"I Promised Growing up I Would Not Become a Teacher": Exploring the Career Trajectory of a Language Teacher through Social Cognitive Career Theory

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Abstract

Despite some research attention given to expatriate native-English-speaking teachers' (NESTs) identities and the national educational ideologies that have led to their international recruitment, surprisingly little research has addressed their career trajectories as TESOL professionals. To address this gap, this case study explores the career of a long-serving expatriate TESOL professional through the lens of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which was designed to understand how people develop interest in, make decisions about, and commit to a particular career. The methods are qualitative, involving a deductive analysis of interview data and a career timeline according to constructs from SCCT. Despite an initial reluctance to enter the profession, the participant's interest in language teaching began after teaching part-time as a young adult. After this experience, he changed his career interests and continued his educational pursuits in Korea. His background contextual affordances, predispositions, learning experiences, and Korean language proficiency provided new opportunities and outcome expectations as he advanced his career. Although we focus on a single case, the SCCT model is

further explored for its potential to better understand the factors involved in the development and commitment to a career in TESOL and for illustrating the career trajectories of TESOL professionals at scale.

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INTRODUCTION

With approximately 2 billion learners (The British Council, 2014), English remains by far the most popular second language for learners (Smith, 2019), and because of this, there is a growing demand for English language teachers. To meet this demand, many nations employ expatriate teachers, particularly those from English-speaking countries. Despite the decades-long history and prevalence of this international recruitment, employment requirements for transnational TESOL instructors vary considerably between countries, and there is yet no standardization for academic or professional credentials (Copland, Davis, Garton, & Mann, 2016; Copland, Mann, & Garton, 2020), provoking discussions about what legitimizes TESOL as a profession and what defines a TESOL professional (England, 2020). Although calls for improving the status and quality of the profession through certification and education qualifications have been increasing (Richards, 2008), less attention has been given to the actual lived experiences of teachers and how they come to view themselves as professionals. Indeed, while there remains a lack of empirical research on what expatriate English language teachers believe constitutes TESOL professionalism, an even greater gap in the literature exists on the practices and processes they undergo on their path to becoming a TESOL professional.

The question at the heart of this study is how do expatriate English teachers enter and sustain a career in TESOL? Other questions follow. What factors are involved in this career choice? What investments do practitioners make in terms of professional development? What role do environmental supports and barriers play in that decision? How do factors such as background, learning experiences, self-efficacy beliefs, and interests impact one's career decisions and trajectory? And how is goal setting operationalized and success determined as individuals move through their career? Answering these questions is the core aim of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent & Brown, 2013, 2019; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994), a theory of career choice and development that seeks to understand how an individual's background,

experiences, self-perception, career opportunities, and goals affect their career choices and outcomes. By exploring these questions through SCCT, the main objective of the present study is to shed light on the career choices, growth, and achievement of expatriate TESOL professionals through an exemplary case study. Two research questions (RQs) are addressed:

1. How does SCCT help explain the participant's TESOL career development?
2. How can SCCT be used in the field of TESOL to explore, understand, and enhance the careers of English language teachers?

In regard to the first question, we focus on an expatriate, native-English-speaking teacher (NEST) because NESTs often do not initially possess a teaching degree or background and often commence their career having to learn a new vocation and adjust to work and life in an unfamiliar country and culture (Copland et al., 2016; Leigh, 2021). Thus, through the lens of SCCT, the first question intends to examine the personal attributes and professional journey of one expatriate NEST in South Korea (hereafter Korea). Although the participant in this study is a NEST, the model itself has the potential to be used for all teachers, hence, based on the case study data, the second research question aims to offer a wider view of how SCCT may be used to examine, inform, and guide careers in TESOL more generally.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Careers and Professionalism in TESOL

In the title of his article, Johnson (1997) asked a compelling question: Do EFL teachers have careers? Likewise, in an article examining the status of ESL/EFL teachers, Breshars (2004) considers the question: "Am I a professional?" (p. 23). Following a focus group discussion, she concluded that EFL teaching lacks the standing of other professions, for instance, in regard to the social status and career stability of language teaching. But does this still hold true two decades later? While a few international (e.g., TESOL International and IATEFL) and numerous local organizations exist, there remains no official or authoritative accreditation body for language teachers, nor any designated international requirement to obtain a job as an English language teacher, and many countries do not require a teacher

qualification for language teaching. As England ([2020](#)) acknowledges, many schools and programs accept undertrained, underqualified, and unprepared teachers who do not possess a good understanding of the TESOL profession. Indeed, research suggests that many expatriate teachers struggle with their professional identity due to ambivalence in their status as teachers, marginalization within their schools, barriers to communities of practice, minimal collaboration with local teachers, limited access to opportunities for professional development or promotion, and challenges with cultural differences (e.g., Breshars, [2004](#); Yim & Hwang, [2019](#)).

Despite there being little research-based advice for how language teachers can advance their "professional lives" (England, [2020](#)), the topic of professionalism has garnered renewed attention in ELT literature (e.g., Coombe & Burridge, [2020](#); Leung, [2022](#); Rimmer & Floyd, [2020](#)). Broadly, professionalism refers to "the conduct, demeanor, and standards which guide the work of professionals, and also the attitudes and behaviors towards a job that help achieve high-level standards" (Coombe & Burridge, [2020](#), p. 1). One distinguishing feature of professionalism in TESOL is the specialized knowledge relating to applied linguistics, second language acquisition, and ELT methodologies, for example, that go into the professional knowledge base for language teaching.

One further useful distinction is the notion of sponsored professionalism versus independent professionalism (Leung, [2022](#)). Whereas sponsored professionalism refers to the standards of professionalism set by authoritative bodies, such as a school district or the Ministry of Education, independent professionalism refers to an individual's disposition toward "the assumptions and practices associated with sponsored professionalism with reference to disciplinary knowledge and one's own social values and world views, and to take steps to bring about change in one's own practice (and beyond) where appropriate and possible" (Leung, [2022](#), p. 184). It is this independent professionalism which is of interest to the present study, and specifically, how independent professionalism is developed over the career of an ELT professional. Although the career trajectories of expatriate English language teachers have received some attention, for instance, regarding mobility and lifestyles (Codó, [2018](#)) or the traveling, liminal spaces, and socio-political contexts involved in ELT (Craig & Haworth, [2016](#)), Copland et al. ([2020](#)) reiterated the need for investigating the careers of long-term expatriat English teachers, which presents an impetus for the focus of the present study.

ELT Expats in Korea

Korea is one of the EFL countries that has employed expatriate language teachers for several decades (Copland et al., 2016; Jeon, 2009) and is where many have chosen to make their adopted home. With the rise of globalization and the use of English as a lingua franca through the 1980s, Korea's language-in-education policy elevated the status of English, making it a mandatory subject in primary, secondary, and tertiary curricula (Chung & Choi, 2016). These policies, according to Park (2009), were underpinned by an ideology of necessitation: English was central to the government's plan for becoming an advanced economy. The policy, along with the public's demand for English education, stimulated a multi-billion-dollar private English industry. Along with this demand for learning English was an element of externalization. English is seen as a language belonging to outsiders, and the ideal image of an English teacher tends to be a white native speaker of English from a developed Western country (Charles, 2019), a perspective which has also led to the preference for native English speakers over Korean teachers of English in schools (Jeon, 2009).

Considering this regrettably narrow perception of expatriate NESTs, it might be helpful to examine the professional qualifications for teaching English in Korea. Current requirements (see Ministry of Justice, 2022) for applicants are to:

1. Be a citizen of the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, or South Africa.
2. Hold a bachelor's degree in any field from any of the seven countries listed above.
3. Be free of criminal convictions.
4. Be in good health. The required medical assessment tests for general health conditions, drug use, and disease.

This arguably low barrier to entry in Korea impacts how NESTs feel they are viewed by colleagues, how they are viewed by local teachers and administrators, and how they perceive themselves as EFL teachers (Copland et al., 2016). NESTs in Korea report struggling for legitimacy (Choi, 2022; Yim & Hwang, 2019), and the view that they are preferred is "not always realized in their lived experiences" (Jeon, 2009, p. 237). Erling (2017) also highlights that NESTs can be viewed as unskilled by colleagues and a novelty by students. These perceptions have had a detrimental effect on the professional meta-perception, motivation, and commitment of many language teachers, particularly those who have, in fact, significantly invested in their careers.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory explains how someone's background and experiences intersect with the environment and the actions of others, highlighting the development of social and cognitive skills and behaviors that manifest through observational learning, expectations, support systems, self-efficacy beliefs, and goal-oriented outcomes. According to Bandura ([1986](), [1997]()), behavior change depends on interactions between three interconnected components: personal factors (e.g., age, background, and personal experiences), environment factors (e.g., personal resources, support systems, and health), and specific aspects of behavior (e.g., outcome expectations, reinforcements, and perceived obstacles).

SCCT adapts Bandura's theory, applying it to careers (Lent et al., [1994]()). The model considers self-efficacy beliefs, goal setting, and outcome expectations as they pertain to career choice. At the same time, the model accounts for people's background affordances, person inputs, interests, learning experiences, and proximal environmental influences. Background affordances refer to circumstances that influence one's social environment and learning opportunities, while person inputs include predispositions and demographic variables such as one's language background, gender, race/ethnicity, personality, and health. Proximal environmental influences account for emergent and dynamic individual circumstances and influences within the environment that shapes how individuals react and adapt to changes in their career (Lent & Brown, [2019](); Thompson, Dahling, Chin, & Melloy, [2017]()).

Like Bandura's ([1986]()) theory, it calls attention to cognitive and behavioral factors that are affected by observational learning and that shape self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal and professional goals (Lent et al., [1994](); Lent & Brown, [2019]()). Self-efficacy belief is "an estimate of one's ability to successfully perform tasks in a particular domain" (Conklin & Dahling, [2013](), p. 69), and, as it relates to work life, facilitates an individual's decision-making skills and perceived career competence. Outcome expectations are the consequences predicted for performing and completing tasks or demonstrating particular behaviors (Lent & Brown, [2013]()), while personal and professional goals refer to intentions to engage in particular activities that will enhance performance and direct vocational objectives. In essence, the model provides a means for investigating career choices and trajectory, linking people's backgrounds and personal characteristics with their chosen professions, bringing salience to the learning experiences and cognitive processes that shape their career

path (Conklin & Dahling, 2013; Lent & Brown, 2019; Thompson et al., 2017). In doing so, it presents a framework for understanding how people develop interest in and choose careers, how their commitments to a career change over time, and how they reassess their career across time and circumstances (see Figure 1).

SCCT was derived from empirical research involving quantitative analysis of survey data, and it has been validated and applied in numerous employment sectors over the past few decades (Lent & Brown, 2019). The model above is an integrated one, combining the choice, interest, and performance models from earlier studies.

The choice and interests models are particularly concerned with the types of career fields, educational pursuits, and professional activities that people are attracted to, and they provide an analytical tool for evaluating and interpreting these career-engaging interests and activities (Lent & Brown, 2013). The choice model focuses on "self, experiential, and contextual factors that promote pursuit of particular occupational paths" (Lent & Brown, 2013, p. 258), seeking to explain why and how people develop and pursue academic and career-related goals that coincide with and are supported by their experiences and outcome expectations in connection with their interests. The interests model similarly asserts that one's personal, academic, and occupational interests are influenced by and a product of self-efficacy beliefs and expected outcomes in pursuits associated with their interests. Finally, the performance model focuses on the level of success one has in their educational and professional endeavors (and their perseverance in the face of challenges). It recognizes the importance of academic and career outcomes, and it posits that self-efficacy associated with past failures and achievements affects performance and persistence in new pursuits.

Together, SCCT has provided a theoretical and empirical basis for examining career interests, choice, performance, persistence, and
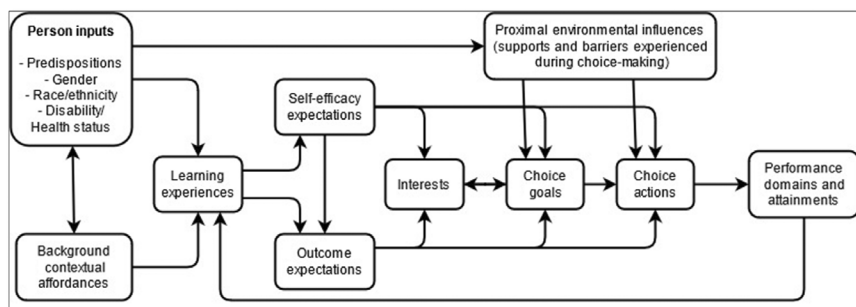

FIGURE 1. The SCCT model. Adapted from (Lent et al., 1994, p. 93).

satisfaction, all in consideration of personal factors, background affordances, and proximal environmental influences. With this in mind, the rationale for adapting SCCT for the theoretical framework of this study is two-fold. First, as Lent and Brown (2019) explain, the model was developed and tested mainly in STEM fields, so there is a need to apply it in other areas, such as education. Doing so here presents a chance to explore its suitability for language teaching research, particularly in terms of career development. Second, as we have expressed, there is a need to examine the career trajectories and processes of professionalism of expatriate English language teachers (Copland et al., 2020), thus applying SCCT presents an opportunity to address this gap through the lens of a well-supported and theory-driven framework from the field of organizational psychology.

METHODS

This is a single-participant qualitative case study (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Given the aims to explore the career trajectory of expat ELT professionals in Korea, and in doing so explore the applicability of SCCT with language teachers, a single-case design is appropriate because it provides an opportunity to explore the application of a theory in depth while attending to the complexities of a specific context (Yin, 2018). Given the nature of the data, coming from interviews and a detailed timeline, qualitative procedures are appropriate because they afford researchers the chance to preserve and express the participant's stated experiences relevant to career trajectory (Miles et al., 2014).

Participant and Context

The participant, Darren (pseudonym), was purposively recruited (Miles et al., 2014). Darren (white American male, late 30s, married with children) is currently a nontenure track assistant professor in an English department at a private university in Korea. Like many expatriate teachers in Korea, he started teaching English without any specialized degrees. However, unlike most expatriate ELT professionals, all of Darren's tertiary education took place in Korea, where he pursued BA, MA, and PhD (ABD) degrees in English. He is married to a Korean citizen, his children are Korean citizens, he is bilingual (English and Korean), and he has spent nearly all his working life in Korea.

As Copland et al. (2020) argued, although the literature tends to group all expat NESTs together, teachers such as Darren are functionally immigrants in their new countries, and it is important to get a

better understanding of the perspectives and experiences of long-term, career-minded expat ELT professionals like him. An additional unique aspect of Darren's case is that he is a second-generation expat English teacher. His first experience teaching English came in his early 20s while visiting his mother in Korea, who was teaching English there at that time. Thus, Darren's career presents somewhat of an unusual case, which Yin (2018) explains are useful for revealing insights about a common process, such as with the career trajectory of expat ELT professionals.

Instrumentation

The data set includes two qualitative instruments: two semi-structured oral history interviews and a detailed career timeline. These instruments were chosen for their narrative orientation, allowing the participant to share his personal history, fully communicate the story of his career, and articulate the nuances and particularities of his experiences and circumstances (Barkhuizen, 2014).

The life history method was used for both interviews, a technique that can produce in-depth data on both personal stories and the elements of social structures within a given context (Goldman et al., 2003). The life history approach is particularly effective for understanding contextual influences of the past and present, leading to insight into individual's feeling, attitudes, and behaviors. It is also useful for researching changes in identity over time. The main tenet of life history interviews is that questions are open-ended, with the researcher being a keen listener allowing the participant to thoroughly articulate their story.

Darren's first interview (I1, 45 minutes) focused on his background, entry into the field of ELT, and general career progression, along with some commentary and reflection on work-life balance and perceptions of TESOL professionalism. After this, Darren composed a timeline (TL) of his career in which he provided a detailed description of his jobs, periods of employment and engagement with professional organizations, major responsibilities, and personal observations of his varied experiences. The timeline presented a chronological summary of his career milestones and transitions with each of the 22 entries offering between 5 and 10 sentences on his career and life in Korea. This timeline became the focal point for the second interview (I2, 90 minutes), where his career decisions, trajectory, perceived outcomes, and reflections were explored in further detail. During the initial analysis, follow-up questions were asked via email in order to clarify responses or gather additional information. Data were collected over a period of 2 months.

Data Analysis

The analysis uses qualitative procedures (Miles et al., 2014). First, data (timeline and interview transcripts) were uploaded to a qualitative data analysis program (QDA Miner Lite 2.0), where we designed an initial deductive code system by identifying relevant constructs from SCCT research (e.g., approval, rewards, and social benefits), organizing them under relevant categories (e.g., outcome expectations). During the first-cycle coding, involving the initial coding of the entire data set, we added inductive codes and memos as we came across excerpts that were important for analyzing Darren's career but that did not fall under the initial code system, such as his specific interests in teaching English, the Korean language, and translation work. The second-cycle coding involved refining the code system, coding excerpts with more precision, writing further analytic memos, and coming to agreements regarding the code system organization. We have adapted the most relevant parts of our code system into Figure 3 below.

Research Positionality

As researchers, we share an emic (insider) perspective with the participant in that we possess a similar demographic background, being native-English-speaking white males from North America who also began our careers as English teachers in Korea. An emic perspective is valuable for understanding insider knowledge; however, a drawback is that insiders can take their own culture and histories for granted and can have certain expectations and/or make assumptions about the lives and experiences of others (Pitard, 2017). In this regard, applying SCCT was helpful in that it provided an empirical and theory-driven framework to base the interviews and analysis on for example, by making proximal environmental influences and contextual affordances more salient. In addition, we strived to be conscious of our positionality and ingrained beliefs and to not generalize or presume to know Darren's perspectives, worldview, or values.

Ethical Considerations

The participant was made aware of the purpose of the study and gave signed consent to explore his story as an example of a long-serving, expatriate English teacher in Korea. Precautions were taken to ensure confidentiality; hence, to protect the participant's anonymity

and privacy, a pseudonym is used and some nonsubstantive data (e.g., locations, job titles, and dates) have been altered in the findings.

FINDINGS

To illustrate the participant's career and help visualize our responses to RQ1, Darren's career timeline is represented in Figure 2. The light blue line represents his main career path in TESOL, the dark blue his education timeline, the yellow his other TESOL and teacher training roles, the green his additional professional roles (translation work), the gray his media experiences, and the pink his engagement in a professional teaching organization (TEFL-Korea (pseudonym)).

To address RQ1, Darren's early, mid, and current career experiences and perceptions are articulated through his own words and analyzed through the SCCT model. We begin by looking at Darren's initial interests, opportunities, and decision making when entering the field of ELT and exploring his early teaching experiences, followed by his mid-career choices and motivations before examining his current professional position and status. In doing so, we employ content analysis of the SCCT data and then discuss three significant themes that emerged. In responding to RQ2, Darren's data are used as an exemplar of an experienced language teacher to explain how SCCT can be used to analyze, understand, and advance teachers' careers and to provide perspective on the processes of professionalism in TESOL.
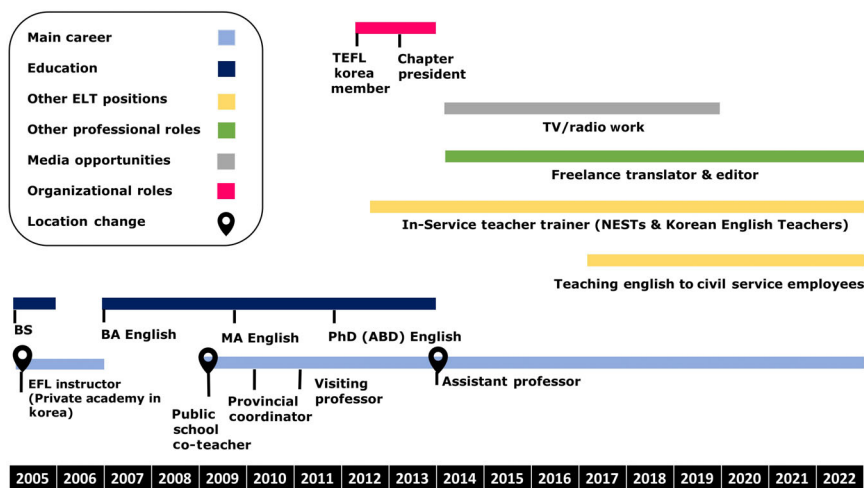

FIGURE 2. Timeline of Darren's career.

Entry and Early Career in TESOL

Darren first came to Korea in the mid-2000s, perhaps at the peak of Korea's so-called English fever (Jeon & Lee, 2006; Park, 2009). Because of this, there were relatively low barriers for entry into the field for native-English speakers from Western countries. "At the time, my mom had been working in Hong Kong, where I was studying and working part time, and she found the job in Korea at an academy" (I1), he stated. Unsure about his career path, he took some time off to visit her: "I was doing a degree in science [in Hong Kong]. I didn't quite finish so I ended up coming [to Korea] kind of just to take a break and see what I wanted to do" (I2). He went on to explain how his entry into ELT was in part due to necessity:

My mindset kind of turned when I came to Korea and blew through a whole bunch of cash that I had saved working in Hong Kong—blew through that ... and realized I kind of needed a source of income. (I1)

However, to start, he had to overcome a long-standing predisposition against teaching, based on observing his mother's career path. As he asserted,

I promised growing up I would not become a teacher (I1) ... I saw her kind of teach in a variety of ... temporary positions ... it didn't seem to be the most stable of professions and required quite a bit of work and dedication. ... At the time, I just thought, oh, this, this was definitely not the profession I wanted to be in growing up. (I2)

Nevertheless, while staying in Korea, he experienced social support from his mother, and also from peers he met in the area:

I met a whole bunch of other really decent, you know, people who I befriended, and saw were, you know, devoted to their job, seemed interested in the profession. ... I thought, oh, maybe I could try this out. (I2)

Upon reflection, he asserted, "So purely by accident, I would say, I ended up moving into teaching" (I2).

Nonetheless, there were relevant implicit factors behind this decision. For instance, his background contextual affordances, person inputs, and proximal environmental influences provided the opportunity for him to enter TESOL. That is, as a young, white American male with some degree of openness and extraversion, Darren experienced few barriers to finding part-time employment teaching at a private language school in Korea. He was also encouraged and supported by his mother and peers and found teaching to be more suited to his

personality than science. However, he did not foresee this kind of long-term commitment to ELT at the time:

> I definitely didn't see myself staying in the career long term. But I thought it might be, you know, a decent way to make some money. And at least try out a new kind of career for a year or two. So that was my initial impression and my initial plan. (I2)

Thus far in his career, it was primarily Darren's background contextual affordances that created the opportunity to teach English. However, his initial teaching opportunities functioned as early career learning experiences, increasing his self-efficacy beliefs and interests in ELT, leading him to changing his education and career goals.

After working in an academy part-time, a new opportunity arose a year later. As he explained, his mother got a job at a university in a nearby city, and he decided to follow her there because they "gave me a full scholarship, as a dependent" (I2). He also recognized that he would need a degree to teach English full-time, but that a student visa would provide a stopgap, allowing him to continue teaching part-time in language schools. Upon enrolling, he chose to major in English. When asked about his university experience, he responded:

> It was somewhat easier academically, I would say, than back home, but a lot harder linguistically, because I was studying not only English, but also the odd Korean language and Korean literature course, in a foreign language at that. My Korean was not up to par then, so the learning curve was rather steep, I would say, and there was a lot of stuff that kind of was above my head. (I2)

Despite this difficulty, he acknowledged that this experience "provided me with a range of opportunities later on" (I2).

In his final year, he joined a government program recruiting native-English speakers from Western countries to team-teach with Korean English teachers. For reasons of confidentiality, this program will be referred to as "Program-K." As far as his self-efficacy beliefs were concerned, he stated that

> I could see I wasn't very good at [teaching] early on. So, the first year or two were definitely a struggle. I had no idea what I was doing, in spite of the training offered by, like, Program-K. (I2).

He recognized, in his words,

> . . . a need to kind of upgrade my skills. I saw very early on that speaking English did not make me an English teacher, right. So, when I started, I had really no idea how to teach. . . . So, I thought, oh, just to kind of keep my job, to stay ahead of the curve, I would need some

kind of training, I would need some kind of, you know, dedication to the profession. (I2)

His conscientious mindset, combined with previous success, propelled his self-efficacy beliefs, and his positive reflections on his previous work experiences motivated his further professional growth:

> I do remember, and this is a very bizarre kind of sense … like walking up to the school building. I had … this kind of repeated sense that … only a decade had passed since I had graduated from elementary school … and I was like, wow, here I am … with the same responsibility, the same role as the teachers I respected, so it kind of put the pressure on me to do a good job. Like, this was no joke. Like this was not, you know, a task I could take lightly or kind of just breeze through. (I2)

With a mindset toward continued professional development, a keen realization of his responsibilities as a teacher, and a new position in the public school system, Darren embarked on a new stage in his career path.

Mid-Career Experiences

While segmenting an individual's career may seem somewhat arbitrary, we contend that career transitions are characterized by professional progression demonstrated through both concrete elements of career advancement and psychological transformations in self-efficacy beliefs and commitment. Thus, career stages are not predicated on years of service but instead on choice actions and self-efficacy beliefs that impact and characterize one's career.

In Darren's case, he decided to enroll in graduate school at a local university, commenting that, "I ended up opting for the face-to-face kind of in-classroom experience in Korea" (I1), later explaining his reasoning, asserting, "it seemed like an interesting challenge, so that, I would say, that's probably why I did it" (I2). He emphasized that he made this choice despite being advised against it by friends and family: "My now wife, … my mom, other people I had met, just random English teachers … they all recommended that I do like a distance MA in TESOL" (I2). In addition to his academic pursuits, he also committed to self-directed professional development by seeking advice from other expatriate teachers and finding resources on ELT websites. As he expressed it,

> I decided, well, since my day job, or my main job is, in fact, language teaching, I should, I should pay equal attention equal, if not more

attention to professional development in the field I actually work in, not just the one I'm studying. (I2)

Over time his interest in teaching English and self-efficacy beliefs grew as he gained knowledge and experience. After 2 years in Program-K, he applied for a management position. As he explained:

At the time, ... the coordinators were all Korean American or ethnic Korean ... so I never expected them to pick me, ... but they ended up picking me, very matter of factly, like, she called me up, the coordinator at the time, I was on my way to school one morning, she said ... we decided to offer you the position. I was like, really is this ... April fools? ... She's like, no, no, we really do want you. And that was that.

As coordinator, Darren was tasked with designing orientation programs and preparing new Program-K members for the classroom, marking his transition into teacher training:

I guess the evaluations from that were good, and I kept up, and to this day, I think I've had an unbroken record of maybe 20 some continuous semesters ... of being at every ... orientation. ... So that was kind of my entryway into teacher training. (I2)

When Darren graduated with an MA, he began teaching English to first-year university students while also doing coursework for a PhD in English. During the semester breaks, he continued teacher training for Program-K, and he also had an opportunity to do preservice teacher training for Korean English teachers. He also began engaging in the local TEFL-Korea chapter and became the chapter president a year later.

Around that time, he was recognized for his work in the local Program-K and got promoted to the national office:

Well, I would say I never had any plans to move. But when the ... national Program-K management ... I guess they liked what they saw. ... I think probably this is all just, you know, my personal guess here, but I would say probably the [local office] said, oh, we have a couple of outstanding people. This guy speaks Korean, I was also a little bit older than the average teacher, that may have played a role, just they wanted someone that other people could look up to, other people could see as a role model.

Over time, his efforts were recognized, and he was given an award, which he stated helped him to see teaching English as a career, rather than just a temporary job as when he started:

Receiving the award for teaching excellence from the head of [a government organization] after my longish stint at elementary schools, it

was an honor, and it opened my eyes to the potential of a professional teaching career. (TL)

Darren's mid-career phase is characterized by his choice goals and actions involving education—opting for graduate and undergraduate study in Korea—and by opportunities in a major city arising from his work in Program-K and his Korean language proficiency.

Darren's Current Career

Darren's promotion to the national Program-K office came when he had nearly finished his PhD coursework. When he and his family moved, he decided not to complete a dissertation, going with a PhD (ABD). Nonetheless, with his advanced Korean proficiency, he secured a position at a university, where he has taught since that time. Darren talked about settling into his career:

So, the first two semesters, my evaluations were hit or miss. … It was a trial-and-error type situation. But now, since that second year, I think it's been pretty steady sailing, you know, pretty high evaluations, the students seem happy, they seem to be learning. (I2)

One thing that has sustained his commitment in his current position is the relationships with students:

In my current job, I see the same students over a two-year period. So, you know, semester after semester often so, you know, we do form, you know, not close bonds, but some degree of camaraderie or friendship as well. (I2)

And it is a position he enjoys for "just the sheer joy of teaching and the particular in the program I'm in; the students are a joy … And I feel like I can learn as much from them as they can learn from me in the classroom" (I2).

During this period, he has received continuous support during choice-making from his family: "My wife is always encouraging me. And, you know, family certainly plays a role, with kids, you know" (I2). As the primary earner in the family, Darren has sought additional employment to support them, such as working as a translator and becoming a TV personality and radio host. He explained how he was recruited for his first television appearance:

My colleague at the time also spoke really good Korean … The producer of this new program had graduated from the university and wanted to find two foreigners who could speak Korean. So, she ended up going back to her alma mater, … and then they found us. So, we

were … given an audition … and then selected to be on the show. So that was kind of my entryway into TV.

He has been an occasional contributor to talk shows featuring foreigners who speak Korean. More recently, he became a commentator for a radio program. While he enjoys this work, he recognized that it comes with opportunity costs, such as not being able to finish his PhD: "I have more responsibilities now. I'm getting older. It seems like more of an undertaking. I've been out of school … as a student for seven years now … so that's quite a while" (I2).

In the workplace, Darren's outsider status as a nontenured, foreign faculty member has become a barrier to further promotion. He concedes that

there was an attempt to get like a foreign faculty council … it didn't amount to much. So sadly, there is absolutely no administrative window for foreign faculty … Input is, is not welcome pretty much on any level. (I2)

This is an additional factor for turning to the private sector to supplement his income, lamenting, "My focus, unfortunately, the past seven years has been certainly on, you know, getting the biggest bang for the buck per hour and just trying to make as much money as possible" (I2).

Despite recognizing that his career has plateaued in some sense, Darren also frequently expressed satisfaction with his career, mentioning that he would be happy to stay in his current position until retirement:

As long as, you know, the money's decent, I'd say, and as long as I'm satisfied professionally, I have no qualms about doing this until I retire. … And I'd be more than happy to … at least to stay at this level and maintain what I'm doing now. (I2)

In addition, it is also clear that Darren still genuinely enjoys teaching. As stated on his timeline, "Ultimately, being a teacher is about giving generously. Giving students your time, attention, knowledge, and care. It's all about the rapport" (TL). Darren's interviews indicate dual, and at times competing, interests in continuing his education and progressing professionally while struggling to maintain a reasonable life-work balance. Nonetheless, he has been able to succeed academically and professionally, while enhancing self-efficacy beliefs, motivation, and commitment to teaching over what is now more than a decadelong career in TESOL.

DISCUSSION

Career Progression in TESOL through SCCT

The findings explored Darren's career path, from his first experience at a private academy to his current roles as an assistant professor, translator, teacher trainer, and TV and radio personality. Here, we address RQ2, exploring how SCCT can help to understand and potentially advance the careers of English language teachers. An SCCT account of Darren's personal inputs and career interest, choices, and outcomes is presented in Figure 3, showing how the SCCT model can be useful for understanding key aspects of career progression in TESOL.

As Lent, Brown, and Hackett (2002) stress, for people's "interests to blossom . . ., their environments must expose them to the types of direct, vicarious, and persuasive experiences that can give rise to robust efficacy beliefs and positive outcome expectations" (p. 752). This was the case with Darren as he developed as a long-term ELT professional. Contextually, it was his background environmental affordances, such as being a young, white, native-English-speaking, American male, along with his personal inputs, such as being conscientious, outgoing, and open-minded, that provided initial opportunities. However, after his positive early experience teaching children English in private schools, he began to see the potential for TESOL as a career option and began to develop self-efficacy beliefs and envisioned future successful outcomes in other positions. Pursuing academic qualifications provided learning experiences that, according to the choice model, were reinforced by self, experiential, and contextual affordances (Lent & Brown, 2013). Although, like other expat teachers, his status as an outsider came with challenges and a struggle for legitimization (e.g., Breshars, 2004; Choi, 2022; Copland et al., 2016, 2020; Yim & Hwang, 2019), Darren overcame his earlier reluctance about being a teacher to become a valued member of the education community in Korea.

As shown in the analysis of Darren's career, the SCCT model's inclusion of self-efficacy, interests, outcome expectations, learning experiences, choice goals and actions, and performance domains—in addition to the consideration of personal inputs, affordances, and environmental influences—serves well to capture the complexity involved in career decision making and can chart a roadmap for reflection, interventions, and future action (Lent et al., 2002; Lent & Brown, 2019). Based on our analysis of Darren's career trajectory, we propose and discuss three overarching themes that can be applied to all teachers pursuing a
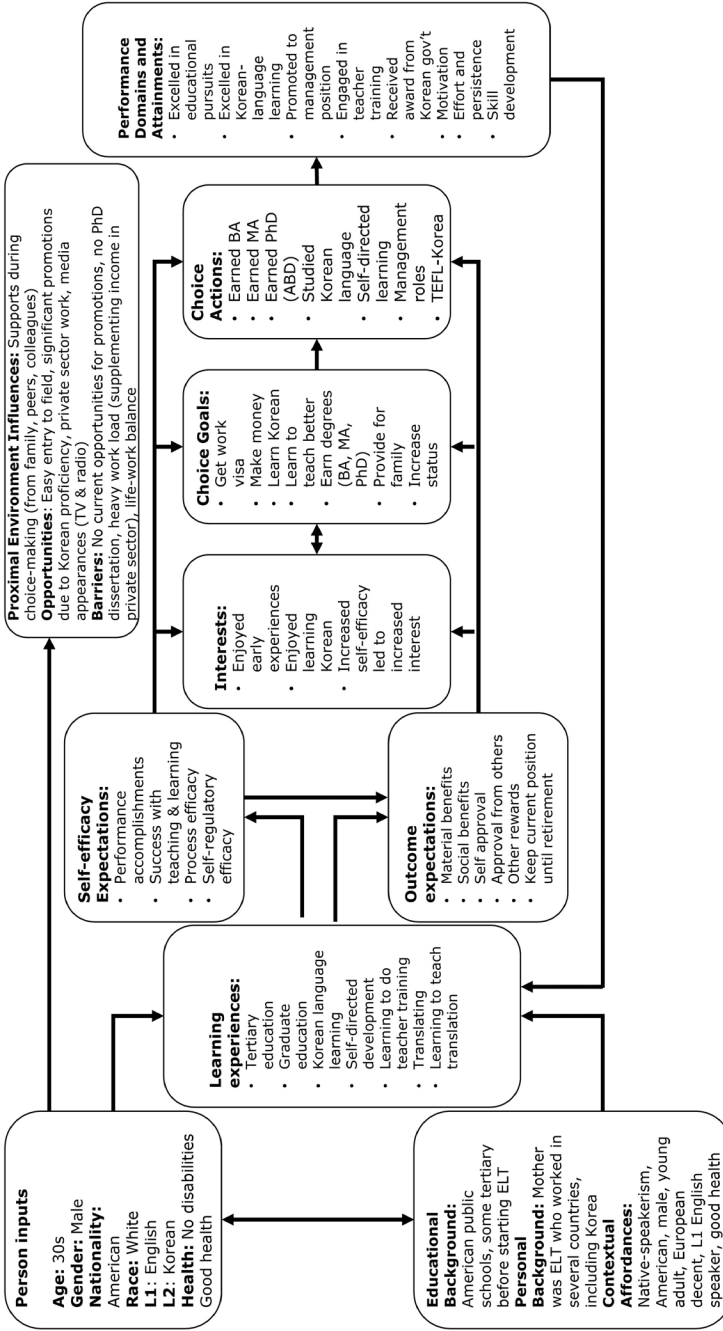
FIGURE 3. Summary of Darren's SCCT data.

career in TESOL, regardless of their linguistic or national background: supportive environments, intentionality, and the peak-end rule.

Supportive Environments

One crucial aspect, especially in the beginning and middle of his career, was the supportive environments in which Darren found himself. Both Darren's life in Korea and career in TESOL began with the encouragement of his mother, who was herself an EFL teacher in Korea. Although he had no intentions of becoming a teacher because of the perceived instability, he found early and rewarding opportunities to teach young learners in the private sector and found support among a cohort of fellow teachers. Although he made an independent decision about where to continue his education, he received constant support from his family to pursue academic interests. These systems of support are apparent in his timeline and interview. For example, it is noted that Darren's interest in teaching was stimulated by interaction with colleagues, his outcome expectations were influenced by approval from others, his motivation was sustained by career advancement, and his joy of teaching is bolstered by the rapport he builds with students. Without these supports experienced during choice-making, and without his personal inputs and background affordances that were valued in his work environment, it is unlikely that Darren would have settled into a career in TESOL.

Self-perceived achievement, in educational outcomes and language proficiency development, encouraged Darren further, and simultaneous professional recognition—in the form of an award, promotions, and being elected to chapter president of a TESOL organization—provided a sense of confirmation. For language teachers, supportive environments are not always concretely realized or intuitively understood because professional responsibilities, work pressures, and the independent nature of teaching can obscure access to communities of practice (Breshars, 2004; Yim & Hwang, 2019); however, the SCCT model can help to illuminate support systems and networks by highlighting the events and circumstances in one's career where support was crucial (Lent et al., 2002).

Intentionality

Darren demonstrates a strong disposition toward self-directed career development, what England (2020) calls *intentionality*, defining it as "a systematic effort to take control of, to purposefully and deliberately address how we develop professionally" (p. 94). In the SCCT model,

intentionality is particularly expressed in choice actions and performance domains and attainments. For example, Figure 3 above illustrates Darren's decision to earn a bachelor's degree in Korea (and advanced degrees thereafter), secure a work visa, and learn Korean. It is notable that most of these choices were made early in his career when attrition tends to be high (Richards & Pennington, 1998). Initially, it was primarily person inputs and proximal environmental influences that provided Darren with opportunities, but early success in the classroom activated self-efficacy expectations, in particular, his self-perception as an adept teacher and teacher trainer, leading him to gain more experience, skills, and credentials. SCCT also highlights how academic qualifications, exceptional Korean language proficiency, and a willingness to take on new roles had a reciprocal effect on his motivation, commitment, self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and interests.

Although interests in careers tend to stabilize in late adolescence, there is a subset of people whose interests change, which was the case with Darren. According to SCCT, "such changes, when they do occur, can be explained by changes in self-efficacy beliefs and/or outcome expectations" (Lent et al., 2002, p. 751). His changed interest was indeed catalyzed by early rewarding experiences in the classroom and recognition by others of his abilities as a teacher, including a promotion to teacher trainer in Program-K, election to TEFL-Korea chapter president, and securing a position as an assistant professor.

Such self-directed, calculated, and meaningful preparations and actions can help teachers initiate, adapt to, and enjoy career transitions (England, 2020). As an essential element to intentionality, it is perhaps important to acknowledge Darren's determination and perseverance in the face of obstacles (England, 2020). SCCT's performance model involves explaining and predicting people's persistence, or "the level of success that people attain in educational and occupational pursuits" (Lent et al., 2002, p. 752). In this regard, Darren's intentionality is evidenced through his dedication to educational and professional goals, a willingness to take on new responsibilities, continued commitment to professional development, and professional recognition by others. For TESOL professionals, particularly novice teachers, depicting both individual achievements and potential paths forward through an SCCT framework may help teachers visualize and organize their development, indeed their future, in the field.

The Peak-End Rule

The SCCT representation of academic and professional life also emphasizes the importance of reflection. Placing emphasis on

beneficial past experiences has been referred to as the peak-end rule, which contends that in recollecting events, there is a cognitive bias toward the most intense positive (or negative) memories (i.e., peaks) and how one feels at the end of an experience (Kahneman, Fredrickson, & Redelmeier, 1993). In Darren's case, the *peaks* he expressed were completing degrees in Korea, a promotion in Program-K, a teaching award from the Korean government, media appearances, and securing his current academic position. The SCCT model illustrates that these peaks were the culmination of many other choices and concerted actions throughout his career. For example, his promotion was a combination of his choice to learn Korean and pursue a master's degree along with an increased interest in teaching and high appraisal from his peers and administrators, and his current academic post and lucrative translation work were the product of his contextual affordances, opportunities, early interest in teaching, Korean language ability, and self-efficacy beliefs formed from past attainment.

The SCCT model also highlights the importance of career transitions, emphasizing the *end* aspect of the heuristic, but simultaneously new beginnings. It is noteworthy that on his timeline several ends marked new and somewhat peripheral ventures for Darren. For example, he began his MA shortly after his first teaching experiences became a chapter president for TEFL-Korea shortly after completing his masters, and engaged in media opportunities at the end of his doctoral coursework. This willingness to explore new experiences during times of career transition is arguably the product of strong self-efficacy beliefs and sustained motivation and commitment. For language teachers, the peak-end rule can have a particularly strong effect on choice actions by reinforcing the need for positive outcome expectations and demonstrating that, despite challenges, the past is a constructive composition of learning experiences that allow for new knowledge and skills to be developed. In addition, the peak-end rule explains why the narrative self tends to gloss over or negate the impact of mundane stressors or negative experiences, helping to convey a sense of upward trajectory when reflecting on one's career. Therefore, by focusing teachers' attention on the pleasant, rewarding, and inspiring moments throughout their careers, they may feel emboldened to explore further, take risks, and persist in the face of difficulties.

Implications

As a theoretical framework, SCCT presents an alternative, and arguably more dynamic, perspective on career decisions and pathways than the more common frameworks of motivations for teaching (Watt

et al., 2012) or occupational commitment (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001) that have been garnering attention in TESOL. While the construct of motivations for teaching offers an understanding of initial career decision making, and commitment offers an understanding of the mindsets associated with positive and negative workplace outcomes, the combined factors of SCCT present a wider, yet at the same time more thorough, lens for interpreting career choices, actions, and trajectories.

A practical implication is that the SCCT model can be readily adapted by institutions, teacher educators, and teachers themselves proactively, continuously, and retroactively. As a proactive tool, it can be employed as a means of career preparation and management, professional direction, and goal setting. It can be used continuously to inform ongoing choices that can facilitate career progression and call attention to perceived needs, obstacles, and setbacks, providing considerations for how to circumnavigate these challenges. Finally, it can be employed retroactively as a vehicle for reflection on one's career path, allowing teachers to understand and appreciate the opportunities, people, and transitions that have positively impacted their career. Going through this process can also stimulate ideas for new experiences. By reflecting on, evaluating, and recognizing what worked and what did not in terms of career decisions and influences indicated by SCCT, TESOL professionals can build pathways to new opportunities and interactions not previously considered. It is our contention that such applications of SCCT can help promote a greater degree of professionalism within the field of TESOL.

As the typical application of SCCT in organizational psychology is as an informative tool for aiding career decisions, future studies could use it as a lens to explore the impact of a variety of interventions, such as participation in teacher associations (cf. Rimmer & Floyd, 2020) and mentorship (Brannan & Bleistein, 2012), particularly in the early career stage. Further, investigating the professional experiences and career trajectories of expatriate teachers from different demographic backgrounds would be a valuable application of SCCT. For example, it could be combined with an intersectionality framework to understand how gender, cultural, racial, and linguistic identity relate to forms of discrimination and privilege within the field (cf. Appleby, 2014; Charles, 2019) and thus how choices, interests, and self-efficacy beliefs factor into overcoming forms of bias and injustice. While intervention and demographic studies would be helpful in understanding how certain components of the SCCT model impact individuals, the model could also be used to track long-term graduate outcomes in order to evaluate how certain experiences, activities, and roles lead to greater success, which could, in turn, provide information pertinent to the design and delivery of teacher education programs.

Methodologically, such a study would require a longitudinal approach of multiple case studies so that teacher profiles could be mapped to inform and stimulate innovation in teacher education. Future studies might also employ a mixed method design, for example, complementing SCCT profiles with questionnaire data to focus on constructs critical to career growth, such as commitment, wellbeing, resilience, and agency. In terms of both focus and methodology, another important contribution of future research would be to expand and/or modify the SCCT model to make it more specific to careers in TESOL. An SCCT model tailored to the specific conditions, intricacies, and challenges of language teaching might be useful not only in enhancing the careers of dedicated teachers but perhaps also in providing insight into career sustainability and stemming the tide of attrition in the TESOL profession.

Limitations and Conclusion

Through this study, we have shown how SCCT aids understanding of the process of professionalism in ELT careers. In the case of expats, its usefulness is particularly salient in that it allows for acknowledging how background environmental affordances and person inputs make language teaching an option (e.g., being a native speaker of English), for highlighting the importance of academic and professional interests and choices on one's career trajectory, and for expressing how self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations can shape one's career.

However, arguably one limitation of the model is that it does not directly account for affective variables related to career continuation and progression. Although it takes into consideration self-efficacy beliefs, these beliefs, as positioned within the model, are formulated more on experiences of previous failures and achievements, rather than on emotional or social factors. Similarly, the model does not particularly attend to psychosocial factors in career progression. For example, Darren's stress regarding his struggles with work-life balance and, on a more positive note, the cultural open-mindedness that provoked his interest in the Korean language, are not fully realized in the SCCT model. While career peaks are included, assigning them notable meaning necessitates a more direct expression of the emotions involved in these events. Given their ever-increasing importance in language teaching, both affective and psychosocial factors could be made more prominent in the SCCT model in future research.

Methodologically, the study is limited in that it includes only a single case. In addition, Darren's case is an exemplary one (Yin, 2018), that is, an uncommon case, but one of interest to stakeholders for its

usefulness in highlighting theoretical processes, such as career development. Because of this, any generalizations made above are intended to be argumentative rather than quantitative.

Despite the methodological limitations of the study, it is our contention that SCCT holds the potential to help language teachers recognize the career-shaping experiences that have led them to a greater sense of professionalism and to provide a model for reflection and progression so that they may better visualize and understand not just what they do but who they are. The model also emphasizes the need for embracing new challenges and continuous career development (Lent & Brown, 2019). This is needed in a field like TESOL where attrition is high, because while initial teacher education and training programs might prepare teachers for their jobs, perhaps more might be done to help them prepare for and envision their careers.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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APPENDIX A

Code System.

Category	Codes
Person inputs	Predispositions
	Personality
	Gender
	Race/ethnicity
	Nationality
	Health status
	Age
Background affordances/influences	Person inputs
	Native-speakerism
	English as a lingua franca
	English education in Korea
Proximal environmental influences	Opportunities
	Supports experienced during choice-making
	Barriers experienced during choice-making
	Family
	Mother
	Spouse
	Children
	Peers
Learning experiences	Learning to teach on the job
	Tertiary education
	Graduate education
	Korean language learning
	Professional development
	Self-directed
	Formal
	Influence of prior education
	Teacher training
	Translating
	Teaching translation

(Continued)

Category	Codes
Self-efficacy expectations	Vicarious experience
	Social persuasion
	Observing others
	Physiological and emotional states
	Performance accomplishments
	Success with specific tasks
	Failure with specific tasks
	Coping efficacy
	Process efficacy
	Self-regulatory efficacy
Outcome expectations	Approval
	Self
	Social
	Rewards
	Social benefits
	Material benefits
	Money
	Attractive working conditions
Interests	Changing interests
	Teaching English
	Teacher education
	Korean language
	Translation
	Teaching translation
	English language and literature
	Computers
Choice	Choice goals
	Education
	Career
	Choice actions
	Education
	Career
Performance domains and attainments	Motivation
	Skill development
	Effort and persistence
	Goal attainment
	Awards