

# Research Forum

## Motivators and Demotivators to Teach English in Japanese Secondary Schools

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This paper presents an investigation of motivators and demotivators for Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) working in secondary schools. A total of 8 JTEs participated by answering a questionnaire containing 3 open-ended questions (2 were subsequently interviewed). Questionnaire results indicated that participants were influenced by 4 factors (i.e., student attitudes, teacher autonomy, self-evaluation, and relationship with colleagues). The follow-up interviews with 2 of the participants provided additional information on some of these influencing factors. Future research should explore changes in teacher motivation in specific contexts.

本研究は、日本の中学校、高校で教える日本人英語教師 (JTEs) の動機づけを増大、減退させる要因を調査した。参加者は8名のJTEsである。8名の参加者は、質問紙に回答し、そのうち2名は、さらにインタビュー調査へ参加した。質問紙によって、参加者は、主に以下の4つから影響を受けていることが明らかになった: 生徒の態度、教師オートノミー、自己評価、同僚との関係。さらにインタビュー調査によって、これらの要因が教師にどのように影響を与えているかを明らかにした。本研究によって、特定の状況下で教える教師の動機づけがどのように変化していくか、さらに調査していく重要性が示唆された。

**Keywords:** Japanese teachers of English; motivation; teacher motivation

**A**lthough motivation is one of the most extensively researched concepts in the field of second language acquisition, nearly all related studies have focused on learner motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). However, interest in teacher motivation has recently increased (Mercer & Kostoulas, 2018). Two factors appear to have influenced this expanding research focus. First, research has indicated that teacher motivation and learner motivation are interconnected (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). That is, learners are likely to be motivated when teachers are highly motivated. Second, motivation is important for the teachers themselves, especially regarding professional development (Kim, Kim, & Zhang, 2014). However, relatively few studies have focused on teachers (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2015). Those concentrating on secondary school teachers are especially few in number. The focus of this study, therefore, was on EFL teachers in Japanese secondary schools by qualitatively examining their teaching motivation.

### **Motivation and Teacher Motivation**

Before discussing teacher motivation, it is important to clarify what is generally meant by motivation. It is an abstract and complicated concept with no straightforward definition. In psychology, for example, it is said that “motivation is the study of why individuals or organisms behave as they do: What gets their behavior started, and what directs, energizes, sustains, and eventually terminates action” (Graham & Weiner, 2012, p. 367). Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) indicated that in applied linguistics “motivation is responsible for why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity, and how hard they are going to pursue it” (p. 4).

As a concept, teacher motivation is not as straightforward as learner motivation. This is mainly because teachers are involved in various kinds of activities as part of their work; for example, they teach subject matter, take care of students in their homeroom classes and club activities, and sit on school committees. Here, they need to study their own subjects and issues related to teaching. One example of teacher motivation is when a teacher attends a conference on language teaching over a weekend despite being very busy. The teacher may do this because they would like to learn more in general or improve their teaching methods. In other words, a teacher’s behavior can be supported by their desire to learn or improve skills.

Teacher motivation is, therefore, important for their overall work. It is important for why teachers decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity, and how hard they pursue it, according to the definition of motivation by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011). Thus,

teacher motivation supports teachers' behavior overall, both in working and learning.

### Previous Studies on Teacher Motivation

Previous studies on teacher motivation can be divided into two main groups: (a) those on the factors that motivate and demotivate teachers and (b) those about changes in teacher motivation. One of the most researched aspects involves the factors that increase and decrease motivation (e.g., Aydin, 2012; Johnson, 2001; Kassabgy, Boraie, & Schmidt, 2001; Sinclair, 2008; Sugino, 2010; Tsutsumi, 2014). In such studies, data were collected in various contexts ranging from elementary schools to universities. Table 1 shows the factors identified.

Table 1. Motivators and Demotivators for Teachers as Found in Previous Studies

Motivators	Demotivators
Student growth	Student attitudes
Classroom environment	School facilities
Working in a good school	Classroom environment
Flexible working hours	A large number of students per class
School administration	Lack of/poor teaching materials
The possibility for promotion	Curriculum
Freedom	Working conditions
Enjoyment	Relationships with staff members
Training opportunities	Parents
Good salary	Lack of training opportunities
	Poor salary

*Note.* Data taken from Aydin (2012), Johnson (2001), Kassabgy et al. (2001), Sinclair (2008), Sugino (2010), and Tsutsumi (2014).

Questionnaires are common tools for investigating the factors that increase and decrease teacher motivation. Although learner motivation studies have mostly adopted questionnaires for use with many participants, it is common for studies on teacher motivation to employ qualitative methods with a small number of participants (e.g., Gao & Xu, 2014; Kumazawa, 2013). For

instance, Padwad and Dixit (2016) investigated changes in both teacher and learner motivation as a result of adopting different classroom strategies. The participants were seven teachers in India who received a list of classroom strategies and learned how to use them. They were then asked to choose several strategies for use in their classrooms. Results indicated that the newly employed strategies changed learner motivation and attitudes. These positive changes then affected the teachers, who improved their own attitudes toward students. It was concluded that even small classroom strategy changes can positively affect both learners and teachers.

As indicated, previous studies have revealed many factors that motivate and demotivate teachers, and some have qualitatively described changes in teacher motivation. These studies were conducted among teachers in a variety of contexts. Some have been conducted in the Japanese context (e.g., Sugino, 2010), but most of these have focused on the university setting. In other words, research on Japanese secondary school teacher motivation is still extremely limited.

## **Study Purpose**

In this study, I investigated the motivation of Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) in a secondary-school setting. Japanese secondary school teachers spend a significant amount of time with their students, being required to do a great deal of work both in terms of teaching English and performing other educational roles. These teachers must, therefore, be appropriately motivated in order to be most effective. The two factors that were examined in this study were (a) the motivating and demotivating factors for JTEs and (b) the types of motivation they experienced.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

The participants were eight JTEs from junior and senior high schools, selected through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is especially useful when there is difficulty accessing suitable research participants (Dörnyei, 2007). Given that I had limited access to possible research participants at the time, I decided to find participants through this method. Potential participants were asked to find other suitable participants. Participant details are summarized in Table 2. Each participant was given an explanation of the study's purpose and asked to sign a consent form before participating.

Table 2. Participant Details

Participant	Gender	Age	Academic background	School type	Teaching experience	Interview participation
Aoi	F	20s	BA	public high school (full-time)	2 years	Yes
Hana	F	20s	BA	public high school (full-time)	2 years	Yes
Haruto	M	20s	BA	private high school and university (part-time)	4 months	No
Rio	F	20s	BA	national high school (part-time)	6 months	No
Sakura	F	20s	BA	public high school (full-time)	4 years	No
Takumi	M	20s	MA (abroad)	private junior high school (part-time)	1 year	No
Yui	F	20s	BA	private junior high school and high school (full-time)	2 years	No
Yusuke	M	30s	MA	private junior high school and high school (part-time)	6 years	No

*Note.* All participant names are pseudonyms.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data were collected through questionnaires and semistructured interviews. Because a focus of this study was the examination of the factors influencing JTE motivation, it was important to gain a qualitative understanding about each teacher's related ideas; therefore, two data collection tools were selected. First, a two-part questionnaire was distributed online. Part 1 consisted of open-ended questions and asked teachers to describe the factors that motivated and demotivated them when they taught English. Part 2 asked for basic biographical information. The questionnaire is in Appendix A.

Second, semistructured interviews lasting approximately 60 minutes each were then conducted in Japanese with two of the participants, Hana and Aoi. They were chosen to participate for reasons of convenience (e.g., accessibility, availability, and willingness). They were asked to describe the factors that motivated and demotivated them while teaching English,

the kinds of difficulties they experienced and how they overcame them, and the types of perceptions they had about student motivation. Sample questions are in Appendix B. Each interview was digitally recorded and fully transcribed in Japanese. I later translated this information into English for inclusion in this paper.

Questionnaire and interview data were analyzed separately. First, I examined the questionnaire data and placed the responses into two categories (i.e., motivators and demotivators). I then further categorized the responses into several groups based on their meanings. After completing this process, I coded the interviews in two different stages, following Yatsu (2015). The first stage involved investigation; it was necessary to read the data carefully, categorize them according to meaning, and then apply labels. The second stage consisted of summarization. This involved classifying, organizing, and integrating the coded data obtained during the first stage. Here, emergent themes were revealed based on common points. Based on Yatsu's coding method, I carefully read the transcripts in Japanese, categorized them based on their meanings, and labeled each segment. I then examined each label and categorized those containing the same meanings to create larger groups. These two stages were equivalent to initial and actual coding processes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### **Questionnaire Results**

The results from Part 1 of the questionnaire are summarized in Table 3. The questionnaire comments were divided into several categories. These categories were taken from previous studies involving different contexts. Concerning student attitudes, positive teacher–student relationships were motivating factors (Tsutsumi, 2014). The availability of various materials and methods also motivated teachers (Kassabgy et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2014; Sugino, 2010; Tsutsumi, 2014). Self-evaluation appeared to be related to teacher confidence as well (Sinclair, 2008). Positive relationships and communication with colleagues were additional motivating factors for teachers (Sugino, 2010).

Table 3. Factors That Motivate and Demotivate Teachers

Factors that motivate	Factors that demotivate
1. Student attitudes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are interested in my personal stories in class</li> <li>• Students are interested in English</li> <li>• Students are motivated to use English</li> <li>• Students are smiling, trying to listen to English, and speaking</li> </ul>	1. Student attitudes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students have low motivation</li> <li>• Students do not respond to questions well</li> </ul>
2. Teacher autonomy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can teach with my favorite materials</li> <li>• I can teach something I am interested in</li> </ul>	2. Teacher autonomy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am always required to teach with a grammar textbook</li> <li>• I feel that the content of the textbook has not been sufficiently updated</li> <li>• I have to teach as other teachers do</li> </ul>
3. Self-evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am satisfied with my English lesson</li> <li>• I find problems in my class</li> </ul>	3. Self-evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am not sufficiently prepared for the class</li> <li>• I have anxiety over my English abilities</li> </ul>
4. The relationship with other teachers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When other teachers rely on me</li> </ul>	

### Interview Discussions

The questionnaire responses revealed some of the factors that motivated and demotivated teachers. However, this basic information was insufficient for examining how these factors led to either motivation or demotivation. Interviews were, therefore, conducted with two of the participants. Subsequent analyses revealed the three major factors of (a) student attitudes, (b) teacher autonomy, and (c) relationships with colleagues.

### ***Student Attitudes***

The first factor that both teachers mentioned was student attitudes. Teachers that interact with students in daily teaching are constantly influenced by exchanges with students. Students can be both motivators and demotivators for teachers in this context. Aoi shared a time when she was motivated by her students: “I saw students react to what I said and could tell whether they understood or not. Students sometimes say, ‘I study English hard’ outside the classroom.” She felt motivated when students responded like this during class. Students with positive attitudes toward English also motivated her.

Student attitudes sometimes demotivate teachers, however. For instance, Hana described her first teaching experience:

Right after I became a teacher, I was in charge of the 2nd-year students. They had been in school longer than me and knew the school well. Because of this, the superior-subordinate relationship was totally the opposite. Students felt that I was subordinate and that they were superior to me. The atmosphere in the class was not serious, and when I introduced an activity to practice speaking English, students were like, “What is this person talking about?” They didn’t join the activity at all. Of course, there were some diligent students, but the students who didn’t listen were prominent. Students didn’t involve themselves in the class I prepared, and they didn’t understand what I wanted to teach. It was sad. (Hana)

Hana’s students felt they were superior to Hana because they had been in the school longer than her. Because of this, they did not participate seriously in the class. This made Hana lose her motivation to teach students.

At the same time, however, these student attitudes motivated Hana to alter the way she taught classes:

Even though I prepared speaking activities, it didn’t work at all. During pair work, one student did nothing, while the other didn’t know what to do even though they were diligent students. So, I thought it was meaningless and decided to teach a classical lesson by only explaining the points and reading the text aloud. (Hana)

In this situation, Hana was demotivated to continue introducing group and pair work. She thus began focusing on individual student activities rather



than having them work in pairs or groups. Hana was, therefore, demotivated by her students during her 1st-year experience. This eventually motivated her to employ an alternative through which she could better gain the attention of her students. Previous studies have also shown that student attitudes can be both motivators and demotivators (e.g., Sugino, 2010).

### ***Teacher Autonomy***

Another important factor for teachers is teaching using their preferred methods. Teachers prefer having autonomy in the classroom. As indicated in the previous section, Hana experienced many difficulties at the beginning of her teaching career. However, her situation changed when she was able to teach using her favorite teaching style the following year. She stated the following:

In my school, a subject teacher who was also a homeroom teacher was able to decide on basic teaching principles. Based on my experiences, I decided that students needed to prepare for the class at home . . . Teachers need to prepare handouts so that students can prepare for the class at home. I also decided how students kept notebooks and when they were collected.  
(Hana)

Hana taught 1st-year students in her 2nd year of teaching. Students were divided into several classes taught by different teachers. Teachers, therefore, needed to follow basic principles to avoid significant deviation. Hana was able to determine these principles, and thus had the autonomy to choose her favorite teaching method. She said, "I didn't feel that teaching was painful, unlike last year, and it went better than I thought."

Therefore, Hana had autonomy in her teaching. Autonomy is the feeling that one is in control of their decisions within a social environment; this is a basic psychological human need (Ryan & Deci , 2000). It is an especially important factor for teachers who are motivated through control of the teaching methods and materials (Sugino, 2010).

### ***Relationships With Colleagues***

Another factor that could be identified from both teachers' responses was relationships with colleagues. Both Aoi and Hana had difficult times right after they began teaching. However, both had supportive colleagues:

I had an advisor for one year right after I became a teacher. This teacher observed my class every week and gave me several pieces of advice, such as “How about trying this?” This supported me. My colleagues also listened to me; we exchanged information about students, such as “This student was talking like this.” (Hana)

When other teachers came to observe my classes, they told me that I was not looking at student behavior very much. I realized this for the first time. I noticed that others looked at my behavior. (Aoi)

Both Hana and Aoi obtained advice from colleagues about improving their classes. In other words, both had relationships with colleagues in which they received advice that led to improvements. As Hana was in a very difficult situation, this advice supported her in maintaining motivation. Previous studies have shown that relationships with colleagues can be both motivators and demotivators (Sugino, 2010; Tsutsumi, 2014). In this study, though, both Aoi and Hana shared only positive experiences, which indicated that relationships with colleagues were motivators rather than demotivators.

## **Conclusion**

The two factors examined in this study were (a) what motivated and demotivated JTEs and (b) the types of motivation they experienced. An analysis of questionnaire data uncovered that participants were influenced by four factors: student attitudes, teacher autonomy, self-evaluation, and their relationships with other teachers. Subsequent interviews with two teachers revealed the processes by which some of these factors influenced teachers. Both interviewees shared experiences in which they were motivated and demotivated by their students. The interviews also indicated that teacher autonomy was one way to promote positive attitudes toward teaching. The teachers also found it helpful to obtain advice from colleagues; both participants had colleagues who helped them improve their teaching methods.

This study involved a small number of participants (i.e., eight), and was therefore limited in scope. Nevertheless, this study contributes to a better understanding of teacher motivation in Japanese secondary schools while also illustrating how teacher motivation can be altered through a complicated process. As indicated in the interview section, Hana was first

demotivated by student attitudes. However, this eventually motivated her to change her teaching methods. Teachers also tend to be influenced by various factors that influence one another. This means that motivation may arise differently according to context.

The results of this study suggest that future research should focus on teacher motivation in a more contextually specific manner because there are a variety of secondary schools in Japan. For instance, teachers working at prestigious schools are expected to focus on helping students pass entrance exams. However, this is not the case at all schools. In other words, teachers have different roles depending on the type of school in which they work. Teachers may be thus motivated and demotivated based on different factors depending on the context. Additional research should thus focus on participants in different contexts to determine how they are specifically motivated and demotivated.

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## Appendix A

### Original Questionnaire (in Japanese)

#### Part 1

以下の質問に対して、ご自身の考えを経験に基づいた上で、自由に記入してください。

1. 教師として英語を教える上で、どのような場合に(何によって)、英語を教えることに対して意欲的になると感じますか。
2. 教師として英語を教える上で、どのような場合に(何によって)、英語を教えることに対して意欲がなくなると感じますか。
3. 英語教師として英語を教える上で、生徒に対して、どのようなことができるようになることを、最も求めていますか。

#### Part 2

1. 性別:1つ選んでください。  
男性、女性、答えたくない
2. 年齢:1つ選んでください。  
20代、30代、40代、50代、60代
3. お持ちになっている最終学位を選んでください。  
学士、修士、博士
4. 大学では何を専攻していましたか。
5. 何年間学校で英語を教えていますか。  
中学校\_\_\_年  
高校\_\_\_年  
大学\_\_\_年  
非常勤講師として\_\_\_年  
常勤の教員として\_\_\_年  
その他\_\_\_年
6. 現在どのような学校で勤務されていますか。それぞれあてはまるものを選んでください。  
(a) 中学校 / 高校  
(b) 私立 / 公立  
(c) レベル:高い / 普通 / 低い

7. 英語教育関係の学会や研究会に参加していますか。参加している場合、学会や研究会の名称をお書きください。

### **English Translation of the Questionnaire**

#### **Part 1**

Please freely write down your ideas for the following questions.

1. When you teach English, what makes you want to teach enthusiastically?
2. When you teach English, what makes you feel reluctant to teach English?
3. What do you think is the most important thing for your students to achieve in learning English?

#### **Part 2**

1. Gender: Please choose the appropriate one  
male, female, do not want to answer
2. Age: Please choose the appropriate one  
20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s
3. Academic background: Please choose the one you have  
BA / MA / PhD
4. What was your major in university?
5. How many years have you been teaching English?  
junior high school \_\_ years  
high school \_\_ years  
university \_\_ years  
part-time \_\_ years  
full-time \_\_ years  
other \_\_ years
6. In what type of school are you teaching now? Please choose the appropriate one for each.  
(a) junior high school/high school  
(b) private school/public school  
(c) academic level: high, middle, low

7. Do you sometimes attend conferences or seminars on English education? If so, please write down the names of these events.

## **Appendix B**

### ***Sample Questions for Semistructured Interviews (in Original Japanese)***

- 今まで教えてきた中で、うまくいったと感じた経験を教えてください。
- 今まで教えてきた中で、うまくいかなかったと感じた経験を教えてください。
- 困難な状況のとき、何が支えになりましたか。
- どのようなときに、できる限りうまく教えたいと感じますか。
- どのようなときに、教えることに対して意欲が下がると感じますか。
- ご自身が教える生徒の動機づけは、どのような状態だと感じますか。

### ***Translated Sample Questions for Semistructured Interviews (in English)***

- Please describe the teaching experiences that went well.
- Please describe the teaching experiences that did not go well.
- What supported you when you were experiencing something difficult?
- When do you feel you would like to teach the best you can?
- When do you feel you are reluctant to teach?
- How do you perceive your students' motivation?