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Exploring the employment motivation, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction of university English instructors in public institutions: a Chinese case study analysis

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This study considers the important areas of language teacher employment motivation, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction in state universities in China. This is an area in which there is a distinct lack of research studies. Through an exploratory case study analysis, and depth enlightening interviews, this paper considers the experiences of two outwardly successful doctorate status educators, examining their early career motives and subsequent employment satisfaction and dissatisfaction. It finds that these English instructors were driven by a diverse range of extrinsic motives to work in the Chinese public university sector. They were largely satisfied with their jobs, but they also reported dissatisfaction in certain areas. For example, they appreciated the teaching loads and respect afforded to university teachers, but harboured worries about their longer-term professional development. The study also reveals the different treatment and concerns experienced by home and expatriate university English teachers working in China. There are implications for a wide range of important pedagogic and professional areas. These range from teacher wellbeing and mental health to development and training, career management and leadership practice. On a more macro level still, there are also potential implications for institutional human resource governance.

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Introduction

Language plays a major role in terms of disseminating culture, promoting communication, and understanding, and facilitating knowledge exchanges and learning (Chen and Morris, 2019), and is highly significant in cultural inheritance and development (Wu, 2021). In China, language learning is an essential part of the lives of many people and fulfils an important function across all educational levels and sectors. Indeed, at the primary and secondary educational levels, Chinese and English are not only listed as two of the major subjects for Chinese students to master, but are also tested in nationwide college entrance examinations. The importance of Chinese, and especially English, is also recognised in higher education, with both languages part of the tertiary curriculum and a core feature of many university degrees, as well as being a graduation requirement, as Hu (2002) has noted previously. In addition, every year millions of Chinese college students take the College English Test Band 4 and Band 6, which is a national English test organised by the Chinese Ministry of Education. This test has been in operation since 1987. In addition to this, there are other foreign language tests at various levels in China which are recognised as acceptable and attract thousands of test takers every year. In the pre-pandemic recent past it was estimated that 100,000 extra English as a Foreign Language teachers were needed to meet marketplace demand (Gamlam, 2016).

At the tertiary level in China English is undoubtedly important (Hu, 2002). It is also a profession in which cultural traditions mean that teachers are afforded a strong social standing (Gu and Lai, 2012). Since 1977 the demand for and opportunities to undertake a college education have continued to increase. A turning point came in 1999 with policy changes that enabled the expansion of the higher education sector (Liu, 2006). Data released by the World Bank highlights that in 2018 Chinese university enrollment covered 50.6% of the eligible demographic population (World Bank Open Data, 2020). This suggests that higher education in China is no longer a privilege reserved for a limited few, but an opportunity available to the majority. As a socialist economy, most of the colleges and universities are state-owned. This is in contrast to other global locations, as Collini (2012) notes, where the influence of business can be more prominent. In other words, Chinese higher education is to a great extent public in nature. It is worth mentioning that private higher education also exists in China, but only plays a supplementary role. This study explores what motivates English instructors to seek out work at higher education state institutions in China, especially when more lucrative private sector opportunities exist both domestically and overseas. There is also consideration of the extent to which these educators are satisfied with their employment and the factors which contribute to this, or alternatively to their job dissatisfaction.

The rationale behind this writing is multifaceted. Firstly, the writers have a personal research interest in this subject area. There is also a professional interest as language teaching has long been regarded as a demanding profession, as Richardson and Watt (2006) have highlighted. In addition, job satisfaction is an essential feature from an organisational perspective, and one which is linked to performance and productivity (Dugguh and Dennis, 2014), alongside educational quality (Peršēvica, 2011), all of which are key success metrics. Finally, there is an academic interest, as both writers hope to contribute to a lessening of the practice-research-theory disconnect (Copland et al. 2020). They also hope to provide some invaluable research insights into an under researched area. To date research into this area has tended to focus on private higher education institutions in China as the work of Morris (2021) demonstrates. Alternatively, considering public universities, research has either considered the professional development of home nationals (Yang, 2021), non-English language teachers (Tao et al. 2019), or demographic subsets, such as visiting scholars (Liu et al., 2020). This is despite a call for post-COVID stories in the area of language teachers' lives by Kubanyiova (Su and Zhang, 2022) in a period in which research in this area is excepted as being complex, dynamic and situated. Other studies adopt a quantitative multifaceted perspective, as Han (2022) highlights considering psychological wellbeing, resilience and satisfaction, or evaluating the satisfaction and motivation of college lecturers (Munyengabe et al., 2017). This study contributes to the extant research on public university English teachers by taking a case study approach to portraying their stories of work motivation, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Literature review

Teacher motivation is complex and multilayered as Shoaib (2004) demonstrates. Vallerand and Ratelle (2002) advocate that motivation is influenced by global, contextual and situational forces. It is also culturally situated and socially mediated as Ushioda (2007) shows. This suggests that the environment is the referential frame (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2010). Because motivation is emergent, dynamic and multifaceted (Dörnyei et al. 2014), considering motives for a specific course of action is more manageable than considering those which feature in life moments, as Dörnyei and Ushioda (2010) highlight. For language teachers, a love of languages (Karavas, 2010), an interest in culture (Kissau et al. 2019) and various push and pull factors are often noticeable (Cai and Hall, 2015; Trembath, 2016). In addition, altruistic, intrinsic and numerous extrinsic features affect teacher motivation, alongside non-work-related factors as Morris (2021) stresses. The employment package, especially the financial elements, has additionally be found to motivate certain college educators in China (Munyengabe et al., 2017). It is also worth noting that just as these factors can motivate, they can also demotivate (Dörnyei, 2001). Liu (2022) indicates that English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' motivation has not been given enough attention, particularly in China where English plays a key role. Through investigating the motivation of English teachers at the university level in China, she finds that these teachers were multi-motivated when choosing to enter the teaching profession, the main reasons being intrinsic, followed by altruistic reasons. In addition, there are few theoretical constructs that consider language teacher employment motivation. One of the few, and most comprehensive is Morris's (2021) framework, hence the adoption in this instance. This is a key consideration as Watt et al. (2017) advocate, and is suitable for the setting and participants as the same researcher's note. Morris (2021) suggests that employment motivation needs to consider three factors. These are employment-based ones, alongside personal considerations and move convenience (See Fig. 1).

Teacher satisfaction can be influenced by a multitude of factors. One of the most important is altruistic and intrinsic fulfilment as Afshar and Doosti (2016) draw attention to. Personal interactions and relationships are another source of job satisfaction (Wilkins and Neri, 2019). This can be derived from working with students and colleagues, as Wilkins and Neri (2019) note. The general climate is also important (Aldridge and Fraser, 2016) alongside a community ethos (You et al. 2015). Teaching and learning aspects are also highly influential as well, and the work is often cited as a source of importance as Sharma and Jyoti (2009) highlight. This might involve job (or task) characteristics (Naumann, 1993), novelty and variety (Jonasson et al. 2017), or simply how interesting it is (Wilkins and Neri, 2019). Amongst other aspects, autonomy, challenge, meaningfulness,
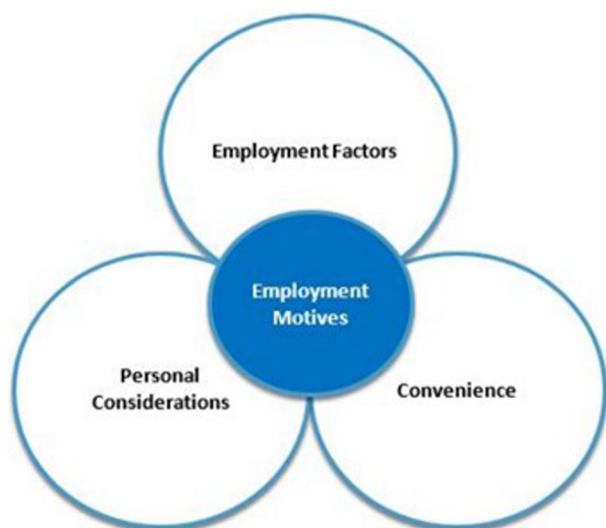
Fig. 1 Employment motivation framework (Morris, 2021). Employment factors, convenience and personal considerations influence an individual's motivation to change jobs.

responsibility and creativity can be influential. In addition, recognition and progression is another essential element, alongside the employment package (Morris, 2021). Indeed, Munyengabe et al. (2017) found that the employment package and recognition were important aspects of job satisfaction. Finally, non-work-related factors are important, such as personal relationships with loved ones (Cacioppo, 2022). This is because a spillover effect does happen. The importance of job satisfaction for teachers should not be underestimated (Judge et al. 2002) as it can influence effectiveness (Selmer and Lauring, 2011), discipline (Sungu et al. 2014) and retention (Yoshihara, 2018). It is also tied to organisational effectiveness and retention. As far as Chinese university EFL teachers are concerned, previous studies have suggested that there can be a relatively high level of job satisfaction (Gao, 2011; Chen, 2014). More recent studies also demonstrate that job satisfaction is often reasonable and positively correlated with Chinese university EFL teachers' resilience and well-being (Han, 2022).

Teacher dissatisfaction, like satisfaction, can be derived from a wide range of factors. As Morris (2021) highlights, these can be grouped under the headings of (negative) personal interactions, teaching and learning factors, (a lack of) recognition and progression and the employment package, alongside negative external personal considerations (see Fig. 2). In terms of personal interactions disengaged students, challenging relationships with colleagues, administrators and management, as well as a negative working climate tend to be influential. Teaching and learning factors tend to be linked to work roles and workload, while dissatisfaction linked to a perceived lack of recognition and progression is often related to limited training and professional development opportunities, as well as a lack of promotion and career growth opportunities. Working conditions, limited job security and perceived or real issues with remuneration tend to feature more often than not, while external personal considerations are likely based on family issues and concerns about the wider social context in which teachers, and their families, live and work. Okeke and Mtyuda (2017) found that a lack of resources, overcrowded classes and lack of discipline among learners were serious sources of dissatisfaction among teachers while administrative issues, lack of recognition by principals and parents for good work done also caused disillusion. As far as Chinese university EFL teachers are concerned, Lu (2004) found that 80% of

respondents in her study were dissatisfied with their jobs at the time of writing.

Despite the existing studies, there still lacks a complete picture of why English instructors seek employment in Chinese state universities and to what extent they are satisfied or dissatisfied with their job. This is especially the case when these English instructors not only include Chinese home nationals, but also expatriate language teachers. It is therefore of great significance to conduct a study that investigates both types of English teachers working in the Chinese public university sector.

Methodology

Research purpose. The purpose of this paper is to consider what motivates English instructors to seek employment at state institutions, and then to examine to what extent these instructors are either satisfied or dissatisfied with their jobs. The paradigmatic position of this work stems from pragmatism as defined by Dörnyei (2007) and Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), with the subsequent research design determined by the aims of the work (Morris, 2021). On that note, the ontological and epistemological position of the work is a relativist one as Grix (2010) describes.

Research questions. This study intends to answer three research questions:

RQ1. What motivates English language teachers to seek employment in Chinese state universities?

RQ2. To what extent, and in which areas, are English language teachers satisfied with their job?

RQ3. To what extent, and in which areas, are English language teachers dissatisfied with their job?

Research context and participants. The research site in this instance is a state university in an affluent city in eastern China. It is a Project 211 institution which is over a century old. In China, Project 211, alongside Project 985, are designations awarded to institutions that are acknowledged as being key national universities and colleges whose remit is to raise national research standards and cultivate strategies for socio-economic development in the country. The case study institution is not only a key national institute of higher education, but also a leading public university.

The participants of this study are one Chinese English language teacher and one expatriate British English language teacher. Pseudonyms have been ascribed to both participants. The details of their personal information are listed in Table 1.

Both participants were selected on a purposive premise as advocated by Creswell and Creswell (2018), with individual selection on the premise that both are able to provide insights which can help explore the concepts under evaluation at the case study institution, namely employment motivation, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. This is also an intersectional element to the study design as, interestingly, both individuals should be able to offer very different insights concerning the areas under investigation due to their differing demographic backgrounds, experiences and associated employment outlooks, despite both starting their careers at the same institution.

Research methods. The research design is based upon an exploratory methodology because this is enlightening in discovering and establishing the factors and situations which affect individuals. An advantage of this piece of work is that both researchers can interact with insights as they are informed with an insider's perspective. This is advantageous according to Dörnyei (2007). Regarding the research method, this study adopts a multiple case study approach, as this approach can provide completeness, in-depth analysis and enhanced readability (Duff, 2007). Supporting this is the adoption of semi-

Fig. 2 Job satisfaction and dissatisfaction framework (Morris, 2021). Four work-related features, alongside the external environment, influence employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Table 1 Demographic information of the participants.						
Participant	**Gender**	**Age**	**Nationality**	**Qualification**	**Contract**	**Experience**
Chen	Male	40–50	Chinese	Doctorate	Permanent	15 years >
Edward	Male	40–50	British	Doctorate	Annual	15 years >

structured interviews as these enable the perspectives of the interviewee to be better understood and the focus retained. The interview guide is adopted from Morris (2021) who considered the employment motivation and job satisfaction of language teachers at a private university in China. He in turn drew inspiration from Khan (2011).

Data collection and analysis. The interview data was collected online in the spring of 2023 in two separate sessions, each of which lasted less than an hour. Both interviews were transcribed, and the insights were coded, after a period of familiarisation as Caulfield (2019) recommends, with a duel inductive and deductive approach adopted. The rationale is derived from the experiences and examples of Miles and Haberman (2005), Sahakyan et al. (2018) and Morris (2021). Finally, on a methodological footing, this study was informed by the British Educational Research Association's (2018) stipulations, and the Data Protection Act (2018). It also adhered to institutional ethical guidelines and requirements.

Findings

Employment motivation of Chinese university English teachers. Chen's career started as a university English language teacher when he graduated, and it is the only form of employment he has known. Initially Chen became a university English teacher in March of 2003 when he received his master's degree in Foreign Linguistics and Applied Linguistics. The second time was in January of 2008 when he earned his doctoral degree in the same field. Chen's choice to become a university English teacher was motivated, he stressed, by external influences as his degree choice, learning experiences and the national employment situation played prominent roles in his decision making.

> When I was an undergraduate, I didn't have the slightest idea of becoming a university English teacher. However, when I passed the graduate education, I was moving in that direction without my awareness. Since the reform and opening-up was adopted in 1978, there appeared an English craze in China. China boasted the largest population of English learners, which generated a huge demand for English teachers. As an early English major, it seemed to be my destiny and the destiny of many other English majors to become English teachers. When I finished my graduate education, I failed to become a media worker as I had wished. Like many of my fellow graduate students, I became a university English teacher. When I started my doctoral education, it seemed inevitable that I would work as a university English teacher in the future, because this

was the usual choice of work for doctorate students of foreign languages.

In contrast to Chen, Edward had worked in a range of industries and jobs in entry level roles and on a short-term basis including, but not limited to, administration, data analysis and catering before joining the university. He had also considered a career in logistics until an injury had led to enrolment on a CELTA course to make good use of his time.

> I really didn't know what I wanted to do work wise. Chance, and an eye to the future, led me to enroll on a language teaching course when I dislocated my shoulder, and then luck led me to China simply because a visiting professor promoted a job opening.

Edward went on to note how no family ties at the time meant that this was an opportunity which was relatively straightforward to pursue and accept. He also noted that an easily navigated recruitment process meant that it only took between 4 and 6 weeks from applying for the role to actually arriving onsite. He went on to note how an exchange year in North America, and a gap year working and living in South East Asia, alongside a background growing up in an environment where moving was not uncommon had led him to see this as an opportunity to live, learn and travel in a new country. On an occupational note, Edward added:

> Teaching in higher education was completely new to me at the time. I hadn't been formally trained beside a 4-week CELTA course, and what little experience I had gleaned came from my own experiences as an undergraduate student and teaching in a state school a few years earlier.

Job satisfaction of Chinese university English teachers. Despite having ideally preferred a career in the media, Chen noted how he had derived a significant sense of satisfaction from university teaching. Indeed, it is a career from which he now derives a great sense of pride, contentment, and external recognition. Chen also highlighted how he felt that tertiary level teaching is a career area he would be happy to see his daughter go into in the future.

> Now I'm happy to be a university English teacher. I think the salary and benefits are better than many other jobs. What's more, I don't have to teach every day. Every year I have two long vacations, the summer vacation and the winter vacation. This is an advantage non-teaching professions don't have. Nowadays the social status of university teachers is quite high. I think I belong to the middle-upper class of the Chinese society. I enjoy being a university teacher. I wish my daughter can become a teacher when she grows up. She may not become a university teacher, because it is too hard to do so nowadays. In this past summer, the daughter of my cousin finished her graduate education in primary school education in Chinese in Yangzhou University and passed the test of teacher selections in her hometown … She stood out from hundreds of applicants and became a Chinese teacher in a public primary school. Her parents were very satisfied with her job. I felt happy for her. I think it is a good profession to work as teacher. Even primary school teachers are great, not to mention university teachers.

More recently, Chen has gained an even greater sense of job satisfaction since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which exerted a severe negative impact on many people, industries and professions around the world. Chen's satisfaction lies in the fact that the university he works for has provided him with a stable financial position which many in the private sector simply have not had and do not now have.

> I think my love for this profession is increasing with the passing of time. It is especially the case since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. As a university teacher, my salary and benefits have not been negatively affected by the pandemic, while many other professions have suffered a lot during this time.

Edward was satisfied with many aspects of his work. In terms of the teaching and learning, Edward liked the way that he had autonomy, flexibility and the chance to be creative with his work. He also enjoyed the freedom in terms of what and how to teach. The reasonably light weekly workload was also mentioned as a plus. Edward additionally acknowledged how this employment opportunity presented him with an experience he would not have been afforded back home.

> The first day I turned up wearing a suit and tie in mid-summer with a chalk board as my go to medium of instruction and with my skeleton syllabus to hand muddled my way through the day's classes of forty as best I could. It was a great learning opportunity, but I was limited pedagogically by what I knew, or rather didn't know, and any success was driven largely by subject and teaching enthusiasm, rather than anything else, alongside being a novelty.

Besides teaching and learning considerations Edward also noted how friendly and collegial the students were, which was in contrast to some colleagues. He added that life as a university language teacher was a highly engaging, peaceful and pleasant experience, albeit one with few, if any opportunities appearing to become an integrated part of the wider occupational community.

> The students were incredibly friendly, kind, and welcoming. Perhaps part of this was because our ages at the time were not too dissimilar, but I think in hindsight this is only part of the reason as culture was also a telling factor, alongside novelty as at that point in time there weren't all that many international teachers on campus. This was a real positive as there wasn't much of a collective sense in terms of colleagues.

Another aspect which satisfied Edward during his time at the university was the external environment. He noted how he had made many good friends and also had friends to visit from overseas. He went on to note how he got married in his final year in the city as well and divided most of his time between playing sport and travelling locally, but that continual departures, and a lack of career progression opportunities meant that after four years he too had to move on in order to build for the longer term.

> I had a wonderful 4 years all things considered, and I look back on my time at the university both as a teacher and student fondly. I met some great people, but many of these relationships were transient as expatriates moved back overseas and local friends moved on to advance their own careers and lives. It meant that after 4 years I also felt compelled to move because everyone I knew was gone or going, and at that point I was feeling it was time for a change myself because my career was stalling, I had started to miss home, and my development had plateaued as I neared my thirties.

Job dissatisfaction of Chinese university English teachers. Despite having a newfound appreciation for his career more

generally, Chen has also noted some areas in which dissatisfaction did and still does arise. One such area was with regards to a perceived acclaim bias towards research rather than teaching.

At the end of every year, the university tallies the teaching work and research work teachers have done in the past year. I have felt that research is more important than teaching. In fact, not just I myself, but also many of my colleagues feel this way. Teachers who do well in research will be praised and rewarded. They will get greater financial benefits. Teaching work is rewarded in a much less profitable way. It often becomes clear at the end of the year that research counts much more than teaching. I will feel frustrated that I didn't commit to research and have few good publications.

Another area in which Chen felt a sense of job dissatisfaction was with regard to professional development and career advancement. He highlighted how he felt that opportunities were lacking, potentially due to a lack of guidance and support. Highly demanding targets, perceived to be unattainable at times, also led him to feel a sense of disillusionment. This culminated in apathy, a loss of motivation and confidence, feelings of unhappiness, and a more general querying of his sense of self-worth as he felt his career was stalling. These feelings have since dissipated, but not completely subsided.

I didn't enjoy a great sense of professional development at my workplace. For a long time, the school I'm a part of didn't feel as if it had a very supportive environment. For one thing, many teachers were very disheartened because they couldn't see any hope of promotion. I had a professional doom instead of a professional development. For many years, I didn't have any motivation to do research because the standards indicated by the then leadership of the school were too high to reach. I was depressed for more than 10 years. I gave up striving because I was mentally crushed and psychologically dismayed. I felt like I was a failure. But I'm only an individual example. Many of the young teachers enjoyed a good sense of career development and became full professors at a very early age.

For Edward, several factors would impact upon him negatively, although not necessarily in a pronounced manner at the time. The first was the lack of wider institutional integration. Unlike Chen, for Edward there was no sense of community binding him to the institution or locality. With his friends continually moving on, and not being integrated into the wider institution, his stay was only ever likely to be relatively brief. Interestingly, but again unsurprisingly, it far exceeded many of the other expatriate educator stay durations which typically only lasted as long as their 1 year contracts because of non-work related personal factors.

Expatriate teachers often worked in isolation and only those of a similar age mixed, but there was only a handful of us, and only a very limited few home staff engaged with us on the bus and in the dining halls, most likely due to language and cultural differences.

A lack of recognition and progression was also noted by Edward as being a marked consideration as far as job dissatisfaction was concerned because there were only limited opportunities for expatriate staff. There was also no incentive, as staff were employed on short term contracts and, like most of his contemporaries, Edward was only employed for one academic year at a time. He noted how the employment package at the time was comfortable for an educator starting out who viewed the experience as something of a paid gap year but would not be sufficient for those with families or with any significant bills to pay. This was in contrast to some of the emerging private transnational higher education providers who at the time were known to be offering a much more competitive and lucrative employment package.

After the first year I knew that although the employment package was enough for me to live frugally on as an individual for a year, I would struggle to save much, and I would also have real difficulty had I needed to support a family or pay any bills as an expatriate. I really enjoyed my year, but I was also hearing that private institutions in the same city were paying three or four times more. The only thing which discouraged me from trying to earn more was the difficulty in reaching these places from the city centre where I was based and a feeling that I probably would not stay in the city or country for too much longer anyway.

Discussion

Recognising diverse extrinsic employment motives of English teachers. It is clear that the employment motives of English teachers are diverse. There is also often an extrinsic consideration as Munyengabe et al. (2017) draw attention to. Several employment related factors led Chen to join the university. His degree choice, subsequent postgraduate studies, work experience and the difficulties in acquiring a career in the media are examples. The convenience of continuing in and entering into a system with which he was familiar and already a part of, also played a prominent role in his decision making. In contrast, for Edward, as an expatriate educator recruited from overseas, both push and pull factors lay behind his decision to join an institution with which he was much less familiar. Again, the primary driving forces were employment related factors and convenience, as Morris (2021) highlights as prominent. Indeed, these two features were also identified to be those that were most prominent in attracting language educators to join a rapidly growing private transnational provider (Morris, 2021). The diversity of employment motives for Chen and Edward corroborates Liu's (2022) finding that the Chinese university EFL teachers are multi-motivated. Unlike Liu (2022), however, who finds that these teachers' work motivation was primarily intrinsic, both Chen and Edward were influenced by extrinsic factors. In both the cases of Chen and Edward there was a distinct lack of any explicitly noted altruistic drive which Alexander (2008) draws attention to as influential as a core motive initially for teachers. In addition, in the cases of both Chen and Edward neither made explicit mention of an intrinsic love of teaching which is also often important in teaching career decision making (Karavas, 2010). The fact that both educators joined the institution at the start of their careers and working lives, and both had fairly pragmatic, as opposed to romanticised, employment designs, may explain this. It is also probable their ages at the time also explain why career motives and remuneration were not notable primary recruitment forces as the moves were not upgrades as Kızıltepe (2008) suggests can be important, or financially advantageous as Cai and Hall (2015) highlight as having the power to attract (alongside other employment package features). In fact, for Chen securing familiar employment relatively effortlessly was important, while for Edward the opportunity for paid travel (Mullock, 2009), and new experiences or adventure appealed as Thorn (2009) highlights it may. That said, employment push factors, as Morris (2021) notes, did feature, at least for Chen, in the form of limited desired alternatives (Ismail and El Nakkache, 2014). Interestingly, in both the cases of Chen and Edward, neither really noted any prevalence of personal considerations, such as recommendations, family and lifestyle initially. These features were important ones for some as Morris (2021) found when considering the motives for joining a private transnational institution in the same city. Given the different
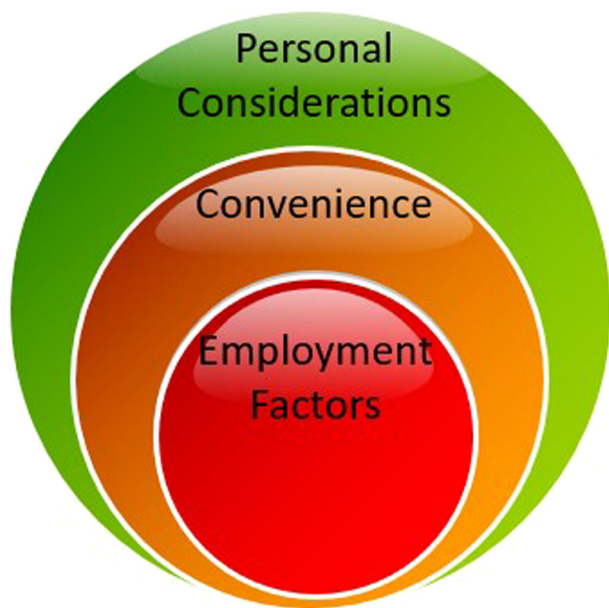
Fig. 3 Employment motivation framework for university English teachers.
Tracking the temporal changes and relative influence of motivational factors.

weights of employment factors, convenience and personal considerations for university English teachers, it is possible to adapt and present Morris' (2021) employment motivation framework in an alternative temporal and variable weighted capacity. For example, the more important the employment motives are, the more central positions they will occupy in the framework (see Fig. 3).

Considering differentiated job satisfaction factors of home and expatriate teachers. It was interesting to note the differences in satisfaction between Chen and Edward. As a home national Chen felt that recognition and the employment package were areas in which the work was rewarding and satisfying. More specifically, a competitive salary, one which might reduce need deficiencies in daily life (for example, supporting and raising a family and paying the mortgage), and enable life to be easier (Wilkins and Neri, 2019) were essential. The fact that his salary proved stable during the pandemic, alongside the regard in which higher education educators are generally perceived in China, proved to be additional significant pluses as far as his satisfaction was concerned. Indeed, job security is often important for work-based satisfaction as Morris (2021) has noted and may not simply be a feature to guard against dissatisfaction. The holidays were also a plus for Chen compared to many other professions. In contrast, Edward mentioned how personal interactions with friendly students and a light teaching load, alongside a job that offered plenty of autonomy provided the greatest sense job satisfaction. This source of employment happiness aligns with the statements of many relatively new professionals who worked at the private transnational educational provider in the same city. At this institution personal interactions with students were cited as one of the most satisfying aspects of the work (Morris, 2021). Where notable differences resided in this study between Chen and his expatriate counterpart Edward was with respect to the employment package. For Chen, and indeed the language teachers at the private higher education provider, the employment package was regarded a real plus point. However, in Edward's case his employment package was not set up with the intention of long-term retention likely in mind. There is a move towards this in other global locations as well as Collini (2012) highlights. Certainly, a 1-year contract did not provide

much in the way of job security either. Other interesting omissions in terms of job satisfaction for both Chen and Edward was the absence of mentioning collegiality as a positive feature. Friendly and supportive colleagues are often noted as a source of wellbeing (Ouyang and Paprock, 2006), and satisfaction, especially for younger staff. Indeed, a sense of community, as Lacy and Sheehan (1997) highlight, is important. In Edward's case this was distinctly lacking. Another notable aspect, albeit for its lack of mention, was any overt and clearly positive mentions toward management and leadership. Managers and leaders play an essential role in this area, as Haberman (2005) draws attention to, as satisfaction is often tied to the working climate which they inevitably influence.

Addressing shared job dissatisfaction factors of home and expatriate teachers. In terms of dissatisfaction, both Chen and Edward focused primarily on the areas of recognition and progression, and the employment package, which were deemed lacking in some respects. For Chen, who aspired to build a career at the institution, and one in which upward mobility was desirable, experiencing what he felt were insurmountable roadblocks led to feelings of failure and despondency. Pennington (1995) highlighted the importance of career development, and Kissau et al. (2019) draw attention to the challenges which can arise when mismatches exist between ambition and reality. Edward also felt that after 4 years his career was stalling and, alongside missing home, the lack of employment security and the ease with which he could leave meant that he subsequently did. Both study participants also alluded to financial considerations being concerns as well, with Edward noting how his salary at the time was never going to be enough to enable him to save and build a future. Chen in contrast felt that unattainable standards, limited developmental opportunities and employment tracks which financially favoured research over teaching meant he too felt disillusioned when considering himself against his peers. More recently, Al Harthy (2005) has also drawn attention to the power of comparison, and Robson (2022) the impact of expectation, and certainly pay inequalities can rankle (Yoshihara, 2018). It is also more than understandable that a desire to improve one's living standard can lead to employment change (Khan, 2011). The fact that in both Chen and Edward's cases neither felt that they were working in a particularly supportive, collaborative or growth inspired environment only furthered their relative senses of unease and discontent in certain areas. Interestingly, these findings contrast quite noticeably with new staff at the private transnational provider who typically felt that they operated in a supportive environment for the most part as far as colleagues were concerned as Morris (2021) notes. These staff were also generally more content with the employment package, although recognition and progression were still areas of concern. Given the different weights of employment packages, teaching and learning, recognition and progression, and personal interactions for university English teachers, it is also possible to adapt, weight and present Morris's (2021) job satisfaction and dissatisfaction framework in a prominence ordered manner. The more important the job satisfaction and dissatisfaction factors are, the more central positions they will hold in the framework (see Fig. 4).

Conclusion
This paper has considered the employment motives, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction of two well educated and qualified practitioners working in a Chinese state institution who sought out employment opportunities to work in higher education in China where language learning demand is high. Both of these practitioners reflect on their early career development. They also do so through considering a wide range of influencing factors, with differences apparent in perceptions and experiences between one another, as well as staff as
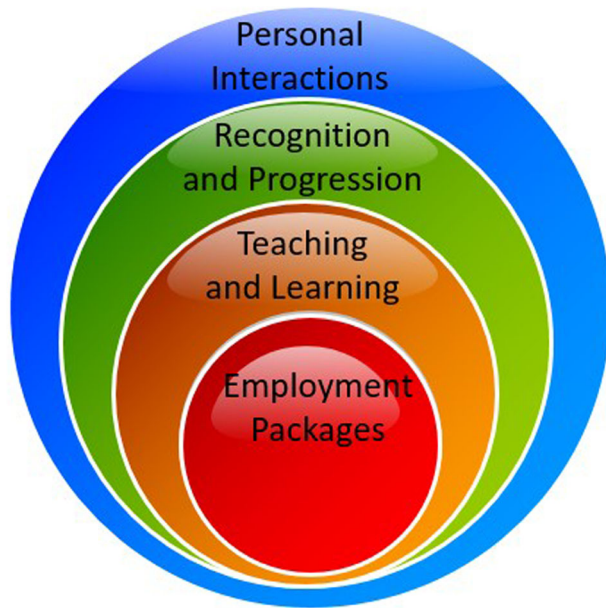
Fig. 4 Job satisfaction and dissatisfaction framework for university English teachers. Tracking the temporal changes and relative influence of work-related satisfaction and dissatisfaction features.

a private transnational higher educational provider in the same city. What is clear is that as far as recruitment and retention is concerned, it is important for institutions to consider their staff provision and experience based on a range of metrics. All staff are replaceable, but it is often beneficial financially, and with regard to reputation and performance, to develop and retain high quality staff, rather than chance the roulette wheel of external recruitment. By the same measure, creating the conditions in which staff are motivated, satisfied and supportive also makes good sense as far as institutional effectiveness and success is concerned, and in this study both participants were generally content for the most part with their early careers, but encountered areas in which they felt could have been improved with the passing of time. Going forward, there are many exciting areas in which research can be conducted. For example, how prominent is altruism and a love of one's field of expertise in a pragmatically driven content? A larger scale quantitative study at the aforementioned public and private institutions would also potentially be enlightening, as this study was limited to a couple of participants, and the recalled experiences may blur with time. Each participant's motivational and satisfaction recounts will not resonate with everyone or cover all eventualities. Extending the number of participants, or building on the work of Morris (2021), would enable an examination of the employment motivation, subsequent job satisfaction and dissatisfaction of language teachers at private and public institutions in greater depth, before then considering the data sets together. Additional qualitative studies at other educational providers would also provide excellent opportunities for greater institutional reflection and, hopefully, improvements. Expanding this into other related sub-fields and across professional disciplines has vast promise, and the areas of management and leadership and wellbeing and mental health are but two such interrelated domains. Ultimately, it is hoped that this work will resonate with and enlighten readers and promote raising professional and pedagogic awareness and reflection.

Data availability

Data of this research is available upon request from the corresponding author.

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Author contributions

Both authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication.

Competing interests

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential competing interests.

Ethical approval

This research was guided by the stipulations of the British Educational Research Association (2018), and the Data Protection Act (2018). Approval was also forthcoming from Soochow University. Consent was informed and participant anonymity ensured. Participants were also free to withdraw from the study at any point.

Informed consent

Written consent was obtained from the two participants before the research was carried out.

Additional information

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