independently doing research for my own sake, I will say “no” because I do not have much free time”. (**Esther**)

“Research engagement is just a requirement for my master’s program. I only research if it is required for me in some courses; Otherwise, I do not focus on it too much. Beyond studying and teaching, I have to spend time with my family, friends, and myself to relax. It leaves me with very little time for research engagement”. (**Adam**)

### **Lack of research policies**

The participants confirmed that the absence of institutional research policies was a critical factor hindering them from research engagement. They mentioned the uncertainty about the existence and accessibility of research policies and hopes for further investment.

“For high school teachers, I have not seen any research policies. For postgraduate studies, if my academic research gets published in a national or international journal, that publication will contribute points to my master’s thesis only. I do not know any other policies related to research for master’s students”. (**Amos**)

“In my workplace, teachers’ research engagement is a personal choice. So, if I share my research with them, the center will know but do nothing. Even if I research and publish an article, according to the course requirements from my master’s program, I do not receive any benefits from the center. I lack motivation from this workplace due to its lack of policies”. (**Olivia**)

Moreover, one participant expressed that the lack of national research policies awarded to master’s students also caused her demotivation to conduct her research.

“Regarding national policies, responsibilities are often delegated to the provincial or city levels. From this perspective, there is support, but it is unclear. Only large-scale projects receive support. Small projects like mine are still overlooked”. (**Anna**)



### **Shortage in research resources and incentives**

When asked about institutional research resources and facilities, the interviewed participants recognized that an abundance was available. However, they noted that research resources were still limited and that research materials lacked diversity.

"I do not find the source materials (from the university and my private sector) diverse and rich. It is only a master's thesis; when I go there to find it, I have to search through each one. For example, although there are many topics, I feel they are not diverse. Therefore, I cannot find the most suitable research sources for my gaps". (**Ava**)

"Although the books and other materials are quite diverse, some books I would like to read are limited in the institution's library. That means I can download or read free books that are limited and unavailable. If I want to read higher-ranked or more excellent articles, I must pay a lot of money. There exists a very high fee!" (**Anna**)

The participants considered the lack of research funding and rewards key demotivators in their research engagement. Stakeholders showed little acknowledgment and care for participants' research achievements and publications.

"Although I did my research, my workplace did not recognize me and received no funding. Research funding and rewards are needed. They play a role as external factors motivating teachers to do more research. If teachers do not have strong internal motivation and external support is still lacking, it is hard to build a strong passion for research". (**Anna**)

"Currently, research incentives at my workplace are not that abundant. They are just recognition for academic completion, so the value is not very high. Such incentives exist for successful teaching, but incentives for research do not exist in my workplace's policies. That is one of the most important factors that delay my co-workers and me from conducting academic research". (**Adam**)

### **Lack of collegiality**

The participants lacked institutional support, and stakeholders appeared indifferent to their research-related activities. This remained a significant hindrance to their research engagement.

"Lack of support from institutions would cause delays in research. This is because the student population is not always available in my workplace. Sometimes, I may have access to a particular group of students today, but tomorrow, I may not teach them again. So, sometimes, it is hard to research these groups. I have not received acceptance from the Board of Directors. They focus on their financial benefits, not teacher research". (**Amos**)

"I worked in an environment where support from above was still isolated and separate. [...] I still had to be proactive in my research because there was no strong connection between the involved parties. I felt the current environment was not ready to aid me, so I sought opportunities outside this workplace". (**Olivia**)

One participant said insufficient collegial support linked to how teachers perceived research and shaped a "poor" research culture in her working context. Her colleague did not care much about research and dismissed her discussion on research.

"Some people in my workplace do not understand the importance of research engagement. [...] They think research is about sitting down and writing many words without real-life significance. They do not understand what research results can bring or what contributions research makes to society after being published or socially recognized. Therefore, few people listen to or advise me when I talk about research. I think this makes the research culture in my workplace so modest and somehow poor". (**Anna**)

### Internal and external factors: Which are more hindering to research motivation?

When asked whether internal or external factors had a more significant demotivating impact on their motivation, all participants agreed that internal factors hindered their motivation in research engagement to a greater extent.

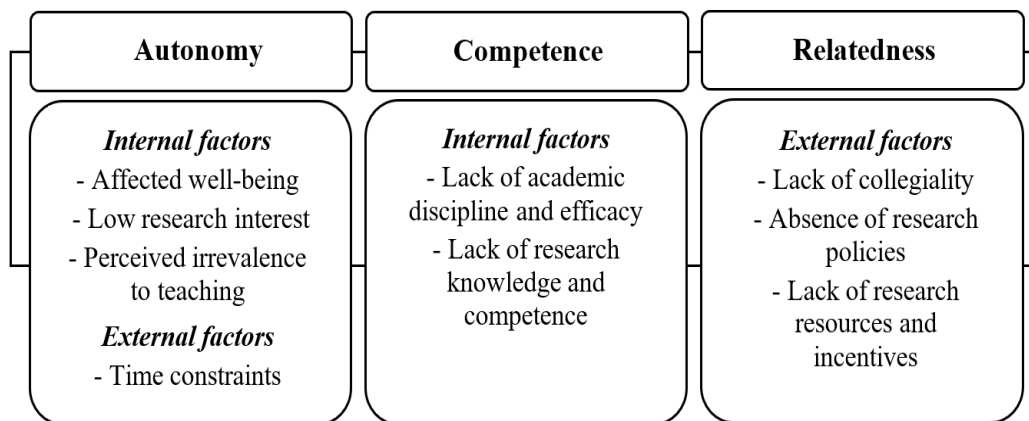
“The factor that has a more significant demotivating effect is the teacher’s self, which is the internal factor. If a teacher’s willingness for research engagement is high, when they encounter any difficulties, they seek help and find solutions. However, if their willingness is inadequate, they will not be able to do it, even if everything is smooth. In my case, I think my current teaching roles are not related to research, so I focus on teaching”. (Amos)

“Internal factors truly affect my research engagement more than external factors. When it comes to my desire to research a certain issue, ultimately, it is up to me whether I can find a way to gather my data, regardless of whether I receive support from the institution. If I have more time, I will manage my time between studying, working, and family responsibilities to research”. (Ava)

“My internal factors still negatively impact my research engagement more than external factors.[...] The environment only helps me to speed up or push me to move forward in some ways. If they give me financial benefits, I will strive to overcome everything to reach it. If there are no research rewards, but I love research, I will still do it for my satisfaction and career advancement. I will not do it if I am not passionate about research”. (Anna)

### DISCUSSION

This research investigated factors hindering six EFL teacher master’s students’ motivation in research engagement. Grounded on Deci’s and Ryan’s (1985) self-determination theory, it sheds light on external and internal factors concerning autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In the internalization process, participants stopped at the introduced regulation stage, in which they conducted research as an external requirement, not as a personal self-determination.



**Figure 1. Factors concerning participants’ autonomy, competence, and relatedness**

Some internal factors were prominent in hindering participants’ motivation in research engagement. These factors were reported in line with their autonomy and competence. First and foremost, they regarded their well-being as a prerequisite for their research engagement. Well-being refers to physical, mental, emotional, and psychological health (Guo & Jiang, 2023; Talbot & Mercer, 2018). Participants emphasized the importance of personal wellness needed for successful research engagement. Secondly, participants had a low research interest. This finding attests to previous studies, which found that the more interested in research teachers are, the more they engage in research activities (Snowball & Shackleton, 2018; Phuong et al., 2017). Secondly, participants lacked

the necessary knowledge and competence to conduct research. This deficit stemmed from limited experience with research methodologies and data collection and analysis. Besides, participants mentioned that research practices were irrelevant to their teaching positions. These findings supported Heng et al. (2020), mentioning that research is not required in some institutions, so teachers do not include teacher-researcher identity in their professional selves. Besides, low academic self-discipline also demotivated participants in research engagement. This conforms to Kwiek (2016) and Phuong et al. (2017). They emphasized the importance of self-discipline and time management skills in academic research. Moreover, those with low self-efficacy doubted their competence and caused fear of failure in the research process. This finding is consistent with Shafiee and Sotoudehnama (2019), who posited that belief in teachers' capabilities is critical for engaging in challenging tasks.

Alongside internal factors, some external factors hindering participants' motivation in research engagement directly influenced participants' autonomy and relatedness. Firstly, participants mentioned their personal multi-tasking, which left them limited time for research engagement. This finding aligns with previous studies (Borg & Liu, 2013; Ngo et al., 2022). Interestingly, female participants reported more significant constraints compared to their male counterparts. This report is consistent with Confucianism's conceptualization that Vietnamese women are expected to possess 'tam tông, tứ đức' (three feminine obediences, four feminine virtues). Female participants often juggled wifedom, motherhood, household management, and professional duties. Secondly, they lacked national and institutional research policies. Previous studies (Kamarud, 2023; Phuong et al., 2017) emphasized the need to establish research policies that integrate research into teachers' PD duties. Furthermore, Huynh (2016) demonstrated that access to adequate resources is essential for successful research engagement. Participants found it logistically challenging to conduct high-quality research in this research if the institution offered few research resources. This finding syncs with Heng et al. (2020) and Ngo et al. (2022), highlighting financial incentives motivating teacher research engagement. Finally, a lack of collegiality was reported concerning participants' relatedness. This finding matches Vu (2020), who emphasized the merits of a supportive academic environment in promoting teacher research engagement and productivity.

Participants revealed that internal factors exerted more significant demotivating impacts on their research engagement than external factors. It is deciphered that internal factors intertwined with participants' professional identity and self-concept construction. These internal factors influenced how they perceived their teacher roles as researchers, which subdued their teacher-researcher identity. As a result, they prioritized teaching duties over research engagement, perceiving the latter as disconnected from fundamental teacher roles in their institutional contexts. In a broader analysis, this prioritization reflected a more critical issue within educational institutions where the lack of collaboration and recognition for research-related activities leads to a disconnection between teachers' teaching and research. Therefore, participants felt that investing time and effort in research was less valuable than their teaching duties.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

This research aimed to comprehend factors demotivating EFL master's students in research engagement. Internal and external factors greatly demotivated their research engagement. The former had more demotivating effects than the latter did. The insights generated from this research could be transferred in other contexts to polish research engagement as a transformative form of teachers' PD. Two recommendations should be taken into account. Firstly, EFL master's students should raise awareness of the critical significance of research for their teaching practices and PD. To enable active research engagement, they should balance their personal tasks and ensure adequate time for their research engagement. Maintaining physical, mental, and psychological well-being is also necessary for effective research engagement as it promotes positive environments that prevent

burnout and negativity towards research. Secondly, research policies at national and institutional levels should be established to encourage EFL master's students' research engagement. Institutions should also offer more research training to improve their knowledge and competence. Subsequently, stakeholders should provide ample research resources, funding, and rewards to motivate teachers in their research activities.

The study was a small-scale qualitative cross-sectional case study with a limited population. Therefore, results should be considered before they are generalized into other contexts. Future research should be conducted with a larger group of teacher participants and be longitudinal to investigate factors hindering EFL teachers' motivation in their research engagement over time.

### CO-AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

The authors affirmed that there is no conflict of interest in this article. Author1 conducted the data collection and analysis, prepared the literature review, and wrote the whole article. Author2 conceptualized the research methodology and supervised the study's conduct. Author3 structured the content, formatted the paper, edited the language, and revised the whole paper. All three authors have read and agreed on the final manuscript.

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