

## Investigation of EFL Teachers' Career and Motivation at Universities in Japan

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**Tsutsumi, R. (2013). Investigation of EFL teachers' career and motivation at universities in Japan. *Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics*, 17(2), 23-37.**

Motivation is one of the most popular topics on language teaching and learning. Many studies on language learning focus on students' motivation; however, teachers' motivation is easily overlooked in the area of the applied linguistics field. In this paper, the researcher presents a study to investigate how satisfied English teachers at private universities in Japan are with their work as English instructors. In this study, the researcher created questionnaires and conducted a survey of thirty English teachers at private universities in Japan. This study shows the perception and the degree of satisfaction in their jobs. The study vividly shows what the most significant obstacles are as well as approaches to solve the problems. The researcher asked participants what significant aspect of teaching is included in their personal teaching philosophy. The major question the researcher was looking for was the following: what the reward was, what obstacles existed, and what possible solutions were for the problematic aspects in the field. Overall, this study clearly provides the reader a clearer idea of what motivates teachers and how closely it is related to their productivity in their daily teaching.

**Key Words:** teacher motivation, career development, language teaching and learning

### 1 Introduction

Motivation is one of the most popular and controversial topics in applied linguistic fields because it has a dynamic influence on the actual classroom activities in language classrooms. Many studies focus on learners' motivation; however, in this paper; teachers' motivation will be dealt with as a major topic. The researcher is also one of the teachers striving to be a better instructor through daily reflections and the direct communication with her colleagues and students, who gave her a hint to start this research. Knowing that all humans basically continue to change and that teachers themselves also keep changing and evolving to reach their expectations to become better teachers and humans, it is important to mention that from the perspective, teachers' motivation may change over time. This research explores the whole

picture of the realities that teachers face and identifies specific aspects that influence their teaching motivation inside and outside of their classrooms through their career as English teachers of tertiary education in Japan.

The study conducted in the United States focused on English teachers' careers including initial pathways to become EFL teachers, perceptions and the degree of satisfaction on teaching jobs, the major rewards, the most significant obstacles, and approaches to solve problem.

In this paper, the first part of the paper consists of literature reviews concerning teachers' motivation. The second part shows findings of a study which the researcher conducted, including perceptions and the degree of satisfaction on teaching jobs, the major rewards, the most significant obstacles, approaches to solve problems, and pathways to be EFL teachers.

## **2 Literature Review**

Teachers' motivation is a relatively new area in applied linguistic fields. As R.C. Nikolov (2001) mentions, it is becoming increasingly clearer that teachers have a very important influence on the motivation of learners. However, very little is known about the motivation of the teachers themselves. The number of studies on motivation, especially for language teachers, has been researched less than the studies on the motivation of language learners. In fact, very few studies have been reported in the applied linguistics literature so far (Kassabgy, Boraie & Schmidt, 2001).

Next, the very first essential question is what motivation is. There is a variety of definitions for what constitutes motivation. For example, according to Steers and Porter (1991), motivation is what energizes human behavior, what directs or channels such behaviors, and how this behavior is maintained or sustained. Often times, intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation are introduced to explain motivation. Ellis (1984) explains that intrinsic motivation is self-respect of accomplishment and personal growth. Latham (1998) defines intrinsic motivation for language teachers as seeing the growth and development of students, activities that satisfy curiosity and enhance the effectiveness. Ryan and Deci (2000) describe intrinsic motivation as autonomy and competence (positive feedback). Raffini (1996) focuses on a sense of relatedness as "the degree of emotional security" when explaining intrinsic motivation.

On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is specifically explained as follows. According to Herzberg et al. (1993) it is defined by salary, fringe benefits, job security, wage increase, the amount of work, and the facilities available for doing the work.

As for the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of teachers teaching motivation, there is a major finding from past studies. It is often mentioned that generally intrinsic sides of teaching is satisfying and fulfilling. In addition to satisfactory aspects of teaching, teachers often experience

dissatisfaction with extrinsic factors in working conditions such as a pay, job security, and opportunities for promotion (Johnson 1997; Kassabgy et al., 2001; McKnight, 1992; Pennington, 1991; Pennington & Ho, 1995; Pennington & Riley, 1991; Senior, 2006; Waites, 1999,). Many theories exist to support the importance of intrinsic aspects on teaching motivation. For example, according to Csikszentmihalyi (1997), the most influential teachers are generally teachers who can make a difference in students' lives as learners. He clearly suggests that teachers who have the most status, power, intelligence, or knowledge may not be perceived as possessing the highest quality to teach students. One of the most important qualities in teachers is instead to have passion to dedicate their lives to what they do.

As I mentioned above, not many studies have been conducted until today. However, some teacher motivation research has been done so far. Three systems of teacher motivation were studied by Ames and Ames (1984). Their study shows that an ability system related to self-esteem, a task mastery system focused on the accomplishment of objectives, and a moral responsibility system concern for student welfare are included to motivate language teachers. Furthermore, three conditions for work satisfaction were explored by Barnabe and Burns (1994). They explain the following three conditions as necessary to feel satisfaction at teaching jobs in the field of language teaching. Those conditions are experiencing the work as worthwhile, experiencing responsibility for results, and understanding how effectively they are performing in the classroom.

In addition to the teacher motivation, Kassabgy et al. (2001) suggested that there were four variants of a good language teaching. According to their study, the necessary conditions include having a job in a well-managed institution, having one that provides professional status, feeling that the job's primary rewards come from students and classroom itself, and possessing a challenging job that provides scope to learn and develop in a stimulating atmosphere. More specifically, five basic wants and needs for teachers were studied by Kassabgy et al. (2001). The study suggests that a relationship orientation, extrinsic motivation, autonomy needs, a self-realization factor, and institutional support needs are basic necessary conditions for language teachers to work effectively.

### **3 Purpose of the Study**

It is becoming clear that teachers have a very important influence on the motivation of English language learners. However, we know very little about the motivation of English teachers. Not many studies of language teachers have been done while many studies of learners' motivation exist in applied linguistics. There are two major aims to conduct this teacher motivation study. The first one is to identify what motivates university teachers' motivation at work considering the current situation which English teachers face in their

daily work. The second one is to make an improvement in applied linguistic fields by gaining insights about the obstacles and difficulties at tertiary educational facilities in Japan.

#### **4 Research Questions**

The main research questions addressed in this study were as follows:

1. What are the major factors to motivate university English teachers in Japan through their teaching career?
2. What are the rewards and obstacles at work?
3. What are their specific approaches to overcome the difficulties?

#### **5 Methods**

##### **5.1 Questionnaires**

First, questionnaires were made to deepen the understanding of teachers' motivation, including their daily obstacles and rewards as university English teachers and approaches to solve difficulties at work (See Appendix). The questionnaires included the teachers' demographic information such as gender and teaching experiences. Seven open-ended questions were made as a pilot study to identify what kinds of factors enhance university English teachers' motivation. The questions include what the reward, obstacles, and specific approaches to solve the problematic aspects are. Findings will be utilized to create effective Likert scale questions to capture the whole picture of the university English teachers' motivation. In this study, the questionnaires were distributed to 30 university English teachers who work for private and national universities in the Kanto area in Japan. The researcher was able to receive results from 16 university teachers. Then the result was analyzed by the researcher.

##### **5.2 Participants**

The researcher had access to the participants through her university teaching job. The participants' demographic information was as follows. (See Table 1) The participants were 6 males and 10 females, 10 Japanese, 5 native English speakers, and 1 other who was from an African country and taught English and French. Fifteen teachers worked on a part time basis and only one teacher worked as a full-time lecturer at private universities. Majorities of the participants were part-time teachers; therefore, they taught at multiple universities in the Kanto area. It is a common teaching situation for part-time university teachers. Teachers' teaching experience is as follows: 1 to 5 years (4), 6 to 10 years (3), 11 to 15 years (3), 16 to 20 years (3), more than 20

years (3). The teaching experiences varied from 2 years to 40 years. The average years of teaching experience was 14 years. All of the participants were currently working teachers at private universities in the Kanto area. Participation was completely voluntary. Informed consent was distributed because this research asks teachers their personal views and experiences on teaching careers as university English teachers.

Table 1. A Summary of the Participants' Information

		No. of the participants
Gender	Female	6
	Male	10
Teaching Experiences	1-5 years	4
	6-10 years	3
	11-15	3
	16-20 years	3
	Over 20 years	3
Teachers Background	Native English Speaker	5
	Japanese	10
	Other	1

### 5.3 Procedure

The time survey was distributed in the middle of October. In Japan, the new school year begins in April in Japan and finishes the first semester at the end of July and then starts its new semester in September and finishes the semester around the end of January. Therefore, the researcher chose the time to distribute the questionnaires carefully and chose the best timing when teachers are not too busy. At the beginning and end of the semester, teachers are usually busy preparing for the new courses or giving final exams and assignments and grading them. The questionnaires were distributed to the teachers' mailboxes at some private universities, and participants returned them to the researcher's mailbox. This method was utilized in order to protect the anonymity of the participants. The researcher's colleagues helped the researcher by distributing the questionnaires. Some were sent via email; therefore, the researcher received some responses through email. Initially, the researcher hoped to receive more responses; however, approximately one half of the participants responded to the questionnaires. To analyze the data, content analysis was conducted for open-ended questions and statistical analysis was conducted for Likert scale questions.

## 6 Findings

### 6.1 Initial motivation to become a university English teacher

The open-ended questionnaire study revealed specific information about current English teachers' motivation through their daily life as university English teachers in Japan. The first question consisted of asking why and how teachers decided their career as university English teachers. This question was asked in order to understand the initial motivation to become an English teacher and reason behind one entering English teaching career as a university English teacher in Japan. As Table 2 shows, the first major reason to be university English teachers was pure interest in different cultures and people. The second most common answer was because they were good at languages, so they thought it was the right choice to teach language. Three native speaking teachers and one Japanese teacher answered that it was because they would like to work overseas. Three teachers said that they like to help people and thus became interested in an English teaching career. There was one response from a Japanese female teacher whose initial motivation was to be a researcher. One male Japanese teacher said that he did not have any other choice after learning English literature at graduate school. For certain areas of studies such as literature, they don't seem to have many options as for the career choices. However, as these results suggest, a majority of the teachers chose careers based on their pure interests and positive prospects about their future career.

Table 2. Initial Motivation to Be University English Teachers

Why did you be a university English teacher?	No. of participants
Because I became interested in different cultures and people	8
Because I was good at languages	4
Because I would like to work overseas	4
Because I like helping people	3
Because I wanted to do research	1
Because I didn't have any other choice after learning English literature at graduate school	1

### 6.2 Rewards

First, the researcher asked if the teaching job was rewarding for the teachers. In general, the teacher is often told it is a rewarding job. What is not often clarified is how this is determined. To answer this question, the researcher asked this question to the participants. Overall, they were willing to share a variety of rewards from their job as university English teachers in Japan.

When participants were asked what the major rewards were, the respondents answered as follows. (See Table 3) The most common answers were their personal growth as a teacher and as a human through daily practice of teaching, receiving appreciation from students, and observing students' growth. Furthermore, three teachers cited experiencing the feeling of students getting motivated and excited to learn. Two teachers mentioned their passion to teach and learn and being able to keep learning and teaching at the same time. One male native English teacher referred to the feeling that they were connected with students and that helping them was one of the greatest rewards. These results show that intrinsic motivation can be a powerful motivator for university English teachers. One Japanese male teacher mentioned that a comparatively longer vacation is one of the rewards. However, except for the point, no one mentioned any extrinsic rewards. To explore what kind of values university English teachers have, the researcher intends to find out detailed values regarding extrinsic values in further study.

Table 3. Major Rewards

Category	No. of participants
Appreciation from students	4
Observing students' growth	4
Personal growth	4
Feeling the students get motivated and excited to learn	3
Being able to keep learning and teaching at the same time	2
Feeling connected with students and helping students	1
Comparatively longer vacation	1

### 6.3 Discrepancy between ideals and reality

The next question was related to gaps between ideals and reality for university English teachers. The specific question was as follows: Do you feel find any discrepancy between your ideals and reality? Approximately 44% of the teachers answered yes and 56% of the participants answered no. When the researcher took a deeper look at who tended to find discrepancy more between their ideals and reality, novice and teachers with fewer years of teaching were likely to answer yes for this particular question. As a following question, when the researcher asked what the major discrepancies were, various answers were given. These are some quotes from the teachers that described their discrepancies vividly. One male native English teacher with two years of teaching experiences expressed the biggest problem as follows. *"I expected more enthusiastic attitudes about learning English and that the students would participate more readily in class."* Another female native English teacher with 20 years of teaching experience commented that students' passive attitude was a serious discrepancy. *"I thought there would*

*be higher levels of English spoken in Japan but later realized their passive skills were high but active skills were low.*" A Japanese female teacher with 5 years of teaching experience mentioned that she began to realize that many students lack study skills and basic comprehension skills, and as a result, she found a necessity to teach a lot more besides English content skills. Another Japanese female teacher with 6 years teaching experience expressed similar impressions about her students by daily teaching practice. She says that it is truly unfortunate that many students have English knowledge; however, they do not have enough practical skills to utilize English as a communication tool. All the gaps between ideals and realities were related to their students' skills, attitudes, and motivation regarding their English learning.

#### **6.4 Most interesting aspect**

In the next question, when the researcher asked what the most interesting aspect of language teaching was, various answers were given by the participants including looking forward to the excitement to teach, having autonomy, being creative on curriculum design, having a variety of materials to present in class, and meeting new challenges every day. These results showed that teachers found that the pleasure of daily teaching as university English teachers is directly connected with intrinsic aspects of teaching motivation. In this section, no one mentioned about extrinsic aspects of teaching motivation.

#### **6.5 Greatest difficulties**

The greatest difficulties of the teaching job are lack of motivation from some students, little advancement in skill from some students, students' passive attitudes, the inability to get students to speak up, and difficulties getting students to take responsibility for their learning. From these specific teachers, all the difficulties teachers face at work are also directly related with difficulties dealt with inside of classrooms in their daily teaching lives at universities in Japan. This is one teacher's direct quote about the difficulty to deal with students in class. *"It's a lack of motivation from students. It seems that students rarely want to stick out, so they rarely volunteer answers. Most students don't want to do homework and/or seem to spend little time for homework,"* (Part-time NEST, male, 2 years). However, one teacher mentioned commuting as the biggest problem which is related to working conditions. In fact, it is a commonly cited complaint for part-time university teachers especially in the Kanto area. Because they need to teach at a few different universities, they need to move around the Kanto area. Therefore, one teacher mentioned that it was very time consuming to commute from one university to another university. In addition, one Japanese female full-time teacher revealed her impression about her job stating that she has too much



work besides her daily teaching and research activities although the participants except for this particular one are part-time teachers. It gives a hint that there may be a need to create a different set of questionnaires to assess their motivation because it clearly shows that part-time teachers and full-time teachers have different job duties.

### **6.6 Major solutions to overcome the difficulties**

Next, major solutions toward problematic aspects were described as follows. In the classroom, teachers often try to change activities regularly, constantly check the pace of the class, try to ensure that students feel better about their English after attending classes, make the classroom a comfortable place, try not to push students on the spot or give too much pressure, try to adjust class activities so students work efficiently, encourage every student to speak during every class, and give useful feedback. Since most of the issues to deal with for the teachers were related to students' attitudes, motivation, and skills, each teacher introduced his or her own coping strategies to make teaching and students' learning more successful and productive. As for the commuting, the teacher stated that he hasn't found any solution.

### **6.7 Teachers' personal philosophy on teaching**

The question was included in order to capture the values they have acquired in their teaching situation. The question was particularly attempting to explore what teachers emphasize in their teaching which might give some hints when making effective questionnaires for the next further study. Various comments from the participants were given including how to choose materials to teach, how to determine which student skills to develop, how to understand which methodology to utilize in class, and how to address their attitude toward teaching and their students.

The following comments represent the teachers' personal philosophy on teaching. For example, one Japanese, part-time female teacher with 5 years teaching experience had two significant points as her own teaching philosophies including understanding students' needs and teaching what they need and choosing authentic and engaging materials to teach so that students can learn effectively with joy. Another Japanese part-time teacher with 26 years teaching experience emphasized that preparation is a key. She usually looks for everything so that she can fully understand the materials to teach with by utilizing all the resources she can access. Another Japanese female part-time teacher with 10 years of teaching experience cited that her personal teaching philosophy was to give a lesson that can develop students' critical thinking skills because these are important for them when they go into the real world after graduation. One Japanese male part-time teacher with 15 years of teaching experience mentioned that being flexible was one thing he

tries to keep it in mind. One male African teacher with 13 years teaching experience emphasized the importance of keeping a positive attitude. Each teacher has different philosophy and different teaching methodology to reach their goals during their teaching career. This is a direct quote from a part-time native English speaking teacher with 31 years teaching experience's illustrates the teachers' goal on his daily teaching. *"I want to ensure that students feel better about their English after attending my classes and enjoy the process as well."* Overall, all the comments shared by English teachers represented what they were consciously trying to do inside of the classroom to make their teaching more successful and enjoyable for learners. Furthermore, from this study, it became clearer that motivated teachers were willing to share their teaching situations, issues to deal with, and their personal philosophy.

Finally, as a further note one full-time female Japanese teacher with 6 years experience emphasized communicating with other teachers, spending time wisely, and prioritizing and organizing things to do because she has a huge amount of administrative duties to take care of. She showed a completely different philosophy because her daily job duty was quite different from that of part-time lecturers.

## **7 Discussion**

As a result, reflecting all the data the researcher received, the study shows the fulfillment in their daily work and chosen career. To prove these results, no participants mentioned extrinsic rewards (e.g. pay, working conditions, chances for promotion, benefits) in this research except for expressing the difficulties to commute from one school to another due to multiple teaching jobs at universities in the Kanto area. Therefore, the researcher could not find the similarity regarding the models and conditions which were suggested about good jobs for language teachers in previous studies. The responses are filled mostly about intrinsic aspects of the teaching profession; however the researcher was not able to perceive the whole picture of the profession and career. Then one question that emerges in particular regarding teaching motivation concerns how it may become possible to conduct an effective teachers' research which reflects real voices that capture the whole picture which includes their teaching environment and working condition in details. It might be one of the most important reasons why teacher research is still a minor area in applied linguistic field. As a crucial issue, the researcher began to realize that one very intriguing challenge exists when conducting research about teachers as participants. The major issue is how teachers can best conduct effective research on teaching. A large part of the motivation study in applied linguistic fields is about learners.

The root of this issue is very complicated, and varieties of socio-psychological and cultural specific issues, such as ideal self, individual

goals through their long term and short term career perspectives, issues concerning the meaning of working and teaching, and value system of each teacher are interrelated. Teachers are striving to become better teachers and trying to figure out how they can overcome the difficulties and elaborate various approaches to create a better teaching.

Considering all the data that the researcher received in an open-ended questionnaire, all of the teachers had positive attitudes toward their teaching jobs although approximately half of the teachers find gaps between the ideal and reality. To solve the difficulties and problems they face in the classroom, each teacher has different coping strategies.

In this study, it became clear that the following factors influence teachers' teaching lives including working conditions, commuting, students overall attitude toward English learning, students interest level, students motivation level, and students participation in class.

## **8 Limitations and Implications for Further Study**

In this study, some limitations exist and there are critical points that must be considered for further research. First, the overall participant population was relatively small. Therefore, a much larger population will be required in the next study. Secondly, open-ended questions were utilized in this research to capture what university teachers face in reality, including their daily success and problems they face on a daily basis. In further research, in order to grasp specific job satisfaction levels and what teachers value on their teaching jobs, Likert scale questions should be carefully made and utilized effectively. In the next study, the researcher will create a specific category for each research question e.g. such as salary, benefit, relationship with colleagues and supervisors which participants did not even mention in this study.

In the next study, the researcher will conduct follow-up interviews with participants to understand the deeper part of teachers' motivation. Through this study with open-ended questions, no one mentioned the extrinsic side of motivation; therefore, the researcher will use this data as a pilot study for further research.

## **9 Conclusion**

Through this study the researcher was able to take an in-depth look at teachers' motivation, including their daily success, obstacles, and views on what they do in their teaching lives. This study shows that teachers' motivation mainly comes from intrinsic motivation, specifically students' growth, self-growth, autonomy, and creativity. Teachers at universities emphasized the importance of intrinsic over extrinsic rewards. Only a few teachers mentioned about the extrinsic side of motivation. This study gives us a hint that teachers in Japan are not open about values on extrinsic rewards.

Therefore, the result of this study gives us a hint that it is very essential to create an effective set of questionnaires for further study.

As mentioned above, there is great potential in this teacher motivation study to explore on this particular topic since it is a relatively new one. The researcher's intention through this pilot study is to utilize this data effectively to conduct a further successful study using Likert scale questionnaire study with a combination of semi-structured interviews. The researcher's true intention toward this study is to give teachers real voices on their teaching careers and to contribute to the teaching research of tertiary level education in Japan.

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Received: August 31, 2013  
Revised: December 24, 2013

Accepted: December 27, 2013

## **Appendix Questionnaire**

This anonymous questionnaire is designed to investigate the career and motivation as a university English teacher in Japan. There are no risks or benefits to you from participating in this research. Your name and school will be withheld from the public. If you do not wish to participate, you may simply return the blank survey or stop at any time with no penalty to yourself. If you do choose to participate, the completion and return of the survey indicates your consent to participate in this study. Please do not put your name on this form. If you have questions, please contact me. I would appreciate it if you could cooperate with my research. Thank you very much for your help.

1. Gender                                      Male                                      Female
2. Are you Japanese or native English speaker?  
Japanese      Native English Speaker      Other (                                      )
3. How long have you been teaching EFL? (                                      ) years
4. Why did you become an English teacher? Please circle as many as applicable.
  - a. Because I become interested in different cultures and people, I decided to be an English teacher.
  - b. Because I like helping people, I became an EFL teacher.
  - c. Because I would like to work overseas, I became an English teacher
  - d. Because I am good at languages, I can utilize my strength in the field.
  - e. Other  
(                                      )
5. Do you feel rewarded by your work? Please circle one.
  1. Strongly disagree
  2. Modestly disagree
  3. Neutral
  4. Modestly agree
  5. Strongly agree
6. If yes, what are the major rewards in your work? If no, would you explain why you think so?

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7. Were there any major discrepancies between what you expected from

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teaching EFL and what you experience now? Please circle either one.

Yes                      No

8. If yes, would you describe what the discrepancies are?

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9. What is the most interesting aspect of work?

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10. What are the greatest difficulties or obstacles that you encounter in your work?

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11. What solutions do you use to solve these problems?

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12. What is your personal philosophy about your work?

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