

Foreign tertiary EFL teachers' role perceptions

Paul Hullah

Miyazaki University

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In 1997, the author and Dr. Barry O'Sullivan developed a 25-item questionnaire to examine: actual and ideal labels tertiary native-speaker EFL teachers use to describe their work, actual and ideal activities involved in that work, and degree of job satisfaction. Results demonstrated an overwhelming discrepancy between actual and ideal on the first two factors, and respondents (n = 218) appeared dissatisfied with their role and pessimistic regarding their future.

With the survey about to be repeated in 2007 in order to gauge what, if any, shifts in role perception have occurred during the intervening decade, this report of the 1997 project attempts to focus attention onto the following issues for tertiary level EFL teachers today: What activities actually/ideally comprise your job? Are your skills appropriately used in your position? To what extent does your job meet the preconceptions you had of it? What degree of job satisfaction do you feel?

1997年ポール・ハラとバリー・オサリバン博士は以下の事を調査するために25項目に及ぶアンケートを開発した。大学におけるネイティブ・スピーカーのEFLの先生が彼らの仕事を表現する際に用いる理想的また現実のラベル。その仕事に含まれる理想的また現実の活動。さらに仕事に対する満足度。その結果によればはじめの項目に関しては現実と理想の間に大きな格差があり、そして218人の回答者が彼らの役割に不満のようであり、未来にたいして悲観的であった。1997年以降彼らの役割認識に何らかの変化があったかを判断するために2007年に同様の調査を行う予定である。ゆえに1997年のプロジェクトに関するこのレポートでは大学のEFLの先生の以下のような問題に焦点を当てるつもりである。どのような活動が(現実的に/理想的に)あなたの仕事に含まれるか? あなたの技能があなたの職に適切に用いられているか? あなたの今の仕事はあなたの予想とどの程度合致しているか? あなたの仕事に対する満足度はどの程度か?

One's perception of one's role in life is inseparable from one's total perception of self. It is indeed an integral part of that perception. Dissatisfaction with one's role implies lack of satisfaction with one's self, a sense of lack of completion, of potential unfulfilled. For teachers, role is not wholly self-ordained, however, but is a combination of factors decided by others (job responsibilities and duties accepted as part of a contract) and factors or activities appended to this set of accepted criteria by one's self.

During my 14 years of experience as an English teacher working full time at 3 different Japanese universities, mixing with non-Japanese colleagues and speaking to other foreign teachers, I have been struck by the lack of unity of perception of role among native-speaker English teachers at tertiary level. I have observed that, from individual to individual, these English teachers see and define their function and role in markedly different ways, even those working under identical job titles in similar institutions, and noted a distinct lack of consistency in the way foreign teachers of English at tertiary level conceive of their own *raison d'être*, purpose and position.

In 1997, Barry O'Sullivan and I, at that time colleagues at Okayama University, thought it would be an interesting, enlightening exercise to conduct a survey in order to identify and collate the variety of ways in which respective teachers regard their role and demonstrate general trends. We saw this as being of particular value and relevance to the almost 11, 000 teaching positions occupied by foreigners at Japan's approximately 1, 200 tertiary educational institutions at that time (see *Appendix 2*).

We wanted to discover:

- a) what foreign teachers of English at tertiary level in Japan perceive their actual role to be
- b) what kind of activities these individuals undertake in the course of their job
- c) to what extent (a) and/or (b) diverge from the teacher's 'ideal' conception of his/her role and the activities that constitute that role

- d) to what extent foreign teachers of English at tertiary level in Japan are satisfied with their current position and role.

In 1997, ours was the first survey of its kind that had been hitherto attempted in Japan. The still relatively small body of research that exists on the role perception of university level teachers has tended to concentrate on the teacher in his or her own cultural environment, typically the USA (Kelly and Hart 1971, Rich and Jolicoeur 1978). In addition, these, and other studies have had as their focus the dichotomy between teaching and research (Fischer 1965, Page 1972, Sample 1972, Wilson and Wilson 1972, Ladd and Lipset 1975). The same can be said of the many studies that have explored the area of teacher burnout, seen by Freisen and Sarros (1989: 179) as having "been linked with identifiable psychological, and behavioral responses to unmediated work stress in a variety of helping professions". In 2004, the University Teachers Union *Survey of Foreign Nationals at Japanese Universities* (available online at < <http://www.utu-japan.org/>>) extensively investigated contractual and administrative issues for foreign ELT instructors and looked at working conditions in a detailed factual manner but did not address the specific area of role perception by self and others that our study sought to probe. I thus consider the UTU project and my own ongoing research to be usefully mutually complementary.

Rationale

Our study, therefore, approached the topic of role perception among foreign teachers in Japanese tertiary institutions by

looking at the differences between how they see themselves and how they believe they are seen by their employers, in terms of the labels they use to signify their role and the activities they participate in. Moreover, we sought to establish a distinction between perceived 'Actual' and 'Ideal' situations, and to isolate any significant, consistent disparities between the two. Following Freisen and Sarros (1989), we also see job satisfaction as a function of role perception. We therefore operationalised the construct 'role perception' as;

Job satisfaction

Ideal vs. Actual Activity

Ideal vs. Actual Label

In this model, based on our own experience as teachers and conversations with others in the same profession, we saw the former two elements as being the major factors, while the latter, "Label", is less important. Therefore, we planned to include questions pertinent to these areas in the approximate ratio of 2: 2: 1.

The study

We set out to design a quickly answerable questionnaire that would focus attention on to the above issues, and precisely and effectively elicit responses that could then be analyzed statistically in order to draw conclusions. Initial open-ended versions were revised and Lickert-scale items substituted based upon feedback from active teachers who completed and commented on a series of pilot models. In this respect, we hoped that the final version was satisfactory in terms of

both face and content validity. Over 250 copies of the final questionnaire were distributed to teachers working all over Japan of which 218 were returned and used as data: over 130 copies were handed personally to teachers attending the 1997 JALT Conference in Hamamatsu and most were filled in 'on the spot'. The rest were distributed and returned by post. The questionnaire is, I think, self explanatory and is reproduced in its entirety below as Appendix 1.

Results and discussion

All data received were input into a specially designed database, using FilemakerPro for the Macintosh, and later exported to two software packages for analysis (Statview, and Excel). The results will be first presented by section, as the questionnaire was presented in three distinct sections to the respondents.

1. Label

Table 1 shows the results of the first section of the questionnaire. There is a clear and significant difference between actual and ideal scenarios for all four questions. It is interesting to note that there is tendency for the respondents to indicate in their first two answers a telling dichotomy, reflecting that observed by Rich and Jolicoeur (1978), that is, whereas teachers ideally regard the researcher/academic aspect of their role as of greater significance than their general teacher/instructor function, they believe that they are actually perceived in a directly contrary sense, as general teachers first and foremost and as researchers/academics to a markedly lesser extent. The similarity in mean scores for

the ideal responses to these two questions suggests that the aforementioned teacher/researcher controversy observed in the USA in the 1970s may still pertain to the current situation in Japan.

Dissatisfaction with what is clearly the most predominant role label (mean = 4.6) is also mirrored in responses to the other questions in this section. Results indicate that teachers appear to wish for a greater administrative role and for a more formal involvement with their students.

Table 1. 1997 results for 'label' section

	Actual (Mean, Sd.)	Ideal (Mean, Sd.)	t-value	p-value
1. Researcher/ Academic	2.29, 1.21	3.78, 1.16	1.49	6.00E-18
2. Lang. Instr./Gen. Eng. Teacher	4.6, .82	3.51, 1.3	1.09	2.80E-12
3. Administrator	1.46, .87	1.98, 1.2	.52	3.90E-05
4. Student Counsellor/Advisor	1.75, 1.02	3.17, 1.21	1.37	1.00E-16

2. Activity

There is a clear pattern of dissatisfaction in the results of all nine questions in the 'Activities' section. In all cases respondents express a desire for more involvement in all aspects of their work situations. The results, Table 2, show that there is a clear and significant difference between actual and ideal spheres, this time with regard to activities being performed by English teachers.

Table 2. 1997 results for 'activity' section

	Actual (Mean, Sd.)	Ideal (Mean, Sd.)	t-value	p-value
1. Administrative decisions	1.52, .99	3.24, 1.19	1.72	3E-24
2. Formal staff exchange	1.87, 1.23	4.13, 1.02	2.26	2E-30
3. Informal staff exchange	2.51, 1.3	4.37, .81	1.86	7E-26
4. Social staff interaction	2.13, 1.14	3.26, 1.1	1.13	2E-14
5. Social student interaction	2.01, 1.05	2.94, 1.19	.93	8E-15
6. Developing curricula	2.58, 1.55	4.4, .95	1.82	6E-20
7. Programme planning	1.82, 1.56	4.22, 1.1	2.4	3E-29
8. Formal academic supervision	1.56, 1.19	3.08, 1.55	1.52	2E-16
9. Entrance test development	1.88, 1.47	3.65, 1.55	1.75	7E-14

In all nine categories we can see willingness expressed to become more deeply involved in all aspects of the position explored in this study, suggesting that teachers were not utilized to their full potential within the 1997 system.

3. Job satisfaction

As this section was offered in a different format to the above, being specifically designed to explore the degree of job satisfaction of respondents, the results are presented here accordingly.

Table 3. 1997 results for 'job satisfaction' section

	(Mean, Sd.)
1. My skills are appropriately used in my current position.	3.32, 1.67
2. My opinions are not taken seriously by my employers	3.88, 1.07
3. My position meets my preconceptions of it.	3.41, 1.01
4. I am not a valued member of staff.	4.02, 1.06
5. I am optimistic about my future career at this institution.	2.10, 1.15
6. I am as enthusiastic about my work now as I was when I arrived here.	2.71, 1.38
7. I am content with my present position.	2.61, 1.58
8. My qualifications are not directly relevant to my current position.	2.66, 1.49
9. I should be paid more for the work I do.	1.39, 0.82
10. I have not benefitted professionally as a result of my work in Japan.	3.38, 1.31

In order to establish the construct validity of this section a factor analysis was undertaken, the results of which are presented below (Tables 3, 4 and 5). The oblique solution suggests that there are two factors at work here, with the principal factor weighing on all statements except for number nine, this discrepancy thus accounting for factor two. Statement number 9, which referred to financial satisfaction, was found to be the single non-fitting item, a fact that might be explained by a number of factors: satisfaction with the relatively high remuneration for teaching work in Japan, or a belief that, for what the typical teacher actually does (bearing in mind that in the previous section respondents expressed a strong willingness to do more, rather than less, in the course of their job activities), monetary recompense is more than

adequate. It can therefore be deduced from this section that financial dissatisfaction was not a major element of general job dissatisfaction felt by teachers in Japan in 1997.

Table 4. Factor analysis summary (DAs)

Number of Variables	10
Est. Number of Factors	5
Number of Factors	2
Number of Cases	106
Number Missing	0
Degrees of Freedom	54
Bartlett's Chi Square	690.236
P-Value	<.0001

Factor Extraction Method: Principal Components

Extraction Rule: Roots greater than one

Transformation Method: Orthotran/Varimax

Table 5. Eigen values

	Magnitude	Variance Prop
Value 1	5.773	.577
Value 2	1.005	.101
Value 3	.769	.077
Value 4	.572	.057
Value 5	.493	.049

Table 6. Oblique solution primary pattern matrix

	Factor 1	Factor 2
DA01	.791	.058
DA02	.752	-.167
DA03	.856	.014
DA04	.817	-.303
DA05	.730	1.597E-3
DA06	.852	.142
DA07	.864	-3.334E-3
DA08	.751	-.133
DA09	.296	.918
DA10	.724	.035

It might have been interesting to have asked the teachers overtly for an overall (holistic) measure of their degree of job satisfaction. However, we were keen to keep the questions as particular as possible, allowing the general degree of job satisfaction to be deduced from the accumulated responses, rather than risk a Hawthorn effect (where respondents give answers to questions not honestly but based upon what they think the researcher wants to hear) so the idea was dropped.

In addition to factor analysis it was decided to correlate candidate responses on individual items with their overall total minus that item. This procedure is designed to establish by cross-response correlation that each item is showing a degree of uniformity of measurement with those other items. The results (Table 6) appear to confirm the results of the factor analysis, by indicating that all questions, with the exception of item 9, appear to be highly correlated. While the correlation significance for that item is statistically

significant, at .0089, the actual size of the measure, .252, was too small, in our view, to be of any real value.

Table 7. Correlation of item responses to total minus item

Item	Correlation	Significance
DA01	.721	<.0001
DA02	.654	<.0001
DA03	.772	<.0001
DA04	.720	<.0001
DA05	.632	<.0001
DA06	.772	<.0001
DA07	.778	<.0001
DA08	.681	<.0001
DA09	.252	.0089
DA10	.623	<.0001

These analyses confirm that the questionnaire is essentially sound in terms of construct validity. Though there is a question mark over item DA09, in that it is quite clearly observing a different behavior than the other nine items in the section, this discrepancy was foreseen, and the inclusion of such a statement was, for the purposes of this study at least, of real interest, in that it was the sole positive indicator (job-satisfaction wise) in this section of the questionnaire.

Finally, the results of the final section were explored for any trends in responses. Due to the limited number of responses it was not possible to perform a multi variate ANOVA. It was therefore decided to examine a selection of the demographic variables in turn. No significant difference was found in the responses of the men or women, or for those respondents

working at different institutions. Similarly no significant difference was found for the variable 'position', however post hoc analysis suggests that there were significant differences between Associate Professors and Instructors (mean difference = 8.232; p -value = .0132) and between Teachers and Instructors (mean difference = 9.345; p -value = .0378), suggesting that those who identified themselves as Instructors in the demographic data collection are the least satisfied with their position. There was a significant difference (p = .0397) for the variable 'full/part-time', with those employed full-time showing a significantly higher total score (i.e. a greater dissatisfaction) than their part-time colleagues (mean difference = 5.27, a more than 10% difference).

Conclusions

While the limitations of this study, in terms of sample size and the relatively narrow scope of the questions posed, restrict the generalizability of the results, the quite strong trends suggested here are of real value and justify re-examination of this area a decade later. The 1997 results indicate that there was a pervasive and disturbing feeling of lack of job satisfaction within the foreign English teaching community at tertiary level in Japan. This dissatisfaction stemmed most certainly not from the stereotypical selfish workers' complaint of being 'overworked and underpaid' and is thus the more surprising, and perhaps more credible, for this fact. Teachers did not wish for more money but did generally crave more involvement in the set of activities comprising their job. This sense of dissatisfaction with level of involvement in activities undertaken as part of the job was reinforced by a worrying discrepancy between the manner in

which teachers were actually regarded and the way in which they would ideally have preferred to be perceived.

Clearly, there was something happening within the tertiary teaching community in Japan ten years ago which merits further in depth study today, hence my incentive to repeat the study in 2007. As the profile of those involved in teaching language at Japanese universities changes, with membership and conference attendee data from professional organisations such as JALT indicating an aging teaching population (O'Sullivan 1998), there are indications that what was once regarded as transitory occupation is now maturing into a true profession in its own right. With this maturity comes change, not all of which is positive. The lack of recognition, both on an individual level and on a professional level is creating a climate of disillusionment and dissatisfaction among teachers. The very animated audience discussion which accompanied the report of these 1997 findings at the 2005 JALT national conference incontrovertibly demonstrated that the issues raised here are still very much part of the native speaker tertiary EFL teacher experience today. It is thus with a sense of affirmation that I set about preparing to repeat this project next year, for I believe that this ongoing study will mark an important step towards a greater understanding of the personal and professional issues which affect and construct the role of the tertiary level foreign language teacher in contemporary Japan.

Note: The 1997 survey questionnaire was developed and statistically analyzed jointly by the author and Dr. Barry O'Sullivan, currently Reader in Language Testing at Roehampton University, UK. Relevant materials in this report are used with his kind permission.

Paul Hullah (M.A., Ph.D.) has taught at National and Private universities in Western Japan since 1992, and is currently Associate Professor of English at the University of Miyazaki. He is interested in content-based teaching and the influence of study text-type on L2 performance. He has written a series of successful EFL textbooks using 'literary' texts (prose, poetry, and song) to promote communicative comprehension and self-expression among Japanese university students. He has also published and presented widely in TEFL and literary critical areas, and an award-winning collection of his own poetry appeared in Britain in 2000. He can be reached at <paulhullah@hotmail.com>.

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Appendix 1

Please circle the appropriate response to the following questions

Title: Professor Ass. Prof. Lecturer Instructor Teacher **Part-time/Full-time**

Type of Establishment: National/Prefectural University Private University Junior College

Years at Tertiary level (Japan): 0-2 3-6 7-10 10-15 Over 15 **Age:** Under 30 31-44 45-55 Over 55

Years at Tertiary level (total): 0-2 3-6 7-10 10-15 Over 15 **Sex:** Woman Man

1. To what extent do the following labels apply to your current position?

ACTUAL SITUATION					LABEL	IDEAL SITUATION				
Not at all				Very much		Not at all				Very much
1	2	3	4	5	1. Researcher/Academic	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	2. Language Instructor/General English Teacher	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	3. Administrator	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	4. Student Counselor/Advisor	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	5. Other (specify) _____	1	2	3	4	5

2. To what extent are you involved in the following activities as part of your job?

ACTUAL SITUATION					ACTIVITY	IDEAL SITUATION				
Not at all				Very much		Not at all				Very much
1	2	3	4	5	1. Administrative decisions	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	2. Formal exchange of information/ideas with staff	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	3. Informal exchange of information/ideas with staff	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	4. Social interaction with other staff	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	5. Social interaction with students	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	6. Developing curricula for specific courses	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	7. Programme planning and design (multi course)	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	8. Formal student academic supervision (thesis)	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	9. Entrance-test development	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	10. Other (specify) _____	1	2	3	4	5

3. Please indicate the extent of your agreement with each of the following statements:

	Disagree		Agree		
1. My skills are appropriately used in my current position.	1	2	3	4	5
2. My opinions are not taken seriously by my employers.	1	2	3	4	5
3. My position meets my preconceptions of it.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I am not a valued member of staff.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I am optimistic about my future career at this institution.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I am as enthusiastic about my work now as I was when I arrived here.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I am content with my present position.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My qualifications are not directly relevant to my current position.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I should be paid more for the work I do.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I have not benefitted professionally as a result of my work in Japan.	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Appendix 2

Number of Institutions

As of 1 May 1997:

	Universities (4 year)	Junior Colleges (2-year)
National	99	41
Public	57	53
Private	431	504
Total	587	598

Number of Non-Japanese English Teachers

As of 1 May 1997:

	Full-time	Part-time
National Universities	1433	1155
Public	253	305
Private Universities	2461	5401
Total	4152 (M = 3290 (79.2%) F = 862 (20.8%))	6861 (M = 4549 (66.3%) F = 2312 (33.7%))
Private Junior Colleges	702	2008

Note: Full time teachers at national Universities included 93 Professors, 354 Associate Professors, 275 Lecturers, and 711 Instructors