

Career Transitions in Digital Labor: Motivation and Identity among Filipino Career Shifters in Online EFL Teaching

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines how Filipino professionals from non-teaching backgrounds describe their motivations and identity in transitioning to online English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. Using a descriptive qualitative design, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with six participants and analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings show that career transitions are shaped by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, including personal fulfillment, commitment to learners, and a sense of purpose, alongside practical concerns such as income, flexible work arrangements, and work-life balance. Prior career experiences also influenced the shift, as participants compared earlier jobs with their current work and pointed to dissatisfaction with previous conditions. At the same time, participants described changes in how they saw themselves, gradually identifying as teachers rather than workers from other fields. Online EFL teaching further shaped these motivations, particularly through opportunities for career growth and interaction with learners from different countries. The study shows that career transitions into online teaching are shaped by the interaction of personal meaning, prior experiences, and the conditions of digital labor.

Keywords: career transition, online EFL teaching, digital labor market, professional identity, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

1.0 Introduction

In recent years, traditional employment characterized by long-term stability has declined, giving way to more flexible and non-standard forms of work (Vandevenne et al., 2024; Sankararaman et al., 2024). Across Asia, more professionals are increasingly navigating non-linear career paths in response to digital transformation, economic uncertainty, and evolving global demands. Under these conditions, lifelong learning has become both a necessity and a strategy, enabling individuals to reskill, upskill, and reposition themselves within emerging labor markets. One area where this shift is especially visible is online English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, a field that intersects digital education, global labor mobility, and alternative career pathways. In the Philippines, this phenomenon is particularly pronounced, as professionals from diverse backgrounds transition into online teaching roles, redefining both their work and professional identities.

The Philippines has established itself as a key player in the global English language education industry. It is widely recognized as a “de facto hub” for English language learning (Saha, 2021), with Filipino teachers gaining international demand due to their communicative competence and neutral accent (Choe, 2016, as cited in Tsui, 2020). This global positioning is reinforced by economic factors, as the country offers relatively affordable English instruction compared to Western nations (Schmidt, 2021). Consequently, English-related professions, particularly online EFL teaching, have become significant contributors to the Philippine economy (Ozaki, 2022).

The growth of online EFL teaching platforms has further strengthened this sector before the COVID-19 pandemic. One company alone reported employing approximately 30,000 Filipino English teachers (INQUIRER.net BrandRoom, 2021). However, the pandemic intensified this trajectory. Economic disruptions led to increased unemployment, with approximately 3.5 million Filipinos affected in 2021, as cited in Crismundo (2022). During this period, many individuals turned to online EFL teaching as an alternative source of income due to its accessibility, flexibility, and relatively low entry requirements.

This shift reflects broader transformations in the future of work, where platform-based employment structures are becoming more prevalent. Online EFL teachers often operate as independent contractors within digital platforms, where compensation is tied to performance metrics such as student feedback. While this model enables access to

global opportunities, it also introduces new forms of labor precarity, including income instability and limited institutional support. At the same time, it further shows that Filipino career shifters, particularly those without formal education degrees, often engage in lifelong learning, such as self-directed learning to develop pedagogical and technological competencies.

1.2 Literature Context and Research Gap

Understanding why Filipino professionals move into online EFL teaching requires looking at several connected areas: changing labor conditions, the expansion of online education, career motivation, and identity change. Previous studies have discussed these areas separately, but fewer have examined how they intersect in the experiences of career shifters entering platform-based teaching work. For this reason, the present study brings these strands together to clarify what is already known and to identify what remains underexplored in the Philippine context.

Career Shifting Phenomenon

Career shifting has become increasingly common in contemporary labor markets shaped by economic disruptions and technological change. Rather than following a linear career path, individuals now move across industries in search of more sustainable, flexible, and meaningful forms of work. In the Philippines, this pattern is visible in the growing number of professionals from fields such as business, healthcare, engineering, and service work who enter online EFL teaching. These transitions from different sectors are often driven by both necessity and opportunity, reflecting the realities of a rapidly evolving labor market.

However, career shifting involves significant adaptation. Individuals must acquire new skills, adjust to unfamiliar professional expectations, and navigate new work environments. For those entering teaching without formal training, the transition is particularly complex, as it requires both skill development and identity transformation.

Online EFL Teaching in the Philippines

Online EFL teaching in the Philippines has grown into a competitive and expanding sector that connects Filipino teachers with learners across Asia and other regions (Morales, 2020; 51Talk, 2021). Filipino educators are often valued for their communication skills, adaptability, and ability to work effectively with learners from different backgrounds, which has helped strengthen the country's presence in the online English education market (Pontillas, 2021).

Despite its growth, the industry faces persistent challenges. These include limited access to stable internet infrastructure, lack of formal pedagogical training, and the pressures associated with performance-based evaluation systems (Cuenca & Angoya, 2020; Eunice & Guillermo, 2021). While existing studies have explored teaching practices, challenges, and learner outcomes, they largely focus on formally trained educators, leaving the lived experiences of career shifters underrepresented.

Motivation in Career Transitions

Motivation is a central factor in understanding career transitions. Among Filipino EFL teachers, teaching is often associated with a sense of purpose and the opportunity to support student learning, while also offering economic benefits (Ulla, 2019). However, existing literature tends to treat motivation as secondary, focusing instead on structural or pedagogical aspects of the profession. There remains a need for deeper exploration of how motivational factors shape career transitions, particularly in digital labor contexts.

Identity Reconstruction in Alternative Teaching Pathways

Moving into online EFL teaching also involves changes in professional identity. Individuals who come from non-teaching fields do not simply enter a new job; they also begin to reposition themselves in relation to teaching, learning, and expertise. This process may be gradual, especially when they must learn new pedagogical practices while adapting to online work environments.

This kind of transition can be understood through theories that emphasize the evolving nature of self-concept and the role of personal meaning in career decisions. Super's Career Development Theory is useful for examining how people move toward roles that better reflect their developing sense of self, while Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs helps explain why practical needs and deeper personal fulfillment may operate together in career transitions (Akkermans et al., 2021; Dar & Sakthivel, 2022). For career shifters in online EFL teaching, identity reconstruction is not only a challenge but also part of what makes the transition meaningful.

Research Gap

Although previous studies have examined online EFL teaching, they have tended to focus on educators who have formal teaching education and their teaching practices. Professionals who entered the online teaching EFL field after beginning careers elsewhere, particularly how they make sense of their motivations and changing identities, are still underexplored. This gap matters because online EFL teaching has become an increasingly visible form of digital labor. Examining the experiences of career shifters can therefore offer a clearer understanding of how people move into alternative teaching pathways and how they negotiate work, learning, and identity in the process.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study aims to explore the motivational drivers of Filipino professionals who transition into online EFL teaching despite having completed undergraduate degrees in non-education fields and prior work experience in different industries.

The study addresses main research question: *How do Filipino career shifters from non-teaching backgrounds describe their motivations in transitioning to online EFL teaching?*

Specifically, this study intends to answer the following questions:

1. What intrinsic and extrinsic motivations influence this transition?
2. How do prior career experiences shape their decision?
3. How do participants describe changes in their professional identity?
4. How do digital labor conditions influence their motivations?

Through the lived experiences of career shifters, this study seeks to understand how participants describe their transition into online teaching opportunities, how they interpret their transitions, and how they reconstruct their identities.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to multiple areas of scholarship and practice. For teacher education programs, the findings highlight the need for flexible and inclusive training pathways that accommodate non-traditional entrants into the teaching profession. For policy-makers, the study underscores the importance of investing in workforce reskilling and upskilling initiatives in labor markets increasingly shaped by digital work. For scholars of digital labor and education, this research provides insights into how professionals in the Global South navigate online platform-based employment, economic opportunity, and redefining their professional identities. More broadly, this study positions online EFL teaching can function not only as a source of livelihood but also a space for career reinvention.

2.0 Methodology

Understanding why individuals shift careers in digitally mediated environments requires attention to the meanings they assign to such transitions. In the context of online EFL teaching in the Philippines, motivation is not simply an individual choice but a response shaped by economic conditions, digital opportunities, and aspirations for professional reinvention. To capture these motivations within the broader discourse of lifelong learning and the future of work, this study adopts a qualitative approach that prioritizes participants' lived experiences and meaning-making processes.

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the motivational drivers of Filipino career shifters who transitioned into online EFL teaching. Descriptive qualitative research is appropriate for studies that aim to describe and interpret participants' experiences by addressing questions related to "what" and "how" phenomena occur (Bradshaw et al., 2017). In this case, the design enabled a focused examination of *what motivates* individuals to shift careers and how these motivations are constructed within the context of digital labor and lifelong learning.

The inquiry concentrated specifically on motivational drivers. This focus allowed for a deeper understanding of both intrinsic and extrinsic drivers influencing career transitions, as well as how do participants describe the changes in their professional identities. The qualitative approach was particularly suitable for eliciting rich,

narrative accounts that reflect participants' personal goals, values, and aspirations as they engage in reskilling and upskilling processes within a platform-based work environment.

2.2 Participants

The participants consisted of six (6) self-employed Filipino online EFL teachers selected through purposive sampling. This sampling technique involves intentionally selecting individuals who possess relevant experience and can provide detailed insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Andrade, 2021; Heath, 2023).

The following inclusion criteria were applied to ensure alignment with the study's focus on career shifting and motivation: (a) Filipino citizens; (b) non-education degree holders; (c) previously employed in a different professional field; (d) currently self-employed as full-time online EFL teachers; and (e) with at least five (5) years of experience in online EFL teaching.

A sample size of six participants was deemed appropriate for qualitative inquiry, as it allows for in-depth exploration while ensuring data saturation (Bekele & Yohannes, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2016). Data collection continued until no new themes emerged from the participants' narratives.

The participants in this study come from diverse professional backgrounds, including theology, hospitality, engineering, maritime work, healthcare, and business. Most had prior experience in structured, service-oriented, or physically demanding roles, while some had informal exposure to teaching in community settings. Their career paths were largely non-linear, with transitions shaped by a combination of prior skills, changing work conditions, and access to digital opportunities. These varied backgrounds provide context for understanding how participants developed their motivations and redefined their professional identities within online EFL teaching.

Table 1. *Summary of Participants' Profile*

Name	Age	Sex	Highest Educational Attainment	Previous Work Experience/s
Participant B	35	M	BA Theology	Call Center Agent (one year), Pastor (12 years)
Participant S	28	F	BS Hotel and Restaurant Management	Front Desk Officer (2 years)
Participant T	25	F	BS Civil Engineering	Cite Engineer (one year), Call Center Agent (2 years)
Participant N	34	M	BS Marine Transportation	Seafarer (7 years)
Participant J	38	F	Master of Science in Nursing	Hospital Nurse (2 years) and Private Nurse (3 years)
Participant C	38	M	BS Business Management	Call Center Agent (1 year), Banking Marketing Assistant (2 years), OFW (5 years)

Table 1 shows the summary of the participants' age, sex, undergraduate degrees and their diverse professional backgrounds before shifting to online EFL teaching.

2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews, which enabled participants to articulate their motivations in a detailed yet flexible manner. This method is particularly appropriate for qualitative inquiry, as it allows the researcher to explore participants' perspectives while maintaining consistency across interviews (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

The interviews were conducted using online platforms such as Zoom and Voov, reflecting the digital nature of the participants' work environments. Each session lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes and was designed to elicit in-depth accounts of the participants' reasons for transitioning into online EFL teaching.

The interview guide was structured to explore key motivational dimensions of career transition of six Filipino career shifters, including: (1) reasons for entering online EFL teaching; (2) how participants view teaching as a profession; (3) experiences or influences that shaped their decision; (4) perceived benefits of the work; and (5) perceived impact of the career on their personal and professional development.

Rather than imposing predefined categories, the questions were designed to allow participants to describe their motivations in their own terms. This approach to examine through thematic analysis.

Prior to data collection, participants were provided with informed consent forms outlining the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time. With participants' permission, interviews were audio- and video-recorded and securely stored for transcription and analysis.

To ensure the credibility of the data collection instrument, the interview guide underwent expert validation by specialists in qualitative research, EFL instruction, and communication studies. This process enhanced the clarity, relevance, and alignment of the questions with the study's focus on motivational drivers.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase approach outlined by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006). This method was selected because it allows patterns to emerge from participants' accounts while remaining flexible enough to capture different dimensions of their experiences.

The analysis began with repeated reading of the transcripts to become familiar with how participants described their career transitions. Initial codes were then generated, focusing on statements related to reasons for entering online EFL teaching, references to prior work experiences, descriptions of changes in professional identity, and comments about working within online or platform-based environments. Rather than coding only for general themes, attention was given to how participants explained and justified their decisions.

Codes were grouped and compared across participants to identify broader patterns. During this stage, particular care was taken to distinguish between intrinsic motivations and extrinsic motivations, in line with the first research question. At the same time, codes related to previous occupations were examined to understand how earlier work experiences influenced participants' decisions to shift careers.

As themes were refined, the analysis also considered how participants described themselves before and after entering online EFL teaching. This allowed for the identification of patterns related to professional identity change, including how individuals began to see themselves as teachers. In addition, references to flexibility, platform systems, and remote work conditions were analyzed to capture how digital labor structures shaped participants' motivations and experiences.

The final themes were developed through an iterative process of reviewing, refining, and naming, ensuring that each theme clearly addressed the research questions. Participants excerpts were then selected to illustrate how participants articulated their motivations, experiences, and identity shifts within the context of online EFL teaching.

2.5 Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the rigor and credibility of the findings, several strategies were employed. First, an audit trail was maintained to document the research process, including data collection procedures, coding decisions, and analytical reflections. This enhances transparency and allows for the verification of findings (Williams, 2018). Second, expert validation was conducted to strengthen the credibility of both the data collection instrument and the analytical process. Internal and external experts reviewed the methodology and findings to ensure consistency and methodological soundness (Idros et al., 2019). Third, reflexive journaling was practiced throughout the study. The researcher maintained reflective notes to acknowledge and manage potential biases, ensuring that interpretations remained grounded in participants' accounts rather than personal assumptions (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). These strategies collectively ensured that the study has maintained credibility, dependability, and confirmability, which are essential standards in qualitative research.

3.0 Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study in response to the main research question: *How do Filipino career shifters from non-teaching backgrounds describe their motivations and identities in transitioning to online EFL teaching?*

The findings are organized into four areas of analysis: intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, the influence of prior career experiences, identity transformation, and the role of digital labor conditions. Two overarching themes: *Passion for Teaching* and *Rewards of Online EFL Teaching*, capture participants' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. The remaining sections examine how *prior work experiences*, *evolving professional identity*, and the *conditions of online EFL teaching* further shape participants' decisions and perspectives.

This section shows how the transitions of Filipino career shifters into online EFL teaching are shaped not only by practical considerations, but also by personal meaning, past experiences, and changes in how participants understand their work and themselves.

3.1 Motivational Drivers of Career Transition

This section shows how participants were drawn to teaching not only for practical reasons, but because it allowed them to engage in work, they found meaningful and personally fulfilling.

3.1.1 Intrinsic Motivations: Passion for Teaching

The first theme, *Passion for Teaching*, highlights the intrinsic motivations that drive Filipino career shifters to enter and remain in online EFL teaching. Across participant narratives, teaching was not framed as a fallback option but as a meaningful pursuit rooted in personal fulfillment, commitment to learners, and a sense of calling. This theme reflects how individuals engage in lifelong learning not only as skill acquisition but as identity transformation, aligning their professional paths with deeply held values.

Table 2. Summary of Participants' Intrinsic Motivations related to Passion for Teaching
Emerging Theme 1

MEANING UNIT	CONDENSED MEANING UNIT	SUB-THEME	MAIN THEME	MOTIVATION TYPE
"The love for kids. It was all, even from the very start..." – Participant S	Natural love for teaching children led to EFL teaching			
"...I've worked with European companies as well, and here in Asia. The feeling that I have doing those lessons for the students, especially when I teach students who are engineers and doctors from all over the world, I felt really good." – Participant N	Fulfilled teaching professionals from diverse backgrounds	Genuine Commitment to Student Growth		Intrinsic
"When I entered this field, I would say that teaching can be done by anyone..." – Participant J	Believes passion and purpose matter in teaching			
"Teaching can be done by anyone as long as they put their heart and soul into it." Participant J	Feels satisfied when teaching with purpose			
"I felt really good that this career have taught me how to showcase my skills on how to teach" – Participant N	Teaching allows meaningful use of personal skills	Personal Fulfillment	Passion for Teaching	Intrinsic
"So, teacher naman talaga ko by heart, so parang kung magkano ... bonus na lang, like nagtuturo ng hindi naman ako binabayaran" – Participant B	Teaching is a calling; taught even without pay			
"I feel bad for the student because teachers don't want to teach him, right? Because the student misbehaves or is a little bit rowdy. Then, when you get to meet the student... Then you realize, why is this student labeled rowdy, naughty and misbehaving." – Participant C	Shows compassion and value in understanding for misunderstood and challenging learners	Teaching as a Calling		Intrinsic

Table 2 illustrates the participants' commitment and fulfillment in teaching and their previous experiences that emerged to the main theme — *Passion for Teaching*.

This theme highlights the deep and genuine commitment of the participants to the act of educating and guiding learners in learning the English language. This extends beyond the instruction of language, encompassing a dedication to student development, putting someone's heart in teaching and showing compassion to students.

Subtheme 1.1: Commitment to Student Growth

This sub-theme signifies the sincere dedication of the participants to the holistic growth and progress of their students. This commitment is a genuine testament to their investment in each student's individual journey.

"The love for kids. It was all, even from the very start, when my cousin introduced me to the industry, her first question was like, "Do you like it? Do you want to teach kids?" And that was my immediate reaction: "Yes." So that made me more enticed to be part of the EFL industry." [Participant S]

"I have taught European companies, I've worked with European companies as well, and here in Asia, almost all nationalities. And the feeling that I have doing those lessons for the students, also with the professional ones that needed to take lessons in English, especially when I teach students who are engineers and doctors from all over the world, I felt really good." [Participant N]

"When I entered this field, I would say that teaching can be done by anyone as long as they put their heart and soul into it. So, um, it also depends on the passion of the person, uh, what their purpose is, or what their goal is when they enter this field." "Participant J"

This subtheme reflects participants' strong commitment to supporting learners' development across diverse contexts. Their accounts highlight a genuine interest in student progress, whether teaching young learners or professionals from different nationalities. Teaching is described as an intentional and value-driven practice, where engagement with students becomes a central source of motivation.

The findings suggest that commitment to student growth functions as a key intrinsic driver in career transition. Participants' emphasis on meaningful learner engagement indicates that motivation extends beyond employment and toward purposeful contribution.

Subtheme 1.2: Personal Fulfillment

Beyond economic considerations, participants described online EFL teaching as a source of personal fulfillment rooted in passion and purposeful engagement. Teaching was viewed as an avenue for self-expression, where individuals could meaningfully apply and develop their skills while contributing to learners' progress. As Participant J emphasized, teaching requires "heart and soul," highlighting the role of personal commitment in shaping their motivation. Similarly, Participant N associated fulfillment with the opportunity to showcase their abilities while teaching diverse learners across global contexts.

"When I entered this field, I would say that teaching can be done by anyone as long as they put their heart and soul into it. So, um, it also depends on the passion of the person, uh, what their purpose is, or what their goal is when they enter this field." [Participant J]

"So, I felt really good that this career have taught me how to showcase my skills on how to teach English language to non-speakers from all over the world." Participant N

These accounts suggest that personal fulfillment functions as a central intrinsic motivator in career transition, reinforcing the idea that individuals seek work that aligns with their values and sense of purpose. Within the framework of lifelong learning, participants' engagement in online EFL teaching reflects an ongoing process of self-development, where skills are not only utilized but continuously refined in digital environments. Moreover, in the context of the future of work, this finding illustrates how platform-based teaching enables professionals in the Global South to achieve both personal and professional growth through globally connected labor. Thus, the transition into online EFL teaching is not merely an economic adjustment but a deliberate move toward more meaningful and self-directed career pathways.

Subtheme 1.3: Teaching is a calling

For some participants, teaching was not merely a career option but a deeply internalized calling. Their narratives reflect a sense of purpose that transcends financial considerations, positioning teaching as an inherent part of their identity. Participant B explicitly described teaching as something they would do regardless of compensation, emphasizing that remuneration is secondary to the act of teaching itself. Similarly, Participant C demonstrated a strong sense of responsibility toward learners, particularly those perceived as difficult, highlighting a willingness to understand and support students beyond surface behaviors.

"So, I enjoyed it. So, teacher naman talaga ko by heart, so parang kung magkano or kung saan ako nagtuturo, parang bonus nalang kasi nasanay naman talaga ko, like nagtuturo ng hindi naman ako binabayaran, kahit na merong nag-aabot ng parang... ang tawag namin dun, "love gift," eh, na parang sa layman's term, donation." (So, I enjoyed it. You see, I'm really a teacher at heart, so it's like, however much or wherever I'm teaching, it's just a bonus because I'm really used to it. Like, I've taught even when I wasn't getting paid, even if someone would offer something like... what we call it there, a 'love gift,' which in layman's terms is a donation) [Participant B]

“I feel bad for the student because teachers don't want to teach him, right? Because the student misbehaves or is a little bit rowdy. Then, when you get to meet the student... Then you realize, why is this student labeled rowdy, naughty and misbehaving.” – [Participant C]

These participants’ narratives suggest that teaching as a calling represents a heightened form of intrinsic motivation, where professional engagement is anchored in identity, empathy, and purpose. Participant B’s perspective illustrates how teaching is internalized as a core self-concept, while Participant C’s narrative reflects a compassionate orientation that prioritizes student understanding over judgment. Within the context of lifelong learning, such motivations indicate that career transitions are not solely driven by external opportunities but by the pursuit of meaningful roles that align with personal values. Furthermore, in the evolving landscape of digital work, this finding underscores how individuals in the Global South engage in platform-based teaching not only as a form of reskilling but as a way to sustain purpose-driven careers. This reinforces the idea that the future of work involves not only flexibility and access but also the redefinition of work as a site of personal meaning and social contribution.

Participants’ accounts frame teaching as more than a profession – it is described as a calling grounded in fulfillment and emotional engagement. This reflects a shift from traditional career trajectories toward purpose-driven work, a key feature of contemporary labor transitions.

Moreover, participants’ narratives suggest that digital careers are increasingly evaluated not only in terms of economic viability but also in their capacity to provide psychological and emotional satisfaction. The narratives demonstrate that career shifters actively seek roles that align with their personal values, reinforcing the idea that upskilling and reskilling are not purely technical processes but also involve identity reconstruction.

3.1.2 Extrinsic Motivations: Rewards of Online EFL Teaching

While intrinsic motivations play a central role, participants also identified practical and material rewards that influenced their decision to transition into online EFL teaching. These rewards reflect the structural conditions of digital labor, where flexibility, accessibility, and global connectivity create new opportunities for employment. This theme highlights how extrinsic motivations complement intrinsic drivers, making online EFL teaching a sustainable and attractive career path.

Table 3. Summary of Participants’ Extrinsic Motivations related to Rewards of Online EFL Teaching
Emerging Theme 2

MEANING UNIT	CONDENSED MEANING UNIT	SUB-THEME	MAIN THEME	MOTIVATION TYPE
<i>“So, the pay is good, so you get to decide on the rate.” – Participant C</i>	Appreciates ability to set rates and earn more	Salary / Remuneration	Rewards of Online EFL Teaching	Extrinsic
<i>“It became the source of my bread and butter.” – Participant J</i>	Discovered EFL could be a stable livelihood			
<i>“I think yung flexibility... compared sa talaga employed...” – Participant B</i>	Appreciates the flexibility and comfort of remote work	Flexible Work Structure		Extrinsic
<i>“You just stay at home. That's a lot more comfortable than going out, especially if you're in the Philippines. It's really hot, right?” – Participant T</i>	Prefers home-based teaching due to weather and comfort			
<i>“You don't get to have the stress... flexibility of time is one of the upsides.” – Participant C”</i>	Values flexible scheduling in EFL teaching			
<i>“Tapos yung idea na online work... kasama mo yung family mo.” – Participant B</i>	WFH allows more quality time with family	Work-Life Integration		Extrinsic
<i>“Peace of mind because I'm able to fulfill... It's different when I'm home.” – Participant J</i>	Enjoys emotional presence and parenting benefits			

Table 3 shows the benefits of online EFL teaching the career shifters motivated them in transitioning on this industry that led to the second theme – *Rewards of Online EFL Teaching*.

Subtheme 2.1: Salary / Remuneration

Financial sustainability emerged as a significant motivator, particularly when compared to participants' previous employment. Online EFL teaching is perceived as a viable economic alternative that offers improved income opportunities within the Philippines.

"The salary. Because I remembered back then, in the hospitality industry, we were only paid the minimum wage. And the minimum wage, if I can disclose, the minimum wage back then for us was around 300 pesos per day. And I think, even though the lifestyle or the cost of living in Baguio City was quite low, I think it does not satisfy my needs as a person." [Participant S]

"I have been to 3 or 4 companies already, and salaries are very competitive as an EFL teacher. So I guess that's one of the considerations why I am still sticking in this company, in this kind of work. I worked in a private [engineering] company. My salary was only 20,000 pesos. I worked as a site supervisor. So, basically, the salary is not enough for me." [Participant T]

"So, the pay is good, so you get to decide on the rate." [Participant C]

"There was this offer and the opportunity to become a nurse. Well, you know, the history here in our country, so it wasn't that great. That's why, okay, let me just try to become a tutor for just like a month. And then, from then on, it became the source of my bread and butter." [Participant J]

Financial sustainability emerges as a decisive driver in participants' career transitions, particularly when contrasted with the limitations of their previous employment. Participant S and Participant T explicitly highlighted inadequate wages in traditional sectors, while Participant C and Participant J emphasized the improved earning potential and income control afforded by online EFL teaching. These accounts suggest that shifting into digital teaching is a strategic response to economic constraints, enabling access to more stable and flexible income sources.

Subtheme 2.2: Flexible Work Structure

The flexibility of online EFL teaching reflects a defining characteristic of the future of work, where traditional employment structures are replaced by more autonomous and adaptable arrangements. Participants value the ability to control their schedules, workload, environment, which contributes to both productivity and well-being.

"I think yung flexibility, ah... lalo na sa management ngayon sa [Company]. Pag meron kang lakad, paalam ka lang, even planned or unplanned. So... yun... flexibility parin, ah... compared sa talaga employed. Mahirap magpaalam ganun kahit... kahit qualified ka, or meron kang pwedeng i-avail na leave, ah... at the same time, for me, ah comfortable ako na hindi pumasok sa office na makikisama ka sa mga officemates, ganyan, ganito, tapos, ah... yung problem na, ano, susuotin mo araw-araw, so yun. *(I think the flexibility, ah... especially with the management now at [Company]. When you have an errand, you just need to ask permission, whether it's planned or unplanned. So... yeah... still flexibility, ah... compared to being really employed. It's hard to ask permission like that even if... even if you're qualified, or you have available leave, ah... at the same time, for me, ah I'm comfortable to not having to go to the office where you have to socialize with officemates, this and that, and then, ah... the problem of, what, what you're going to wear every day, so yeah.)* [Participant B]

"So I don't see a lot of differences at all. It's just that the way of work is very different because when you work as an engineer, it's outside your house. It's in the field. While when you're just an EFL or ESL teacher, you just stay at home. So, basically, that's a lot more comfortable than going out, especially if you're in the Philippines. It's really hot, right? So, yeah, I guess it's just that small difference." [Participant T]

"You don't get to have the stress of like flexible... Your schedule is flexible. You can take in as many classes as you want. You can refuse classes if you want to, right? So, yeah, I think the flexibility of time is one of the upsides." [Participant C]

The participants highlight how technology-mediated work enables individuals to reconfigure their professional lives according to personal needs and priorities. Flexible work structure emerges as a key motivator, reflecting participants' preference for autonomy over rigid employment systems. Participant B emphasized the ease of managing personal commitments without bureaucratic constraints, while Participant T highlighted the comfort of home-based work

compared to physically demanding field jobs. Similarly, Participant C pointed to schedule control as a way to reduce stress and increase agency over workload. These accounts suggest that online EFL teaching aligns with the evolving nature of work, where flexibility enhances both well-being and productivity. This indicates that professionals are drawn to careers that offer adaptable and self-directed work arrangements not available in their previous employments.

3.2 Influence of Prior Career Experiences

Participants often referred to their previous jobs when explaining why they decided to shift careers. Their accounts show that the transition into online EFL teaching was shaped not only by new opportunities, but also by frustrations they had already experienced in earlier employment.

Table 4. *Summary of Influences of Prior Career Experiences on Career Transition*

<i>Emerging Theme 2</i>			
MEANING UNIT	CONDENSED MEANING UNIT	SUB-THEME	MAIN THEME
<i>"In the hospitality industry, we were only paid the minimum wage back then." – Participant S</i>	Previous salary was not enough		
<i>"My salary was only 20,000 pesos. I worked as a site supervisor. So, basically, the salary is not enough for me." – Participant T</i>	Income from previous job was insufficient		
<i>"Nun (Before), I had to always be on-call during my previous work in the hospital. I don't have time for myself and my family. Now, I can even choose my schedule." Participant J</i>	Previous job had long hours; current job offers flexibility	Dissatisfaction with previous employment	
<i>"I didn't enjoy it. BPO has this toxic different work environment. In online teaching, I am the boss and I get respected by students, parents or clients." Participant B</i>	Previous job had a stressful or toxic work environment		Influence of Prior Career Experiences on Career Transition
<i>"Before, I was always away from my family. And, before my contract (as a seafarer) be renewed I had to finish a lot of tests. And I fail one test, I cannot return. Here (online teaching), I just need to be available and teach whenever I want." Participant C</i>	Previous job limited family time and had unstable conditions		
<i>"Compared sa talaga employment ko nun. Mahirap magpaalam ganun kahit... kahit qualified ka... At the same time, for me, ah comfortable ako na hindi pumasok sa office na makikisama ka sa mga officemates... yung problem na, ano, susuotin mo araw-araw, so yun" Participant B</i>	Current job is more flexible and less stressful than previous work	Comparison of past and present work Conditions	

Table 4 presents how participants' previous work experiences, particularly dissatisfaction and comparisons with current work, shaped their decision to shift careers.

3.2.1 Subtheme 1: Dissatisfaction with previous employment

Dissatisfaction with previous work appeared in several forms. Some participants focused on low pay, especially when their salary was not enough to meet everyday needs. Participant S recalled receiving only minimum wage in the hospitality industry, while Participant T described a monthly salary of 20,000 pesos as insufficient. Other accounts pointed to stressful or unstable conditions, including toxic work environments, limited family time, and uncertainty in maintaining employment.

"My salary was only 20,000 pesos. I worked as a site supervisor. So, basically, the salary is not enough for me." – Participant T

"I didn't enjoy it. BPO has this toxic different work environment. In online teaching, I am the boss and I get respected by students, parents or clients." Participant B

These narratives show that dissatisfaction was tied to concrete experiences that made previous jobs difficult to sustain.

3.2.2 Subtheme 2: Comparison of past and present work Conditions

Participants also compared their earlier work with their present roles in online EFL teaching. Long hours, on-call duties, and physically demanding routines were contrasted with the flexibility of online teaching, particularly the ability to manage schedules and work from home. Participant J, for example, described how previous work required constant availability, while online teaching allowed greater control over time.

"Compared sa talaga employment ko nun. Mahirap magpaalam ganun kahit... kahit qualified ka, or meron kang pwedeng i-avail na leave, ahh... at the same time, for me, ah comfortable ako na hindi pumasok sa office na makikisama ka sa mga officemates, ganyan, ganito, tapos, ah... yung problem na, ano, susuotin mo araw-araw, so yun" Participant B

Participant B similarly contrasted the restrictions of formal employment with the relative comfort of working outside an office setting. These comparisons show that participants did not shift careers randomly. They evaluated their past and present conditions, and this contrast shaped their preference for online EFL teaching.

Taken together, these show that prior career experiences did not merely come before the transition; they actively influenced the decision to move into online EFL teaching.

3.3 Identity Transformation in Career Shifting

As participants transitioned into online EFL teaching, they began to describe changes in how they understood and project themselves in the online EFL teaching field.

Table 5. Summary of Identity Transformation in Career Shifting

Emerging Theme 3			
MEANING UNIT	CONDENSED MEANING UNIT	SUB-THEME	MAIN THEME
"I felt really good that this career [online EFL teaching] have taught me how to showcase my skills on how to teach." – Participant N	Feels confident using teaching skills	Emerging Teacher Identity	Identity Transformation in Career Shifting
"I felt bad for the student... (other) teachers don't want to teach him... then you realize why and you wanted to help (the student)..." – Participant C	Shows empathy and effort to understand students		
"I've worked with professionals... I felt really good teaching them." – Participant N	Gains confidence teaching diverse learners		
"Teaching can be done by anyone as long as they put their heart and soul into it." – Participant J	Believes teaching requires personal commitment	Teaching as Self-Concept	
"So, teacher naman talaga ako by heart... kahit hindi ako binabayaran." – Participant B	Consider self as a teacher even without pay		
"I love teaching kids... even from the very start." – Participant S	Long-standing personal connection to teaching		

Table 5 presents the meaning units and thematic coding related to identity transformation, highlighting how participants develop teacher identity and internalize teaching as part of their self-concept.

Participants' narratives show that their transition into online EFL teaching is accompanied by a gradual development of teacher identity. This appears in how they talk about their interactions with students, especially in their efforts to guide, support, and understand learners. For example, Participant C's willingness to work with challenging students shows a shift from simply completing tasks to taking a more active role in teaching. Participant N's experience of teaching professionals from different backgrounds also reflects growing confidence in the role.

*"I felt really good that this career [online EFL teaching] have taught me how to showcase my skills on how to teach."
"I've worked with professionals... I felt really good teaching them." – Participant N*

"I felt bad for the student... (other) teachers don't want to teach him... then you realize why and you wanted to help (the student)..." – Participant C

"So, teacher naman talaga ako by heart... kahit hindi ako binabayaran." – Participant B

"I love teaching kids... even from the very start." – Participant S

Over time, these experiences show how participants' identities changed gradually, as they began to see themselves not only as workers, but as teachers.

3.4 Digital Labor Conditions Influencing Motivation

As participants discussed their experiences in online EFL teaching, they also pointed to features of digital work that influenced their decision to remain in the field. Their accounts show that motivation is shaped not only by teaching itself but also by how the work is organized through online teaching platforms. In particular, opportunities for career growth and exposure to learners from different countries emerged as important factors. These conditions differ from those in their previous jobs and help explain why online EFL teaching is seen as a viable and attractive form of work.

Table 6. Summary of Growth and Exposure in Digital Labor Conditions

Emerging Theme 4

Emerging Theme 1			
MEANING UNIT	CONDENSED MEANING UNIT	SUB-THEME	MAIN THEME
<i>"The things that I considered doing this career are the career growth..." – Participant N</i>	Sees online EFL as offering career growth opportunities	Professional Growth	Digital Labor Conditions Influencing Motivation
<i>"So, after 1 to 3 years, I became a senior teacher..." – Participant T</i>	Experienced faster promotion in online teaching		
<i>"You get to meet different people from different places..." – Participant C</i>	Access to global interaction through online platforms	Global Exposure	
<i>"I had students from different countries, so I had to adjust how I explain things depending on their culture."</i>	Adapts teaching for students from different cultural backgrounds		

Table 6 shows how digital labor conditions, particularly opportunities for professional growth and global exposure, influenced participants' motivation to engage in online EFL teaching.

Subtheme 3.4.1 Professional Growth

Opportunities for professional growth were an important aspect of online EFL teaching for several participants. Some described how platform-based work allowed faster movement within their roles compared to their previous employment. For instance, Participant N referred to career growth as one of the reasons for entering the field, while Participant T described becoming a senior teacher within a relatively short period.

"The things that I considered doing this career are the career growth. At my first company, I was able to get promoted from a new teacher to a junior teacher for only a month, and then junior teacher to senior teacher. I was promoted for only in less than half a year, and then I got promoted to a master teacher for only nine months." [Participant N]

“So, after 2 to 3 years, I became a senior teacher in the company. So, basically, I was given a lot of, like, opportunities there and became a senior teacher. So, in the company, I was able to teach young learners from the age of 4 until the age of 88 years old.” [Participant T]

These participants’ narratives suggest that online teaching platforms can provide clearer or more accessible pathways for advancement. Participants did not refer to formal promotion systems, but to how opportunities became available through the platform itself. Compared with earlier employment, where progression was often slow or uncertain, movement within online teaching appeared more immediate and within reach.

Subtheme 3.4.2 Global Exposure

Participants also highlighted the value of interacting with learners from different countries. For some, this was one of the more distinctive features of online EFL teaching. Participant C described meeting people from different places as a notable part of the work, while others pointed out that teaching students from various backgrounds required them to adjust how they explain lessons.

“You get to meet different people from different places, right? So, it's like traveling, but without actually going out of the country to travel, right? So, I guess that's one cool thing. Those are the cool things.” [Participant C]

“I had students from different countries, so I had to explain things depending on their culture.” [Participant B]

These experiences involve more than simple communication. Participants had to adjust how they explained ideas depending on the learner’s background, which made teaching more dynamic but also more demanding. Likewise, online EFL teaching exposed them to forms of interaction that were not part of their previous locally based jobs. This reflects how professionals in the Global South leverage reskilling to participate in more sustainable, platform-based labor opportunities.

As participants describe and point to the role of digital labor conditions in shaping participants’ motivation. Opportunities for advancement and exposure to international learners are part of how online EFL teaching is structured. These features make the work appealing not only in practical terms, but also in how it broadens participants’ professional experience. In this sense, motivation is shaped not only by the work itself, but by the conditions under which it is carried out.

3.5 Synthesis of Findings

The findings show how Filipino career shifters are motivated by both personal and practical factors. Intrinsic motivations, such as purpose, fulfillment, and a sense of calling, are closely intertwined with extrinsic considerations, including financial stability, flexibility, and work-life balance.

Prior career experiences play a significant role in shaping these motivations, as participants often described dissatisfaction with previous work conditions as a key reason for seeking alternative employment. At the same time, the transition into online EFL teaching is accompanied by a gradual shift in professional identity, where individuals begin to see themselves as educators rather than as members of their former professions.

The findings also show that these motivations are influenced by the structure of digital labor. Platform-based teaching provides both opportunities and constraints, but it allows participants to access global work while maintaining autonomy. Taken together, the transition into online EFL teaching can be understood as both a practical response to labor conditions and a meaningful process of career redefinition.

3.6 Theoretical Integration of Motivational Drivers

The findings can be understood through the lens of career development and motivational theories. Participants’ transition into online EFL teaching reflects a process of self-concept development, where individuals move toward roles that align more closely with their values and perceived abilities. In line with Donald Super, career shifts are not abrupt changes but gradual realignments shaped by both past experiences and emerging opportunities.

At the same time, participants’ motivations demonstrate the interaction between intrinsic and extrinsic factors. While financial stability and flexibility initially attract individuals to online EFL teaching, long-term engagement appears to be sustained by fulfillment, purpose, and commitment to learners. This aligns with Abraham Maslow’s

Hierarchy of Needs, where individuals seek not only to meet economic needs but also to achieve personal growth and self-actualization.

Importantly, the findings suggest that these needs do not operate in a fixed sequence. Instead, participants experience both economic and personal motivations simultaneously, particularly within digital work environments that allow flexibility and global participation. In this sense, online EFL teaching functions not only as employment but as a space where individuals negotiate identity, purpose, and livelihood.

3.6.1 Career Self-Concept Development

Participants' accounts show that the transition into online EFL teaching was closely tied to how they understood themselves. Participant J mentioned that teaching was not entirely new, but something they had already valued before entering the profession. Statement from Participant B such as being a "teacher by heart" and expressing a long-standing love for teaching suggest that online EFL work allowed these participants to act on an identity that had already been present, though not yet fully expressed. Through the lens of Super's Career Development Theory, this reflects a process of self-concept development in which individuals move toward roles that better match their values, interests, and perceived abilities. Additionally, online EFL teaching serves as a platform where latent teaching identities are expressed and sustained within the context of digital labor.

3.6.2 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation Balance

The findings further demonstrate that participants' motivations are shaped by the interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsic motivations are evident in participants' passion for teaching (Participant J), commitment to learners (Participant C), and sense of calling (Participant B). At the same time, extrinsic factors such as financial sustainability (Participant S and T) and flexible work arrangements (Participant B and C) play a significant role in sustaining their engagement.

Through the lens of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, these motivations reflect a progression from basic economic needs toward higher-level needs such as fulfillment and self-actualization. Importantly, these needs do not operate independently but reinforce one another. The ability of online EFL teaching to satisfy both financial stability and personal meaning suggests that career transitions are more sustainable when intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are balanced, particularly within digitally mediated work environments.

3.6.3 Identity Reorientation

Beyond motivation, participants' transition into online EFL teaching also involved a reorientation of professional identity. Individuals who came from non-teaching fields began to describe themselves in ways that reflected growing identification with teaching. This is especially visible in participants who spoke of being a "teacher by heart," showing empathy toward difficult learners, or finding fulfillment in guiding students from different backgrounds. These accounts suggest that the shift into online EFL teaching was not only occupational, but also personal, as participants gradually came to see themselves as educators.

This pattern is consistent with Super's view of evolving self-concept and with Maslow's emphasis on esteem and self-actualization. In this case, online EFL teaching became a space where participants could renegotiate who they were professionally.

Comparison

Participants' accounts show clear points of connection with existing views of career development and motivation. For example, Participant B's description of being a "teacher by heart" and Participant C's emphasis on understanding learners reflect how career choices are shaped by an evolving sense of self, consistent with Super's idea of career self-concept. At the same time, participants' motivations were not limited to personal meaning. Participant J and Participant N highlighted fulfillment and purpose in teaching, while Participant S and Participant T pointed to the importance of financial stability and improved working conditions.

These accounts support Maslow's view that both economic needs and personal growth influence career decisions. However, the findings also suggest that these needs were not experienced in a fixed sequence. Instead, participants described situations where financial considerations and personal fulfillment were addressed at the same time. In this context, online EFL teaching functioned not only as a source of income but also as a space where participants could pursue work that aligned with their values. This suggests that in digitally mediated work, motivation is shaped by the ability to meet both practical and personal needs within the same environment.

Implications of the Study

The findings suggest that online EFL teaching can serve as both an economic opportunity and a pathway for career reinvention. For many participants, the field offered flexible and sustainable work while also allowing them to pursue roles that felt meaningful and aligned with their developing professional identities.

For teacher education, this highlights the need to recognize non-traditional pathways into teaching and to support individuals entering the profession from other fields. For policymakers, the results point to the growing importance of digital labor platforms in expanding employment opportunities, particularly in the Global South. More broadly, the study shows that career transitions are not only responses to economic change, but also processes of learning, adaptation, and identity development.

4.0 Conclusions

The findings reveal that most career shifters were driven by a genuine passion for teaching. The transition of Filipino professionals into online EFL teaching is shaped by the interplay of passion and practicality, where motivation is both deeply personal and structurally influenced. Participants such as Participant B, who identified as a “teacher by heart,” and Participant C, who demonstrated empathy toward learners, highlight how *Passion for Teaching* reflects strong intrinsic motivations grounded in purpose, fulfillment, and identity. At the same time, participants like Participant S and Participant T emphasized financial sustainability and flexibility, illustrating how the *Rewards of Online EFL Teaching* function as essential extrinsic drivers.

Taken together, these themes suggest that career shifting is sustained not by a single factor but by the alignment of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Consistent with Super’s Career Development Theory, participants actively realign their self-concept with roles that reflect their values and competencies. Likewise, in relation to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, online EFL teaching enables the simultaneous fulfillment of economic security and self-actualization. These findings underscore how digital teaching platforms provide meaningful and sustainable career pathways for professionals in the Global South especially in this evolving digital labor market.

5.0 Recommendations

Based on the salient findings of this qualitative study, the following recommendations are presented:

1. Teacher education institutions should develop accessible and flexible training programs for non-education graduates entering online EFL teaching, supporting their pedagogical skills and ongoing professional development within a lifelong learning framework.
2. Policymakers are encouraged to recognize online EFL teaching as a viable form of digital labor and implement policies that ensure fair compensation, career stability, and access to professional growth opportunities.
3. Online EFL platforms should strengthen support systems by offering structured career pathways, mentorship programs, and continuous upskilling initiatives to sustain both motivation and performance among teachers.
4. Career shifters may be encouraged to engage in continuous self-directed learning and reflective practice to enhance both their teaching competencies and alignment with their evolving professional identities.
5. Future researchers should explore longitudinal and comparative studies on career shifting in digital education, particularly to better understand long-term sustainability and identity development in platform-based work.

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