敘述英文教師的職涯：對臺灣社會脈絡影響的感知
Recounting EFL Teachers' Careers: Perceptions of the Impact of Taiwanese Social Contexts

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ABSTRACT

The study explores how various social contexts, including identity-based factors and broader structural changes, shape the career trajectories of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in Taiwan. Employing a life-history narrative approach, I conducted interviews with 38 English teachers from diverse backgrounds about their career experiences. Findings reveal that identity-based factors, such as religion, race, and gender, significantly influenced teachers' career narratives, often through experiences of discrimination. In addition, structural forces—most notably Taiwan's declining birth rate—also imposed systemic constraints on the profession, including a marked decrease in available teaching positions. The study urges education policymakers to address institutional discrimination in hiring and promotion processes, and to develop long-term recruitment strategies that account for demographic trends, including the declining birth rate.

Keywords: life stories, EFL teachers, Taiwan, social impact

Introduction

Teachers' lives have long been a neglected subject in the fields of English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL). Among the limited published studies on teachers' life stories in ESL/EFL, three categories can be identified. The first investigated the full span of teachers' careers, a subject which has been researched since the late 1980s. Early studies in this category seemed to show congruent results, indicating that ESL/EFL teachers in certain contexts did not have a career. They suffered from a high rate of attrition, and their devotion to the teaching profession was unappreciated. For example, one study funded by the Center for British Teachers (1989) investigated the lives of ESL/EFL teachers in the United Kingdom and overseas, and reported that only a limited proportion remained full-time teachers by the age of 45 due to a lack of career structure. Another research project presented a similar career landscape in Australian TESOL[1]; McKnight (1992) showed that ESL teachers at primary and secondary schools were overworked, but their efforts were undervalued. They were treated as second-class teachers by their colleagues. Still another study revealed that teaching was not the first choice of occupation for EFL teachers in Poland; nor did they regard EFL teaching as a true vocation (Johnston, 1997). In general, they were committed to teaching on a day-to-day basis. Johnston imputed this phenomenon to the rapidly changing socio-economic context in post-communist Poland and its poorly-paid teaching conditions.

Later research projects in this category, especially those conducted after the new millennium, presented contrasting results. Hardy (2007) investigated the lives of 10 Slovenian EFL teachers at the tertiary level and found that none intended to resign from their teaching positions. Similar findings were reported by Hayes (2005), who interviewed three Sri Lankan teachers of EFL in the public schooling system. They considered English language teaching (ELT) a profession and intended to remain until retirement.

[1] TESOL stands for teaching English to speakers of other languages.

The second category encompassed research in different countries focusing on participants' motivations to become EFL teachers. This strand of research has flourished over the past fifteen years (Lamb & Sahakyan, 2025). For example, Gao (2010) and Zhao (2008) examined this issue in China, Başöz (2021) in Turkey, Hayes (2008) in Thailand, and Kyriacou and Kobori (1998) in Slovenia. There appeared to be certain convergences among these studies. For example, Gao (2010), Kyriacou and Kobori (1998), and Zhao (2008) showed that EFL teachers joined the profession because they enjoyed studying English. Moreover, both Zhao (2008) and Hayes (2008) noted that teaching was considered a stable occupation, perceived as particularly suitable for women. Indeed, some participants were coaxed or even coerced into teaching by their parents.

The third category examined a specific issue of teachers' lives in their workplaces. For example, Breshears (2008) recounted the stories of four ESL teachers in Canadian language institutes who strove to form unions to obtain peer support, better remuneration, and job security. In another similar study, Shriewer (2023) solicited help from public school teachers in the United States, examining the impediments posed by collective bargaining agreements to teachers' professional development, which were attributed to the decline of urban students' academic performance. Another topic which has drawn attention from researchers was the emotions of ESL/EFL professionals which might have had induced an impact on their career. For example, Cowie (2011) examined how emotions affected the lives of EFL teachers at universities in Tokyo. He found that rapport teachers built with students, which resulted in emotional warmth, had a positive impact on their professional lives. On the contrary, various educational values among the faculty, hierarchical teacher rankings within the institutions, and institutional distrust toward teachers had deleterious effects on teachers' emotions.

Although external contexts played a critical role in most of the aforementioned studies in the ESL/EFL settings, there has been a lack of in-depth studies which simply examine the impact of the

social contexts on teachers' life stories. This subject is important because educational issues are not confined to classrooms themselves, but are always inextricably linked to the broader contexts. As Apple (2004) believed, "a truly critical study of education needs to deal with more than the technical issues of how we teach efficiently and effectively--too often the dominant or only questions educators ask. It must think critically about education's relationship to economic, political, and cultural power" (pp. vii). To fill in the research gap, I propose a research question for my study: What are Taiwanese ESL/EFL teachers' perceptions of the impact of social contexts on their lives?

The Social Contexts of Taiwan

The first dimension of society relevant to the study is gender. To promote gender equality and eradicate gender discrimination, the legislature passed the Gender Equality in Employment Act in 2002 (Ministry of Labor, 2022, January 12) and the Gender Equity Education Act in 2004 (Laws and Regulations Database of the Republic of China, 2025, May 2). The other milestone in gender equality was that the constitutional court ruled in favor of same-sex marriage in 2017 (Judicial Yuan, 2017), which was then legalized in 2019 (Executive Yuan, 2019, May 22). Although this historical breakthrough signified institutional recognition and raised societal awareness and acceptance toward this gender minority group, LGBTQ teachers might still perceive that certain school authorities, colleagues, students, or parents are hostile.

A second facet of society relevant to the study is religion. According to the Government Information Service (2006), since the late 1980s, Taiwan has transformed into a democratic country with a rapidly changing society that has become a hotbed for both foreign and indigenous religions. In 2005, the government recognized 26 religions in Taiwan. It was documented by the Government Information Service (2006) that Buddhism had approximately 8.08 million, Daoism 7.6 million, Protestantism 0.6 million, and Islam 58,000 followers. Recent government statistics also showed that most Taiwanese people believed in Buddhism, Daoism, and folk religions (Taiwan Tourism

Administration, 2025, February 12). It is critical to examine how followers of different religions interact at schools and how their religious beliefs affect their decisions in different aspects of their school lives.

The third social issue which might arise is discrimination in the English teaching market. A myriad of foreigners, mostly native speakers (NS), teach English in Taiwan. The majority of them work at private schools or cram schools, because teaching at public primary schools, junior high schools, and senior high schools requires a local teaching certificate, except for programs in certain cities where special English programs are provided. Teaching at a public or private university does not require a teaching certificate, but a doctoral degree in TESOL or other relevant fields is the minimum requirement for local non-native speakers (NNS) to secure a full-time job. NS teachers with only a master's or doctoral degree in TESOL-irrelevant fields, however, are sometimes recruited due to a lack of qualified NS applicants. Overall, employers tend to be laxer about the educational credentials and teaching experience of NS teachers than those of NNS teachers. The disparity in recruitment requirements might induce tension between NS and NNS teachers.

The last social factor relevant to the study is the declining birth rate. The number of births decreased from 326,002 in 1997 (Ministry of Interior, 2025, March 7) to less than 135,000 in 2024 (Ministry of Interior, 2025, April). The unforeseen, sharp decline in the number of births has resulted in dire repercussions for teachers' careers; teaching vacancies nationwide have been significantly reduced.

Methods

The present study is part of a larger research project that examined the life stories of EFL teachers in Taiwan. Another manuscript from this project, focusing on the perceived impact of political, economic, and educational contexts, has already been published in an academic journal (see Shih, 2017). Documenting the impact of social contexts on teachers' lives, this publication was guided by the strength

of the findings, editorial decisions, and reviewer feedback. Both papers are essential, as each addresses a different dimension of the broader contextual influences that shape teachers' professional lives.

Participants were selected on the basis of maximum variation sampling in which "the researcher selects cases with markedly different forms of experience" (Dörnyei 2007, p. 128). This sampling strategy also subsumed the essence of time effects which suggested the inclusion of participants of various ages (i.e. 20s through 60s), generations (i.e. from new teachers to retired teachers), and cohorts (i.e. teachers of various groups). Following this sampling guideline, I first divided schools into seven categories: kindergartens, primary schools, junior high schools, senior high schools, vocational high schools, universities and technological institutes, and cram schools. In each category, I interviewed approximately five participants. In addition to this criterion, I also considered gender, age, nationality, geographic region of the school where the participant was teaching (i.e., eastern Taiwan, southern Taiwan, northern Taiwan, central Taiwan, and outlying islands), the type of school at which the participant was teaching (i.e., private school, public school), teaching status (e.g., part-time, full-time, substitute teacher), ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Thirty-eight English teachers with diverse backgrounds participated in the study. The process of recruiting participants terminated when the collected data reached saturation, the stage at which almost no new information could be elicited from participants (Daher, 2023; Dörnyei, 2007).

Before the interview, each participant was given an information sheet on the purposes of the study, issues of confidentiality, and their rights as a research participant. Interviews were conducted after participants signed their written consent form and selected a pseudonym to be used in the study. Each participant was interviewed once. 28 local teachers were interviewed in Mandarin Chinese and 10 foreign teachers in English. The interviews lasted between approximately 25 and 110 minutes; the considerable variation resulted from the interviewees' teaching experiences and the degree to which

one was able to recount one's story as a teacher. In particular, the ability to elaborate on one's experiences and a tendency toward discursive conversation were the primary factors affecting the duration of the interview. The shortest interview was conducted with an experienced teacher whose conversational style appeared very focused and succinct, whereas the longest involved an interviewee who was articulate and occasionally digressive. All interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder and were fully transcribed subsequently.

Atkinson (2007, pp. 234) suggested a "two-part process" in the life story interview approach. First, researchers use open-ended questions to assist participants in telling and making sense of their stories. Second, researchers read interview transcriptions to tease out themes, raise issues, or identify connections across different stories, using existing theories, interpretation, or analysis. The two-part process was applied to data collection and analysis of the present study. In the first part, I conducted a one-time interview with each participant, guided by an interview protocol which included open-ended questions. In the second part, I read each transcript several times to understand and interpret each person's stories, anecdotes, feelings, and experiences which made sense to the interviewees. While reading the interview transcriptions, I highlighted all relevant information and added information labels in the margin. I also identified themes that were germane to the study, and that had the potential to answer my research questions. Then, I developed a coding scheme in which different dimensions of social contexts (e.g., race, religion) were enumerated to code the interview transcriptions. All themes were teased out and compiled under different categories (e.g., race, religion) according to the coding scheme. I also examined whether there were any patterns among participants with certain backgrounds. For example, I noticed that skin color seemed to be a factor which affected teachers' lives; all five non-Caucasian teachers recounted that they had experienced racial discrimination in their workplaces, whereas Caucasian teachers mentioned that they had not. The above-mentioned data analysis process was also assisted, conducted, and interpreted by another coder

to enhance the reliability of the results. If any discrepancy emerged during the process of data analysis, the research team discussed it to reach a consensus. Then, the results were presented in this research report according to the themes. Chinese transcriptions presented in the results section were translated into English semantically. English transcriptions are shown in italics in this manuscript and are left intact even if there are grammatical errors.

Results

The impact of the social contexts can be divided into four themes: (1) race, (2) religion, (3) gender, and (4) declining birth rate. The first three are more relevant to personal identities embedded in the broader social domain, whereas the last pertains to a macro-level demographic structure. I will elaborate on each of them, progressing from the micro-level to macro-level societal dimension, in the upcoming pages.

Race.

Results showed that discrimination was prevalent in the field of ELT in Taiwan. On the basis of the participants' verbal reports, the color of their skin seemed to be the cardinal factor when expatriate teachers sought employment, outweighing others such as the applicant's first language, country of origin, and English proficiency. None of the five Caucasian teachers I interviewed said that they had experienced any discrimination in the job market. Even the Ukrainian teacher, Yusik, who spoke English as a foreign language, and the British teacher, Ian, who was born and grew up in Zimbabwe, said that they were never discriminated against when seeking employment. Conversely, the other five non-Caucasian participants, no matter whether they were from the Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, or the United States, all said that they had experienced a certain degree of discrimination when applying for a teaching position. For example, Chuck recounted his experiences of applying for a teaching position at a high school. He believed that he was discriminated against on the basis of race from the verbal responses and facial expressions of his job interviewer. He said:

I remember calling XXX[2], and of course I spoke English over the phone. And the guy said, "Why don't you come over for an interview?"… So I took my motorcycle went to XXX for an interview…I went out the language center. I said I'm looking for this person [ ][3]this supervisor who[ ]with whom I spoke over the phone. He came over. He looked at my face and he said "I thought you are American." I said, "no no no no no, Chinese or the Philippines." "What? Philippines?" I said, "uh, huh" And then his face changed. I thought, "Oh, you're discriminating me."

Similarly, Jane, a teacher from South Africa, recounted that her employer explicitly said he preferred a Caucasian. She said:

It was not the first time I experienced that. Even my kindergarten I was at, when they first met me, see my picture, I am not white, but I am not black, you know. I am Asian. So when they first met me, they said they were very worried to pick me up because they thought they…confused me with a Filipino, you know!…But the boss wasn't very happy because I wasn't white. He did say so. He did say I wanted a Caucasian. Yes, so that was quite awful.

The other form of discrimination was reflected in salary discrepancies between Caucasian teachers and their non-Caucasian counterparts. For example, Patrick argued with his manager that he should have been treated as a native-like foreigner. He also explained that the salary scales for Chinese and foreign teachers were different. He said:

After I talked to the general manager, I said, "Mr. Yen, all I want is a fair treatment. I am a foreigner as well. I hold a foreign passport, Singapore, first language, check it out, for English is our first language. And everything since high school onward are all from Cambridge. We take the exam from the Cambridge. Everything! So treat me like a foreigner. Pay me like a foreigner." …That's why, discrimination. Foreigners come in 50 (50 thousand New Taiwan dollars[4](NTD))[5]and above, starting from 50. Chinese people go in 35 (35 thousand NTD). Why? I said, just because I look Chinese doesn't mean my English is not good enough… Even though you come from America, but you look Chinese, you still are one step lower.

Although no Caucasian teachers said that they encountered discrimination when seeking employment, Tom and Ian reported that they, being English teachers, were not highly regarded by some Taiwanese people or colleagues in other departments. Although the negative sentiments did not lead them to quit their jobs, Tom described this experience as "unfortunate," and Ian described it as "annoying." For example, Tom said:

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[2] XXX means the name of the school or island.
[3] [ ] means a very short pause in the utterance
[4] One US dollar is roughly equivalent to 30 New Taiwan dollars at the time of writing.
[5] ( ) means added explanation to make the utterance more comprehensible.

There have been comments from teachers in other departments because how other departments view English teachers. Well, there is a variety of attitudes…Some of them don't hold us in very high esteem because they think we don't have any particular training. All we are native speakers and what's the big deal. And we're getting paid as much as them, so they have negative views. And I find that discouraging because they're uninformed and that's unfortunate. But that's not discouraging enough for me to change my career.

Religion.

In addition to the racial prejudice that teachers encountered, different religious beliefs triggered incidents in teachers' life stories. For example, Phyllis described her experience of applying for a teaching position at a Christian school. She said:

> I applied to XXX, and they wanted to hire me immediately. Later, it occurred to them that they didn't ask me if I was a Christian. When they asked me, I knew they would reject my application if I said "no." So, I said it in an indirect way. I said, "I went to church when I was in the States, but I was not baptized." But finally, they used another reason to turn me down <anyway.>[6]

The other teacher whose career was affected by religious beliefs was a South African teacher, Jane. With her first-hand experience, she recounted morosely that her head teacher sounded antagonistic toward her upon learning that she was Muslim, so she taught at a public primary school for just one day.

Jane: The head teacher at the time, uh, asked me what religion I was and I said, "I am Muslim," and then she said, "Oh! We are going to fight because I am Christian."

Interviewer: Oh!

Jane: Yeah, I wasn't very happy about that and that made me very very nervous, you know. And then there is a Canadian with me and a Canadian teacher and myself. And the Taiwanese teacher found more comfortable to speak to the Canadian teacher. And I spoke perfectly clear English. She just didn't [ ] After she said that, she just didn't talk to me anymore. She just spoke to the Canadian teacher.

Interviewer: You mean the head teacher?

Jane: Yeah, the head teacher. Wow! What did I do wrong? I know I am not Canadian. I didn't think that would be a problem, you know. It really made me down…I went back to the company which recruited us and I explained to them what had happened; the teacher wasn't too happy with me because I am Muslim. And she doesn't like to speak to me. It's kind of [ ] I felt awful, you know. So, uh, they said, "Well, what could I like to do?" And I said, "Could I just change schools?"

Gender.

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[6] < > means code-switching from Chinese to English.

Due to the impact of social changes, male and female teachers seemed to gradually assume equivalent responsibilities in the family. Examining teachers' career paths, I found that both male and female teachers temporarily quit their jobs or transferred to a different school because of their spouses. For example, Lydia quit her job and relocated to Vietnam for two years because her husband was dispatched there. Similarly, Miles transferred from Changhua to Taitung to reunite with his wife. The other case in point was Charlie, who, at his wife's request, alternated with her in taking parental leave to care for their newborn baby at the time of his interview.

Another interesting phenomenon shared by a male kindergarten teacher, Jackie, was that employers' views on male teachers went to extremes. At one extreme, he felt that male teachers were more favored than their female counterparts, and he investigated factors that underpinned this phenomenon:

> Why do kindergarten children prefer male teachers? First, most teachers whom kids see at kindergartens are female. Second, when they see male teachers, they project their affection for their father onto the male teacher.

At the other extreme, he inquired about a job over the phone. Jackie quoted the potential employer as saying, "I'm sorry, but we're looking only for female teachers." Jackie also surmised the reason why he was rejected for employment.

> The misconception is that only men will assault other people…Everybody has misgivings about the potential for male teachers to assault female students, but why doesn't it occur to them that female teachers could also assault male students?

Other than straight teachers, one gay teacher, Toby, did not worry about disclosing his sexual orientation because Taiwanese society had become more open. He said:

> I think it is now a more open society…Also, we are always told by the school authorities that there are many students of this kind (gay students) and that teachers can't discriminate against them. Then on what basis can (gay) teachers be discriminated against?

Declining birth rate.

In general, the declining birth rate contributed to fewer students, so demand for teachers

decreased. This demographic change had deleterious effects on those who wanted to become English teachers. For example, Mark Li, a substitute teacher, lamented that it was extremely difficult to secure a full-time teaching position. He said that he might ultimately abandon the hope of becoming a teacher if he failed the test consecutively.

> This has an impact on my career. For example, the demand for teachers decreases, so it is very difficult to pass the test to become a full-time teacher. Many people, including me, can't pass the test. Some people have been failing the test for 7 or 8 years…I really admire that kind of perseverance. If I were like them, I would not have that perseverance. I would consider if I would insist on taking the test. I might choose other professions.

Even if fledgling certified teachers were fortunate to be employed as full-time teachers, they might be transferred to another school due to a declining birth rate. For example, Daphne shared a narrative which she had heard:

> One of my classmates has a classmate who was a new teacher in Taipei. He had four years of seniority…but still became a surplus teacher. That is, he was still the least senior at his school…so he was assigned to a different school…When he goes to a new school, if the same situation occurs, doesn't it become a cycle? So a lot of my classmates have always been transferred to a new school.

In addition, the declining birth rate made recruiting students a daunting task for some private school teachers. For example, Flora recounted that her school had approximately 1,500 students in the past, but only 1,100 students at the time of her interview. The school authority and her colleagues tried hard to recruit students to improve the dire situation. She said:

> During the recruitment period, the school authority mentioned that everybody needed to have a sense of crisis. Now the birth rate is low, so competition has become fierce…When I started to teach at my school, our recruitment lasted only two months which were July and August. We finished it in two months. It sometimes took only one month…But now, the recruitment period starts as early as October. It's like our semester starts in September, but you have to start to prepare for the next year's recruitment in October or November.

Another impact of the low birth rate on teachers was that they might be laid off when the department could not reach a certain intake of students. In addition, the fact that students tended to attend national schools or schools located in metropolises further worsened the situation for teachers working at a remote private school. Ralph, a private technological university teacher, said:

> Interviewer: You just mentioned that most private schools face the problems of recruiting students and running the school. Could you explain both problems a little bit more?
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> Ralph: First, as you know, the declining birth rate. Now people tend not to have children…Originally, students had to get quite a high score to be admitted to my department…Now because my school is relatively in the middle of nowhere, students tend to attend national schools, or go to those big cities such as Taichung or Taipei. There are relatively fewer students who want to come here to study. So my department closed last year.

Unlike the aforementioned contexts, some schools or universities were not affected by the declining birth rate. For example, teachers who taught at prestigious private high schools or leading public schools did not feel the repercussions of this social change. Moreover, some public or private schools, although not very distinguished, buffered their recruitment against the detrimental effects of the declining birth rate. Chris, a public junior high school teacher, said that his colleagues worked closely to gain a good reputation among parents, so his school recruited a growing number of students. A private university teacher, Tom, even considered the plunging birth rate to have had a positive impact on his university's endeavors. He said:

> *How it affects me directly is it has caused the universities to try to be more competitive in the phase of declining enrollments… And my university seems to be successful, so it's affecting me perhaps in a positive way, I think. Our university has improved and then is improving and is continuing to try hard to offer programs that attract more people.*

In response to the plummeting birth rate, English teachers had their own strategies to survive. For example, Chuck, a university instructor of English, mainly taught freshmen English courses. He believed that specialization was the key to tackling this social change. He said:

> *For me, I'm teaching at the university. The university is the perfect place to find the niche, so I can specialize. If I specialize, I will not be redundant. If I keep on teaching Freshmen English, I might become redundant.*

Another teacher Paul had a different strategy. He had developed his alternative expertise in a relevant area, teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages. Although he was an English teacher when interviewed, he did not rule out the possibility of becoming a Chinese teacher if the ELT market shrank and Chinese teaching became more promising. When asked how he reacted to the

declining birth rate, he reflected and said:

> Paul: I feel that you develop your alternative when you have a sense of crisis. If you feel your alternative is more promising, I think you know how to trade off…This is risky, but I think that's another opportunity.
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> Interviewer: If you want to develop your second expertise, what will it be?...
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> Paul: I think it's Chinese teaching.

Discussion

The first phenomenon to emerge from the results is the preference for NS teachers in the English-teaching job market in Taiwan. In this study, expatriate non-native speakers (NNS) were not only discriminated against when seeking a job, but also paid much less than their NS counterparts. It is interesting to note that the results suggest that employers, students and parents equated NS with Caucasians. Therefore, non-Caucasian teachers were always viewed as NNS professionals and were discriminated against in the job market, although their first language is English. In fact, the tenet that native speakers are better teachers has been questioned for over twenty years (see Braine, 1999; Mahboob, 2010). For example, in his book entitled *Linguistic Imperialism*, Phillipson (1992) rebutted this entrenched belief. Although this view has long been questioned, NNS teachers have always been treated as second-class professionals in English teaching worldwide.

The other dimension of the NS-NNS issue, which has rarely been mentioned in the literature, is that NS teachers might be discriminated against by their colleagues. To encourage these expatriate teachers from more affluent English-speaking countries to work in Taiwan, they always receive a heftier paycheck than their NNS counterparts, especially in the private sector. Therefore, these foreign teachers may have very little training and knowledge in English teaching, but are paid relatively generously solely because they are NSs. This discrepancy in educational credentials and payment between NS and NNS teachers throughout the public and private education institutions results in disappointments and resentments among NNS teachers who then cast these complicated

sentiments toward their NS colleagues who, therefore, feel that they are being despised. If NS and NNS teachers cannot be treated and paid equally, hired according to the same criteria, and encouraged to value each other's strengths at the workplace, the tension between both types of teachers will not subside.

Religion is a relatively less researched field in education in Taiwan, and this study has tangentially examined its impact on teachers' lives. Although religion does not play a critical role in Taiwan as it does in other theocratic states, it occasionally affects recruitment decisions and shapes the interactions among colleagues. In this study, participants complained about only Christian teachers or schools although Protestantism followers accounted for only 2.6 per cent of the total population in Taiwan (Government Information Office, 2006). In fact, discrimination on the basis of religion is prohibited according to the Taiwanese Employment Service Act, but the relevant article is rarely stated emphatically on the websites of schools' human resources offices or on the job advertisements, so teachers may not be cognizant thereof and aware of the channel through which to appeal when treated unfairly. This law must be further reinforced to make schools a more liberal environment. A similar concern has been raised at the international level. For example, Vickers (2009) examined the educational contexts of religious schools in the United Kingdom, and indicated that teachers' freedom of religion was not fully protected by existing legislation. The other challenge which teachers face is discrimination based on sexual orientation, as mentioned by the gay and bisexual teachers in the interviews. Fortunately, Toby felt more embraced by his school due to the Gender Equity Education Act. More efforts are still required to provide all teachers with equal opportunities to develop their careers. One effective initiative adopted by the Ministry of Education in recent years has been the funding of numerous in-service workshops on gender equality in education across various levels of schools. Despite their demanding teaching responsibilities, these workshops enable teachers to enhance their awareness and understanding of gender-related topics and

issues.

Results of the study also suggest that demographic statistics must be closely monitored by educational policymakers. The 21st century has witnessed an unprecedented decline in the birth rate in Taiwan. In fact, Taiwan is not the first country to encounter this demographic change. According to Atoh (2008), this social phenomenon of the low fertility rate dates back to the 1970s in Western European countries and English-speaking non-European countries (e.g., Australia, the United States). If policymakers in Taiwan had watched the statistics and had reduced the number of trainee teachers accordingly, certified teachers might not have undergone an unreasonably competitive test to secure a full-time position. The case of Taiwan is a good lesson for other countries which will experience similar social changes in the future.

This study is significant for ESL/EFL research, because it might be among the first to reveal the impact of social contexts on teachers' lives. It fills the research gap by addressing several issues such as religion, the low fertility rate, and homosexuality, which, to my surprise, are rarely investigated by empirical studies, but are inextricably linked to teachers' lives. The results of the study inform the Taiwan government that more efforts are still necessary to address different forms of discrimination and to make schools a more inclusive work environment for teachers. Although focusing solely on the social contexts of Taiwan, the study is relevant to readers worldwide because several issues in this paper are commonly faced in international society. As I mentioned, a low fertility rate is not peculiar to Taiwan, but also affects European countries and Japan (Atoh, 2008; McDonald, 2007). Studies have also reported that discrimination was prevalent in other countries (e.g., Clark & Paran, 2007; Shah & Shaikh, 2010). For example, Shah and Shaikh (2010) investigated the perceived obstacles to leadership posts among Muslim male teachers at secondary schools in the United Kingdom. Further studies can be conducted to examine how the distinct social contexts of different countries sway the lives and careers of various subject teachers, and to investigate how the

government can make society and schools a more conducive environment for teachers of different ages, races, religions, and genders to develop their careers.

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