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Teacher Demotivation in a National *Eikaiwa* Chain in Japan

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Private language (*eikaiwa*) schools are big business in Japan, but the teachers are often undervalued. Inspired by the author's personal experience, this exploratory study is aimed at giving a basic understanding of what it is like to be a foreign teacher working at a national *eikaiwa* chain. Data collected through interviews with 3 participants and previous literature on *eikaiwa* schools, in addition to the author's experience, will show that these teachers' motivation was negatively affected by their perception of several aspects of their working conditions, such as (a) the relationship between management and teachers, (b) infringement on their personal time by the company, (c) inadequate training provisions, (d) career path, and (e) strained collegial relationships. The author also suggests possible areas for further research.

日本で大きなビジネスとなっている英会話学校だが、そこで働く教師の状況は見落とされていることが多い。そこで、本研究では筆者が英会話学校で働いた経験を踏まえ、全国のチェーンの英会話学校で働くネイティブ教師の経験を明らかにすることを目的とした。研究データには3人のネイティブ教師へのインタビューと、先行研究、それから筆者自身の経験を用い、結果として被験者の教師全員に仕事に対するモチベーションの低下が見られた。その原因としては、労働環境が大きく影響しており、(a) 経営者側と教師との人間関係、(b) 教師の私的な時間への侵害、(c) 教師トレーニングの不足、(d) キャリアパス、(e) 同僚との関係性の5点が深く関わっていることが明らかになった。最後に今後の研究への提言を行う。

English language conversation schools, known as *eikaiwa* schools, are big business in Japan: There are several large chains operating nationally and countless independent institutions in many cities. In 2005 there were more than 1,000 schools employing approximately 23,000 teachers and making 192 billion yen in sales (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2005).

The regular school system is regarded as inadequate in terms of the provision for developing students' foreign language communication skills (Aspinall, 2006, p. 256). For almost 2 years, I worked for an *eikaiwa* school that was part of a national chain whose customers included working adults, retired people, and nonworking adults. By the end of my time working at this *eikaiwa* school, I felt I suffered from demotivation, which I would define as a loss or lack of enthusiasm for and interest in my work. There were numerous reasons for this, all of which were related to the working conditions.

The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate and begin to understand what it is like to work as a foreign teacher in this particular *eikaiwa* chain and to know whether I was alone in harbouring such feelings.

Data Collection and Limitations

The data for this study were collected from three sources: interviews with three current and former *eikaiwa* teachers, previous literature on *eikaiwa* schools, and my personal experience.

This study took a qualitative approach with a convenience sample based on personal networks. I was hoping for five interviewees but two dropped out. I chose interviews rather than surveys for practical and methodological reasons. First, practically, a scattergun approach sending questionnaires to schools across Japan from my base in the United Kingdom would have required permission from the companies to contact their employees. Second, methodologically, interviews allow much greater scope for discussing a complex topic such as motivation in depth. The three participants' characteristics are summarised in Table 1 with the information given correct as of August 2015, when the research was conducted.

Table 1. Participants

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Nationality	Years with the company	Current/former employee
Henry	male	37	USA	2 years 5 months	Current
Lewis	male	32	New Zealand	1 year 3 months	Former
Robert	male	27	USA	2 years 5 months	Current

Initial semistructured interviews lasted approximately 1 hour and were followed by a shorter follow-up interview to further explore certain areas that arose while reviewing the transcripts of the first interviews (see Appendix A for interview key). These follow-up interviews were also transcribed, and key quotations relating to teacher cognitions, intrinsic motivation, autonomy, career path, power distance, and organisational culture were collated.

This methodology has limitations. One limitation with interviews is reflexivity: Interviewees may try to depict themselves in a better light when answering questions, or may try to answer with what they think the researcher wants to hear. I had good existing relationships with the interviewees, so it is possible our friendliness influenced them in some way. It is therefore important to bear this in mind when considering the data. This study did not seek the input of management from the e*ikaiwa* chain, so the results only give the teachers' side of the issues. Additionally, the small sample size means that only limited interpretation of the results is possible; nevertheless, the data offer an insight into what it is like to work at an *eikaiwa* school.

In the following section I report the results of the data collection from the interviews, literature, and my personal experience, organised according to greatest correlation between the three sources, beginning with the strongest correlation.

Results

Four areas of interest were identified in the interview data: (a) contractual issues, including the expectation of travel, expectation of exceeding the contract, and the short-term, part-time contract with no career structure or benefits; (b) pedagogical issues, such as the curriculum, lack of autonomy in the classroom, inadequate training provisions for preservice and in-service teachers, and the introduction of a new curriculum; (c) commodification of teachers; and (d) poor relations with colleagues. These areas of interest caused frustration, anger, a feeling of being disrespected, a lack of loyalty towards the company,

demotivation, dissatisfaction, and feeling unstable. This section will address each of these issues, presenting the interviewees' opinions, the representation of the issues in previous literature on *eikaiwa* schools, and my own experience.

The interviewees held a perception of the company infringing on and not respecting or valuing their personal time, which led them to feel frustration. Their main complaint was related to the amount of unpaid travel they were required to do. Travel was described by Henry as "the worst part" of the job. Lewis recalled being very angry about a day when he taught four lessons in one branch and four lessons in another branch, 90 kilometres away. Robert showed exasperation when referring to what he saw as an assumption by management that travelling to other branches was "no problem at all," and Lewis talked negatively of losing a large portion of the day due to travel. Robert also expressed negative opinions regarding the fact that the travel was unpaid. Frequent travel to other branches and the resultant infringement on personal time were examples of what the interviewees specifically referred to as an expectation of the company that the employees would go beyond what is required of them in their contracts.

The company's disregard for its employees' personal time suggests a large power distance. Power distance is "the extent to which . . . power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, p. 61). Japan is generally seen as a country with a high power distance, so employees are seldom consulted about changes in their work (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 58) and are often required to give up their personal time for the company. Although Robert had been in Japan for over 2 years at the time of the interview, he had never worked in a company like this *eikaiwa* chain before. This may be an example of organisational culture shock, as organisations exist within national cultures but also create their own cultures. An institution's organisational culture can exert a great effect on workers' motivation. Cultures contain "shared assumptions about what it means to be human" (Schein, 2004, p. 171) and therefore what motivates humans. But sometimes those assumptions are not shared; for example, these *eikaiwa* teachers, particularly Robert, were expected to act in ways that were at odds with what they were accustomed to. Some people may struggle with this, which causes conflict between views, because none of the teachers share the company's assumptions about human nature. The teachers' frustration at what they perceive to be the company's disregard for their personal time may be an example of what Hofstede et al. (2010) described as people from (what are generally considered) individualist societies struggling to deal with their place in a society generally considered to be collectivist, in which their needs and desires are subjugated to the needs of the group. It seems that these employees felt that their personal time is not valued by the company, which appears to have caused negativity among them and

had an adverse effect on their motivation. My feelings on this issue were similar to those of the interviewees: The intrusion on my personal time created negative feelings towards the company. In particular, the frequent travel to other branches, sometimes as far as 90 km away due to the company's decision that 100 km was within the bounds of a normal commute, made me feel irritated at first; this irritation grew to anger and frustration.

The interviewees also felt frustrated by the lack of visible opportunities for advancement within the company, beyond the occasional opening in management or teacher training. This did not motivate them to stay long-term or to feel much loyalty to the company. They all envisaged themselves doing the same job in 5 years' time if they were to remain with the company, which Robert vehemently asserted he did not want to do: "I don't wanna think about 5 years from now. I hope to God, oh Jesus, I'm not with the same company." What loyalty they felt was to their colleagues, students, or the branches in which they worked. Like the interviewees, I also felt frustrated that the *eikaiwa* career path appeared to be closed and, once I realised this, I began to lose motivation. The "contingent path" concept marries intrinsic and extrinsic motives to illustrate the importance of both to long-term motivation and places importance on the nature of the career path itself: An open-ended path will encourage long-term effort and by extension motivation; a closed path will discourage effort and therefore motivation (Raynor, cited in Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, pp. 166-167).

Teachers were *arubaito* (part-time) rather than full-time employees, on 1-year contracts without pension or healthcare contributions, but these facts did not seem to worry the interviewees too much. Six minutes of every 10-minute break were unpaid. Henry did note that as he was planning to be in Japan long-term he would like something more permanent with pension and healthcare contributions, but all three interviewees expressed little concern about the possibility of not getting a new contract every year because they believed that their performance and ratings from students preclude any possibility of them not being offered a new contract. However, this lack of stability is criticised in the literature. One of Appleby's (2013) interviewees, an *eikaiwa* teacher, described his "low-paid crappy job" under "crappy conditions" with "no stability" as a result of "commercial imperatives" (p. 142). Nagatomo (2013) quoted women who teach from home and see *eikaiwa* schools as an unattractive working option due to being underpaid and "treated as a 'disposable' commodity" (p. 6); that is, in fact, the reason those women do not work in *eikaiwa* schools. I was not concerned by the possibility of nonrenewal, but the feeling of living year-to-year was not stable, and being classified as a part-time employee despite working what I thought were full-time hours meant that I felt undervalued by the company.

This *eikaiwa* chain produced its own materials and trained teachers to follow a particular method and lesson structure, and the interviewees displayed some negativity towards the company's choice of curriculum and the uniformity of the lessons. Robert described the materials as "rubbish." The interviewees were not bothered by their lack of autonomy because they were able to tweak the structure of the preplanned lessons and go off on tangents. It was these in-class digressions, along with planning optional out-of-class activities, that seemed to provide most of the stimulation for these teachers. Robert, for example, had teaching experience in his home country, in a working environment in which he had more freedom over lesson content, style, and structure, so the contrast with this *eikaiwa* chain was stark and negatively affected his motivation. He said it was "disappointing" for him to have his freedom limited in this way. Autonomy is important for intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, cited in Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 162). One former *eikaiwa* teacher interviewed by Kubota (2011) described the *eikaiwa* industry's attitude to pedagogy as secondary to making money; it is after all a business, and "the structure of the curriculum . . . exemplifies this" (p. 485). In the *eikaiwa* chain in this study, students were able to book a lesson up to 1 minute before its scheduled start time, so teachers often did not know which students they would be teaching until the last minute, thus rendering any notion of teachers' planning lessons themselves impractical. To suit this booking system, the company's curriculum was designed so that students can take any lesson at any time in any branch of that chain. In my own case, working in a company where I was not able to plan my own lessons but rather merely teaching lessons planned by people I had never met, I felt that my autonomy was being stifled.

All three participants dismissed the company's initial training and ongoing training for in-service teachers as ineffective at best and at worst a "complete joke" (Robert). They seemed to feel that training was a box-ticking exercise rather than a concerted effort to develop teachers, and so when they were in the training sessions they felt bored and disinclined to participate. Similarly, participants in Bossaer's (2003) study criticised the minimal—and by implication, inadequate—training provision of "most schools" (pp. 18-19). I also felt that the 4 days of initial training were not sufficient to prepare me adequately for the company's specific curriculum and teaching methods, the ongoing training sessions were infrequent and not connected and therefore did not hold much value for me, and attendance at training sessions did not make me feel that I was improving as a teacher.

The interviewees and I experienced the introduction of a new curriculum with minimal training for in-service teachers, which the interviewees felt was inadequate. However, they were able to cope due to their experience and self-confidence. My feelings regarding the lack of training and support at a stressful time were similar to those of the interviewees.

There was some confusion among the interviewees over their role in the company. When asked about their perception of their role in the company, the interviewees listed several, including "contractor," "trouble-shooter," "customer service," "(because) that's part of what we were rewarded for," "the product," "[because] they would never advertise the books, they would advertise these young foreigners who you can have lovely conversations with," and to some extent a salesman, as they were encouraged to try and sell lessons. "Teacher" was mentioned down the list by Henry and Lewis and not at all by Robert. All three interviewees viewed the encouragement to sell lessons differently: Lewis initially stated that "the pushing of sales" was an unappealing aspect of the job but later said he was not forced to act as a salesman. Henry noted that not being pressured to make sales was a very positive aspect of the job.

The concept of teacher-as-product is evident in Appleby (2013), Bailey (2006, 2007) and Kubota (2011). These researchers, in different ways, focused on customers' desire as an aspect of the *eikaiwa* school experience, particularly the positioning of young, white, English-speaking men as objects of desire for young Japanese women. Bailey (2006) drew attention to the fact that *eikaiwa* school advertising presents the possibility of the "establishment of relationships with white males" (p. 105) and in one instance has the instructor "positioned as an object of consumption for [an] office lady" (p. 115) through the placement of their images in advertisements. Studies on *eikaiwa* schools have shown that it is the teacher's marketability as a (typically white) foreigner rather than teaching ability that seems to be most important to the *eikaiwa* business model. Kubota (2011) described *eikaiwa* as an industry that "commodifies and exploits whiteness and native speakers" (p. 473); Seargeant (2009) denounced the schools as "propagators of stereotype" (p. 94). The literature on *eikaiwa* schools depicts teachers as sexual bait, salesmen and women, and teachers. As Lewis noted, he felt like he himself was the focus of the company's advertising, rather than learning English. This appears to be an example of teachers as commercial fodder: Potential customers' desire for the teacher is used to entice them to pay for the company's service. The interviewees did not mention feeling sexualised through advertising. They did feel they had to act as salesmen. My feelings about my role in the company echoed those of the interviewees.

All three interviewees seemed to have what Lewis termed a "mixed bag" of collegial relationships. They all felt they enjoyed good relationships with some colleagues. However, all voiced concerns about some of their colleagues for various reasons: Lewis talked of being punched by a fellow teacher outside work and being sexually harassed by a female Japanese colleague; both incidents led to strained working relationships. Other complaints included what Henry felt were unsavoury opinions held by foreign colleagues

and aggressive behaviour towards Japanese staff members and Robert's frustration with a foreign colleague who Robert felt lacked motivation and a good grasp of English grammar. Henry went so far as to request a schedule change to avoid working with a foreign colleague he regarded as a bigot. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) highlighted the importance of good collegial relationships to teacher motivation (p. 163), and this topic emerged in the interviews as an influential factor in the interviewees' motivation. I enjoyed positive relationships with all of my colleagues, both Japanese and non-Japanese.

Discussion

The general undercurrent of frustration, dissatisfaction, and being undervalued that runs through the data suggests that there are numerous factors at play that negatively affect teacher motivation.

The interviewees and I were frustrated by the apparent lack of promotion opportunities in the company. The extent to which a teacher is able to think of his or her job as a career with potential for development can affect motivation. A lack of potential career development will probably lead to demotivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 166). The closed career path did not motivate the teachers to strive in their everyday working life. Their professional pride motivated them to do their best.

The standardisation of teaching content and methods in the *eikaiwa* chain "work[s] against promoting the diverse identities and incarnations of the language" (Seargeant, 2009, p. 100) and, one might venture, those teaching it. Additionally, the belief (mistaken or not) that one is valued more for one's skin colour or nationality than teaching ability or personality can also negatively affect motivation, as suggested by Kubota (2011) and Seargeant (2009).

Lack of clarity over the teacher's role or a conflict between teachers' perception of their role and the company's perception of their role can cause demotivation.

The interviewees all listed numerous problems in their relationships with several colleagues. It is feasible that having to face colleagues with whom one does not get along every day can lead to a loss of motivation, and the high number of problems mentioned suggests that there are problems in the company's hiring procedures.

Conclusion

Overall, the data showed that the teachers' motivation was strongly influenced in a negative way by their perceptions of several aspects of their working conditions: (a) an expectation that they would go beyond what is required of them in the contract, (b) perceived

disregard for their personal time, **(c)** the closed career path, (d) some of their relationships with colleagues, and (e) the curriculum. These generally matched my personal experience and are supported by previous literature on *eikaiwa* schools.

Although this was only a small-scale, exploratory study, the data offer an insight into what it is like to work for one of the national *eikaiwa* chains and the problems that foreign teachers in this chain experience. The data may ring true for foreign teachers in other *eikaiwa* chains and may also be of interest to those who are involved in the *eikaiwa* industry in other capacities.

This is an area that is ripe for further research on a larger scale to investigate (a) whether these problems exist throughout this company, (b) if they are present in other national chains, and (c) if and how the foreign teachers' experience differs in each chain. Further research might also include the management's input. Comparative studies featuring foreign teachers at national chains and independent *eikaiwa* schools would also be enlightening.

Bio Data

James Taylor taught English at universities in China and for an *eikaiwa* chain in Japan before joining Kanazawa Technical College, where he is an assistant professor of EFL. His research interests include teacher motivation, *eikaiwa* schools, student motivation, and study abroad. He enjoys studying languages, reading, and watching rugby league and football.

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Appendix A
Interview Guide for First Interviews

- Why did you become a teacher?
- What is a teacher?
- Does your current job allow you to be that?
- What motivates you professionally?
- What motivates you personally/materially?
- If you stay with your current employer, where do you see yourself in 5/10 years' time?

Potential topics to cover:

Training, support, curriculum, intellectual stimulation, salary, benefits, job security, career development.

Appendix B
Interview Guide for Follow-Up Interviews

Henry:
- What motivates you professionally?
- Do you find your job intellectually stimulating?
- Do you have a good relationship with your Japanese colleagues?
- Do you have a good relationship with your non-Japanese colleagues?
- What is your perception of your status/role in the company, what is it based on and how do you feel about it?
- Do you feel any loyalty to the company? How does this manifest itself?
- Do you feel you have job security? How does that make you feel?
- If you stay with your current employer, where do you see yourself in 5/10 years' time?

Robert:
- You say you don't find the classroom aspect intellectually stimulating, but would that be different if you were teaching a different subject?
- You said the lessons that you are expected to teach and the materials you are expected to use are "rubbish." How do you feel as a professional about going into the classroom with "rubbish" lessons?
- Do you have a good relationship with your Japanese colleagues?
- Do you have a good relationship with your non-Japanese colleagues?
- What is your perception of your status/role in the company, what is it based on and how do you feel about it?
- Do you feel any loyalty to the company? How does this manifest itself?
- Do you feel you have job security? How does that make you feel?

Lewis:
- Did you have a good relationship with your Japanese colleagues?
- Did you have a good relationship with your non-Japanese colleagues?
- Would you have liked more supervision or observation when starting out as a nov-

ice teacher? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- What was your perception of your status/role in the company, what was it based on and how did you feel about it?
- Did you feel any loyalty to the company? How did it manifest itself?
- Did you feel you had job security? How did that make you feel?

Topics to cover:

Intellectually stimulating, relationship with colleagues, job security, loyalty to company, workload (i.e., number of classes), demotivation, career development.