

Motivation of EFL Teachers at Public Primary Schools to Teach English: The Case of Bahir Dar City Administration

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to explore the motivation of EFL teachers to teach English. The participants were 65 EFL teachers of public primary schools who were teaching in Bahir Dar City Administration. Data were collected through questionnaire and interview. The results of the study generally revealed that EFL teachers were motivated to teach English. Most of the responses the participants provided revealed that they were motivated to teach English because of several reasons. Some of the motivators were the personality of their previous EFL teachers who taught them beginning from their primary school to college, engaging lessons of their previous EFL teachers and the fact that English was a global language. The findings of the study also showed that the participants exhibited behaviors such as reading extensively in English when they were intrinsically motivated to teach English. The findings of this study imply that it is essential to pay attention to the motivation of English teachers to help improve the difficult situation in which English language teaching finds itself in. Finally, conclusions are drawn based on the findings of the study and recommendations are made for further research.

Keywords: Motivation, EFL teachers, primary school, Ethiopia

Introduction

Background to the study

English language, the necessity and significance of which are beyond any controversy, and which is a global communication tool in many fields, has been taught at all schools as one of the compulsory courses of educational programs by English language teachers in most countries (Can, 2005). The success of any curriculum highly depends on teachers' quality to achieve the goals of educational programs. This success is achieved by teachers who plan, apply and evaluate educational activities, and reconstruct their practice upon receiving related feedback.

A career view of motivation emphasizes the temporal dimension of motivation in terms of a vocational situation. The steps on a career path, known as the "contingent path structure" (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 162) activate long-term success in a challenging manner as intrinsic pleasure of being involved in one's profession and different extrinsic rewards which career advancement causes are important (Tardy & Snyder, 2004). Hence, teacher motivation is not only about the motivation to teach but also about the motivation to be a teacher as a lifelong career. "Motivating young people is a fundamental part of what it is to be a teacher," (Smith, 2001 as cited Xiao, 2013, p. 257).

Despite the fact that teacher motivation as opposed to language learner motivation is a vastly overlooked area of research in TESOL, a handful of studies on the construct have been reported in the field during the last two decades. First and foremost, Pennington and her colleagues, in the 1990s, conducted a series of studies on ESL/EFL teacher motivation in different parts of the world. In her review of the teacher motivation literature entitled, "Work satisfaction, motivation, and commitment in teaching English as a second language," Pennington et al. (1995) provided a detailed summary of these studies. Among them is a major quantitative study conducted by Pennington and Riley (1991) involving 100 members of TESOL who were also ESL/EFL teachers from different countries. In this study, they found a "moderate or high level of general job satisfaction" among ESL/EFL teachers (p. 134). However, as the results indicated, these ESL/EFL teachers, like many other teachers in the world, derived their satisfaction from intrinsic rewards of teaching often associated with moral values, social service, creativity, achievement, ability utilization, responsibility, variety, and independence (Pennington & Riley, 1991). Meanwhile, their dissatisfaction or demotivation is associated with teacher pay, limited opportunities for advancement and company policies and procedures (p. 134).

In addition, Doyle and Kim (1999) also conducted several studies on ESL/EFL teacher motivation both in the United States and Korea. Their objective in these studies was to "explore a variety of social, cultural and political reasons which diminish ESL/EFL teacher motivation" (p. 1). As a result of this qualitative interview data, they reported salary, teachers' relationships with school administration, lack of advancement opportunities, obligation to teach a set curriculum, limited choice of textbooks, heavy workload, lack of autonomy in teaching and evaluation process, and lack of long-term employment and job security to be the main sources of teachers' decreasing motivation. They also reported that

intrinsic factors like being with students and doing work that they love were some of the major sources of teacher motivation.

Various studies on teacher motivation have been reported from different EFL contexts. For instance, Connie (2000), through a qualitative survey, investigated the motivation and demotivation of EFL teachers in Mexico. In this study, she reported different factors which motivated and demotivated Mexican EFL teachers. The major motivators for the teachers in the study included student performance, student responses, motivated students, activities that were successful in class, opportunities for training, support and respect by the administration, and a flexible curriculum that they can modify according to student needs (Connie, 2000). These results indicated that teacher motivation is also largely associated with intrinsic rewards of teaching, a common finding in teacher motivation research around the world. Meanwhile, the teachers in Connie's (2000) study were also demotivated by students' lack of enthusiasm for studies, low salaries, unavailability of secondary teaching materials, work overload, inflexible curriculum and limited resources for teaching.

Similarly, Tiziava's (2003) study found that the desire to work with children to be the most common motivator for teachers. In a more recent study on teacher motivation, Bernaus, Wilson, and Gardner (2009) explored how language teacher motivation affected student motivation and their language achievement. This study reported a close relationship between teachers' motivation, their use of strategies to motivate students and students' English achievement. Bernaus et al. (2009) further stated, "If teachers are motivated, students are more actively involved in class activities and feel more motivated" (p. 33). With the increasing interest in learning English in different parts of the world, this finding is highly significant in TESOL for it demands more attention to teacher motivation as opposed to learner motivation.

However, even among the existing research on teacher motivation in SLA/TESOL, only a very few studies have recorded any motivators specific to ESL/EFL teachers around the world. For instance, Pennington (1995) identified some motivators which specifically affected ESL teachers. While the motivators included travel opportunities, possibility of interacting with people of other cultures, and chance to teach language in creative ways, demotivators included low salary, lack of benefits, job insecurity, and inadequate recognition on the job (Gemedá & Tynjälä, 2015; Gobena, 2018). In line with this, Pennington's (1995) findings do

not really reflect the complexity of teaching a second or foreign language, especially in non-native English speaking countries. As Crooks (1997) rightly put it, “Languages and language teaching are political, and language teachers are political actors” (p. 75). This suggests the unique nature of language teaching which often poses an additional set of challenges to language teachers in contrast to teachers in general. These challenges are mostly caused by socio-cultural and affective factors like attitude, inhibition, anxiety, willingness to communicate, risk-taking, and motivation (Brown, 2007) often associated with language teaching and learning. How ESL/EFL teachers face these challenges in classrooms and what determines their motivation and demotivation in the profession in different contexts are complex questions in TESOL/SLA which have still not been adequately answered in the field. This reminds us of what Dörnyei (2001) stated at the beginning of this decade on teacher motivation research in mainstream education and TESOL: “Far more research is needed to do this important issue justice” (p. 156). Even after twenty years, obviously this statement is still true and applicable to TESOL much more than to mainstream education.

Statement of the problem

Even though much research has been carried out on student motivation in the past century, it is only very recently that teacher motivation has caught the attention of educational researchers. The motivation behind this changing perception has been a growing realization that EFL/ESL teachers' motivation to impart knowledge plays an important role in the overall equation of the teaching process since teacher motivation has a considerable impact on student achievement (Firestone & Pennell, 1993). Along with these and several other scholars' views, the current researchers believe that if English language teachers' enthusiasm and commitment levels were high, then there would be a strong likelihood that their students would also be motivated to learn equally. If teachers' motivation is low, then this can be communicated to the students – either directly by means of intentional action, or indirectly through modeling and this attitude is what students tend to adopt.

Despite the fact that EFL teachers' motivation is fundamental to the teaching and learning process, several EFL teachers are not highly motivated for several reasons. For instance, some scholars argued that the importance of remuneration can be summed up best by this quote from Poppleton and Riseborough (1999, p. 4):

Pay does not have absolute importance in relation to job satisfaction but, if it is perceived to be good... all other aspects appear to have relatively less significance. If, on the other hand, it is perceived to be poor...then it is seen as a symptom as much as a cause and associated with other symptoms such as lack of respect in the community.

However, other researchers have rejected the idea that man is motivated by drives and instincts alone, and accepted the idea that man is motivated by sources both inside the body and outside in the world (White, 1959 as cited in Rothman, 1981). According to Jackson (1997), lack of motivation among teachers has been manifested in teachers' unwillingness to participate in school activities, poor attendance, unexpected absence, late coming, lack of additional training, uncreative and non-stimulating teaching, lack of interest in meetings, unhelpful attitudes when assistance is needed, occurrence of hold-ups because deadlines are not kept, resistance to contributing more than what is required of them and development of arguments between colleagues.

While some researchers cautioned against actions that lead to a decline in EFL teachers' motivation, Gullatt and Bennet (1995) argued that the need for motivated teachers is reaching crisis proportions in today's technological society undergoing fundamental changes. They added that a motivated and dedicated staff is considered as a cornerstone for the effectiveness of schools in facing the various challenges and problems which they encounter. It is, therefore, believed to be essential to pay particular attention to English language teachers' motivation in order to revert the assumed adverse situations. Ultimately, it would help to address this problem in the way that it should be improved.

Though there was no direct connection with the motivation of EFL teachers teaching English at public primary schools, a few studies were conducted in Ethiopia. For example, Birhanu (2010) carried out a study and found that though students, as EFL learners, were not interested in their education, they might read materials in English for its external rewards like grades or money. Simultaneously, he also revealed that EFL students' intrinsic motivation and vocabulary knowledge had a significant effect on reading comprehension in which vocabulary learning accounted for the greatest proportion by far. Despite the fact that the study included the issue of motivation, it was about the motivation of EFL learners rather than the motivation of EFL teachers. Yihun (2011) also did research and showed that there was a relationship between

principals' leadership assessment behavior and teachers' motivation. Even though teachers' motivation was a part of his research, Yihun's (2011) study did not emphasize teachers' motivation. As was clearly stated, the two local studies dealt with motivation in relation to vocabulary knowledge and the behavior of educational leaders and teachers' motivation.

In general, the study of EFL teachers' motivation was not the only research area that has been relatively ignored in Ethiopia, but the literature review on teacher motivation in the international context also reveals that foreign language teacher motivation has received even less attention than general teacher motivation despite the fact that the teaching of English as a foreign language is a central component of most national curricula in the world. Some studies on teacher motivation (Akdemir, 2020) show that teachers' motivation does not vary based on the school type, the type of school that teachers graduated from and the school level teachers work at. However, there are also local and international studies which have indicated that teachers' motivation can be affected by the amount of their salary, the social status they have in their own society and lack of a reward system for teachers (Gobena, 2018).

It appears logical, therefore, that research on EFL teacher motivation was a prerequisite to any improvement of EFL learning/teaching so that policy makers would gain a full and better understanding of the different situations that affect teachers. Strauss and Corbin (1998) contend that novice qualitative researchers often set out to investigate a research problem motivated by some personal and professional experience and to improve a situation as an ultimate aim. The main reason that the current research teacher motivation was undertaken was the loss of the researchers' enthusiasm in teaching after they joined their EFL teaching profession – a general trend they also noticed in many of their colleagues. This was especially true in the researchers' hometown context and by extension in similar job environments across Ethiopia.

Finally, since the study of EFL teacher motivation has been an uninvestigated area, the current researchers became motivated to bridge this knowledge gap. This was not to say that no research in this area has been conducted in the past either internationally or locally. For example, important and relevant work has been done by Doyle and Kim, (1999), Kim and Doyle (1998), Pennington, (1990, 1995), Pennington and Ho (1995) and Kassabgy et al. (2001). Along with these authors, the present researchers' ultimate aim was that the study of the motivation of primary

school EFL teachers to teach English would become part of mainstream second language research. Hence, conducting a study on this area is very indispensable so that the results can be used to improve the motivation of public primary EFL teachers to teach English. As a result, the current research is intended to investigate the motivation of English language teachers to teach English at public primary schools in Bahir Dar City Administration.

Research questions

1. Are English language teachers teaching at public primary schools in Bahir Dar city motivated to teach English?
2. What kind of behaviors do EFL teachers of public primary schools exhibit when they are motivated to teach English?

Methods

Research Design

This study used descriptive survey design. The main advantage of this type of design is that it enables the researcher to assess the situation within the study area at the time of the study.

Research site

The research took place in Bahir Dar City Administration. Under the zonal education office of Bahir Dar City Administration, there were 39 public and 34 private primary schools. Out of these public primary schools, 29 were full cycle primary schools (teaching students at two educational levels, i.e. grades 1-4 and 5-8). The remaining ten schools were teaching students in the first cycle (grades 1-4), and they were excluded from this study because at this level teachers were not teaching only English; they were teaching all subjects as self-contained teachers. The researchers targeted only 15 governmental primary schools with full cycles. The remaining 14 full cycle primary schools were excluded from this study because they were found in the outskirts of the city and were not easily accessible.

Target Population

The target population for the study was all EFL teachers who were teaching in 39 public primary schools found in Bahir Dar City Administration in Amhara Region. The study targeted EFL teachers in the Administrative City. There were approximately 259 EFL teachers in 39 public primary schools in Bahir Dar City Administration.

Sampling Technique

Out of 39 primary schools found in Bahir Dar City Administration, 10 of them were teaching students in the first cycle. These ten schools were excluded from the study, and from the remaining 29 primary schools, 15 schools were selected through convenient sampling technique. The total number of EFL teachers in these schools was 126. These teachers were teaching English in two different cycles within the same school or only in one cycle within the same school. The rest 14 schools were excluded from the study since they were found in the outskirts of the town though they were administered by Bahir Dar City Administration Education Bureau. Apart from that, almost all of these 14 schools were far from the city and inaccessible to transport. Among the 15 full cycle primary school EFL teachers, all the 2nd cycle of the 13 schools of EFL teachers (N=70) were selected as a sample of the study through comprehensive or availability sampling technique since the remaining EFL teachers of the two schools were selected for the pilot study earlier.

Data gathering instruments

In this research, two data gathering instruments were used. These were questionnaire and semi-structured interview. Therefore, the data that had been gathered through the questionnaire and interview were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. In this report the results of the quantitative and qualitative data analyses are presented in an integrated manner rather than separately.

Questionnaire

The first data gathering tool used in this research was questionnaire. The questionnaire had items asking the EFL teachers if they were motivated to teach English or not and included questions that were related to their performance and teaching profession. Moreover, the items of the questionnaire asked the participants of the study the types of behaviors they indicated when they were intrinsically motivated. The questionnaire was distributed to 70 EFL teachers only. Most of the items in the questionnaire were prepared by the researchers. All of the items were closed-ended items.

Interview

Semi-structured interview was the second data gathering tool that was used in this research. Five volunteer EFL teachers teaching in five different schools were interviewed. The responses were collected by note taking and recording the responses using a mobile phone.

Reliability and validity of instruments

University professors who were experts in motivation checked the content of the instruments, and their feedback and comments were used to improve the content of the instruments. To test the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach Alpha coefficient was calculated. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was found to be 0.84, and thus the questionnaire was considered reliable.

Data Analysis

In this research, the data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Therefore, the data were tabulated and simple statistics such as frequency count and percentage were used for quantitative analysis. The qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

Results

Motivation of EFL teachers to teach English

Table 1: Motivation of EFL teachers to teach English

Statement	To very large extent		To large extent		To moderate extent		To small extent		No extent at all		Total	
	F	%	f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%	F	%
I am committed to my job.	34	52	12	19	10	15	4	6	5	8	65	100
I am familiar with my school's general climate and the existing school norms.	3	5	8	12	23	35	18	28	13	20	65	100
There are adequate class sizes, the school resources and facilities at the school.	6	9	11	17	9	14	14	22	25	38	65	100
I agree with the value of EFL teachers' role given by colleagues, authorities and the societies at large.	2	3	5	8	7	11	11	17	40	61	65	100
I am motivated to do my job.	27	42	15	23	2	3	17	26	4	6	65	100

I have the required training to be an EFL teacher.	41	63	5	8	12	18	7	11	0	0	65	100
I have knowledge and skills in English language teaching.	10	16	12	18	37	57	6	9	0	0	65	100

The data in Table 1 shows that 52% of the respondents indicated that EFL teachers were committed to their job and motivated to teach English to a very large extent. The data in this table also depicts that 35% of the respondents perceived that they were familiar with their school's general climate and that the existing school norms motivated them to teach English to a moderate extent. As the data in Table 1 further shows, 38% of the respondents indicated that they were not motivated to teach English because of large class sizes and lack of school resources and facilities at their schools. The data in Table 1 also indicates that 61% of the respondents replied that they were not motivated to teach English at all as a result of the limited role EFL teachers were given by colleagues, school officials and the society at large. This finding is in agreement with Gobena's (2018) findings which indicated that in-service teachers' motivation was affected by many factors such as low salary and the negative attitude the society has towards teachers and their profession. As can be seen in Table 1, 42% of the respondents indicated that they were influenced by motivation to teach English to a very large extent. Regarding EFL teachers' personal qualities, the data in the above table indicate that 46% of the respondents were motivated to teach English to a very large extent because of their own personal qualities. Moreover, Table 1 reveals that 63% of the respondents believed that EFL teachers' educational background could be motivating to a very large extent to teach English. Table 1 also shows that 57% of the respondents indicated that their knowledge and skills to teach English language motivated them to a moderate extent.

In line with the above findings, a study conducted by Tardy and Snyder (2004) reported that teachers who feel a strong connection and sense of accomplishment in their English lessons reported feelings of greater desire to teach in order to feel the same kind of success. These authors offer insight into ways in which teachers find the teaching environment motivating through the fact that their students are able to achieve a great deal of success, communication and real interactions through close connection and dialogue. According to these researchers, highly positive

moments in teaching can encourage teachers to explore and reflect on their teaching practices.

One of the five EFL teachers interviewed for this study said the following when asked what motivated him to teach English.

T₄: The first and the most important thing that motivates me to teach the language is to have built experiences in teaching language though there are many things to be mentioned. The next thing that could be considered to be important is one's commitment to teach it. The other things those are helpful to motivate EFL teachers to teach English are the conducive school environment, the freedom we can have, EFL teachers, good relationships we have with other teachers, the attitude of the administrative body and the society towards EFL teachers.

Behaviors exhibited by EFL teachers when motivated

Table 2 below shows the range of behaviors the participants were able to exhibit depending on their level of motivation to teach English.

Table 2: Behaviors exhibited when EFL teachers were motivated to teach English intrinsically

Statement	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Teachers prepare lesson plan/s on time and put it in their schools' EFL lesson plan case for evaluation on Fridays.	32	49	19	29	11	17	3	5	0	0	65	100
Teachers use different EFL texts to teach English such as magazines, internet extracts, photographs, cartoon, etc. in addition to the classroom text as enriching materials and to make the lesson enjoyable for the students.	17	26	29	45	9	14	8	12	2	3	65	100
Teachers read different												

books besides the students' text book both to upgrade themselves and to be efficient EFL teachers as well.	30	46	17	26	6	9	7	11	5	8	65	100
Teachers spend much of their time reading books for their classroom EFL teaching even outside their school.	15	23	21	32	9	14	13	20	7	10	65	100
Most of the time teachers use English in their classrooms and they encourage the students to use English as much as possible when they try to speak and write it in their English lessons even sometimes outside their classrooms.	18	28	25	38	13	20	5	8	4	6	65	100
Teachers work is enjoyable and stimulating.	15	23	37	57	7	11	4	6	2	3	65	100

The data in Table 2 shows that 32(49%) of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that EFL teachers prepare lesson plans on time. The data in the Table 2 also shows that 29(45%) of the respondents agreed that they used different EFL sources to teach English such as magazines, the internet, photographs, cartoon, etc., in addition to the English textbook to make their lessons enjoyable for the students. The data in Table 2 depicts that 30(46%) of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that they read different books besides the students' textbook both to upgrade themselves and to be efficient EFL teachers as well. Table 2 also shows that 25(38%) of the respondents agreed that most of the time they used English in the classroom and they encouraged the students to use English as much as possible when they tried to speak in English even sometimes outside the classroom. Table 2 reveals that 37(57%) of the respondents agreed with the statement that their work was enjoyable and stimulating. With regard to the role of teachers, Bhatia (1997) stated that no teaching can take place without the interest of any teachers, not only EFL teachers.

In their responses to questions in an interview, the participants replied that they were truly motivated in teaching the language. Some of the reasons provided by these EFL teachers were strong love they had for

their previous language teachers and a strong belief they developed in that teaching in general is the mother of other professions; moreover, it is also an international language and it could serve as a means of communicating with other English speaking nations living in many parts of the world. The participants also explained that enthusiastic teachers were motivated to work and help students to pass their exams albeit many difficulties.

The participants were asked to explain whether they were truly motivated by their profession or not and one of them answered the following:

T₁: In the past, yes, of course. Before ten years ago when I was teaching EFL in the countryside,

I taught English with strong motivation of my teaching profession and I was able to produce many students who are now fluent speakers, active readers and writers of books in English. But now I can't say that I am truly motivated by my profession for various reasons.

Some of these were:

Students don't show interest in attending classes and follow their education properly instead they prefer to go to different recreation centers or are addicted to drugs; the salary we are receiving is very meager so it is insufficient to lead our life properly; the respect we get from the society, the government, even the students, etc. is really frustrating. Due to these and other reasons, I am not truly motivated by my profession rather it demotivates me as an EFL teacher.

I am not truly motivated. Do you know why I say especially EFL teachers? Because we teach English which might have been carried out by native English speakers. I think this implies that we, non-native EFL teachers, are saving hard currency that our country would have to spend on native English teachers, but the government has not seriously considered this.

Although most of the participants stated that public primary school EFL teachers were motivated to teach English intrinsically, there were some challenges. The interview with T₃ showed that he was not truly motivated by his work because he was not paid well. This finding is consistent with Gemeda and Tynjälä (2015) and Gobena (2018), who found that poor

salary was one of the main reasons for low level of motivation for teachers in Ethiopia. Teachers like this need to be motivated intrinsically. Dornyei (2001) has explained that intrinsic motivation is “performing a behavior for its own sake in order to experience pleasure and satisfaction such as the joy of doing a particular activity or satisfying one’s curiosity.” Consequently, intrinsic motivation was regarded as the central cause of the behaviors that EFL teachers exhibit when they were teaching English. This implies that those behaviors of EFL teachers could be taken as strong indicators of EFL teachers who are intrinsically teaching the language.

Conclusions

Base on the findings, it could be concluded that English language teachers at public primary schools in Bahir Dar are moderately motivated to teach English. It is probable that the motivation of EFL teachers at public primary schools could be improved if they are engaged in activities that enable them to do their EFL teaching effectively. However, this does not mean that their motivation to teach English only depends on a good situation. This implies that the motivation of EFL teachers to teach the language also depends on their commitment and self-confidence to carry out their teaching duty.

With regard to the behavior of English teachers at public primary schools, there were some types of behaviors exhibited when public primary schools of EFL teachers were motivated to teach English. However, it is generally difficult to say that EFL teachers who didn’t exhibit such kinds of behaviors while they were teaching were not motivated at all. In fact, it is easy to say that those EFL teachers who did most of the teaching activities said to be intrinsically motivated on the basis of some theories. The problem may arise if EFL teachers who exhibited behaviors when they were teaching English intrinsically could be treated in the same way as those EFL teachers who didn’t exhibit behaviors of similar types while teaching English for a certain time. On the contrary, this may encourage those who were not teaching English intrinsically and rather discourage those who were teaching English intrinsically and exhibited the appropriate behaviors.

Generally, it can be inferred that EFL teachers at public primary schools were motivated to teach English implying that their motivation does not necessarily indicate the same level and they were not similarly successful as a result of that. However, they were motivated to teach English, and their motivation level varies ranging from moderate to very large extent.

The EFL teachers were also motivated to teach English intrinsically and exhibited some sort of behaviors implying that the behaviors shown by EFL teachers could not similarly exist in all EFL teachers at public primary schools. In other words, this means that the manifestation of such behaviors may depend on various situations. Some of these may be related to the emotion of the teacher, the environment where he or she lives, their educational and family background.

Recommendations

Regarding the motivation of EFL teachers to teach English, it is recommended that school administrators should ensure that the autonomy of EFL teachers at public primary schools should be respected to increase EFL teachers' motivation to teach English. It is also suggested that school administrators reward EFL teachers, especially those who work hard so as to encourage them to teach more effectively. The award could be provided either in the form of financial support or in the form of materials which can play a significant role in the teaching-learning process. Apart from salary increments, creating conducive working environment, giving proper respect and recognition could also help motivate teachers.

It is also recommended that teachers attend any training programs to update their skills. By attending any type of educational training programs, primary school EFL teachers will develop confidence in teaching English and become motivated. It is suggested that EFL teachers need to thoroughly discuss problems they encounter every day at school and in the society to improve situations that could affect their motivation. Apart from this, they should also love and respect their profession to regain the honor, respect and recognition they have lost many years ago.

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