

Factors Affecting EFL Teachers' Motivation in Thai University: A Case Study of EFL Teachers at Tertiary Level

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Abstract

This study aimed to find out factors that motivate and demotivate EFL teachers in Thai university. The participants were 70 Thai teaching staff at Chulalongkorn University Language Institute in Thailand. A self-completed open-ended and close-ended questionnaire was devised. Then, the scores of rate and responses were compared to investigate the factors that affect EFL teachers' motivation. The result revealed that teachers value interpersonal relationships with students and colleagues along with other intrinsic motivations such as imparting knowledge and providing service to society. The result also showed that teachers are demotivated by extrinsic factors such as heavy workload and low salary which are believed to lead to job dissatisfaction.

Keywords: motivation, teacher motivation, self-determination theory (SDT), job satisfaction

Introduction

Motivation is a widely researched topic in the field of second language learning and teaching. In recent years, the study of learners' motivation in second/foreign language learning has been receiving greater attention especially in the areas of strategies for improving learner motivation. Many studies were carried out (Dörnyei, 1994a; 1994b., Oxford and Ehrman, 1995, Oxford and Shearin, 1994) in the hope that the identified characteristics of motivated ESL/EFL learners would help teachers motivate their own students. With most studies in this field being focused on the attitude and motivation that the student brings to the classroom environment, there has been little work done on the attitude and motivation that the language teacher brings to the classroom. In fact, one of the most often overlooked areas of second language acquisition is the motivation level of the teacher (Praver & Oga-Baldwin, 2008). Still a number of studies have suggested that there is a strong link between the teacher and the learners' motivation, achievement, negative feelings and effort (Chambers, 1999; Clement, Dörnyei & Noel, 1994; Dörnyei, 2003; Dörnyei, 2005). Dörnyei (2005) further commented that teacher motivation is a key factor in L2 students' learning and achievement. Kassabgy, Boraie and Schmidt (2001) also commented that teachers have a very important influence on the motivation of language learners, but we know very little about ESL/ EFL teacher motivation.

Consequently, the lack of research in the field of teacher motivation limits our understanding of what motivates and demotivates ESL/EFL teachers. With this in mind, this study aims to investigate factors that promote L2 teachers' motivation. The study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the factors that affect EFL teachers' motivation in Thai University?
2. What can be done to increase the motivation of EFL teachers in Thai University?

Literature Review

Definition of Motivation

Motivation is considered to be the driving force behind all actions performed and is thought to be 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 (Dörnyei, 2001). However, it is not easy to clearly define what motivation means (Chambers, 1999). Robertson and Smith (1985) defined ‘motivation’ as a psychological concept related to the strength and direction of human behavior while Vroom (1995) defined motivation as asserted to be the explanation of choice or direction. From these definitions, it is clear that motivation is the driving force behind most of human behaviours.

Self-Determination Theory

Some Historical Background

The theoretical framework adopted in this study is self-determination theory by Ryan & Deci (2000) which looks at the intrinsic and extrinsic factors and how they are related to motivation. It is claimed that this self-determination theory has been the most influential and studied theory of motivation (Winn, Harley, Wilcox & Pemberton, 2006). Additionally, teacher motivation is believed to be synonymous with work motivation. In the larger field of motivation studies, work motivation is “a broad construct pertaining to the conditions and processes that account for the arousal, direction, magnitude, and maintenance of effort in a person’s job” (Katzell & Thompson, 1990). Hence, many researchers in the field of teacher motivation have come to adopt the work motivation theories (e.g. expectancy-value, self-efficacy, goal-setting, goal orientation) to investigate factors that motivate and demotivate teachers.

The self-determination theory (SDT) originated from the model of intrinsic and extrinsic work motivation by Porter and Lawler (1968) which defines intrinsic motivation as a result of doing an activity because people find it interesting and gain satisfaction from the activity itself. In other words, SDT associates autonomy, relatedness and competence with intrinsic motivation. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2010) further characterized intrinsic motivation in the field of language teaching as “the inherent joy to pursue a meaningful activity related to one’s manner, within a vivacious collegial community with self-efficacy, instructional goals and performance feedback being critical factors in modifying the level of effort and persistence.” Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, requires an instrumentality between the activity itself with some forms of rewards in order to create satisfaction. In other words, intrinsic motivation is related to internal feelings, while extrinsic motivation is externally prompted by instrumental values such as avoiding sanctions and acquiring future valuable returns.

Within the continuum of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, SDT came up with the concept of internalization which they believe could allow a person to shift from being extrinsically motivated to becoming intrinsically motivated. According to Deci and Ryan (1985), internalization refers to ‘taking in’ a behavioral regulation and the value that underlies it. This process, thus, focuses on how extrinsically motivated behavior can become autonomous or intrinsically motivated behaviour (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In SDT, the terms autonomous motivation and controlled motivation are adopted with autonomous motivation occurring when a person engages in an activity because he thinks the activity is interesting. In contrast, controlled motivation means acting with a sense of pressure, a sense of having to engage in the activity. The use of extrinsic reward was found to induce controlled motivation. Together autonomous and controlled motivation stand in contrast to amotivation which involves a lack of intention and motivation (Gagne & Deci,

2005). SDT regards these two concepts (autonomous and controlled motivation) as a continuum and is interested in how extrinsic motivation can vary from being autonomous to being controlled.

According to SDT, extrinsic motivation can move from being controlled to being autonomous through the process of internalization which involves three stages: introjection, identification, and integration. With introjection, a person feels controlled by the rules and regulations in their organization. In this type of condition, a person is pressured into behaving in a certain way in order to feel worthy and involvement. The next step towards being autonomously extrinsically motivated requires that people identify with the value of behavior because of their own beliefs. With identification, a person has greater freedom and willingness in pursuing an activity because it matches with their personal goals and identities. During this stage, a person feels that the activity that he is involved in can reflect some aspects of his characters. The last stage of this process which allows extrinsic motivation to be truly autonomous is called integration. At this stage, people have a full sense that the behavior is an integral part of who they are, that what they do comes from the sense of self and is thus, self-determined. Integration represents the most advanced form of extrinsic motivation and shares some qualities with intrinsic motivation.

To summarise, SDT proposes that a person's motivation to do certain activities can range from amotivation, which is wholly lacking in self-determination to intrinsic motivation, which is self-determined (see Figure 1). Between intrinsic motivation and amotivation, there are three types of extrinsic motivation which are introjected, identified, and integrated being progressively more self-determined (Gagne & Deci, 2005).

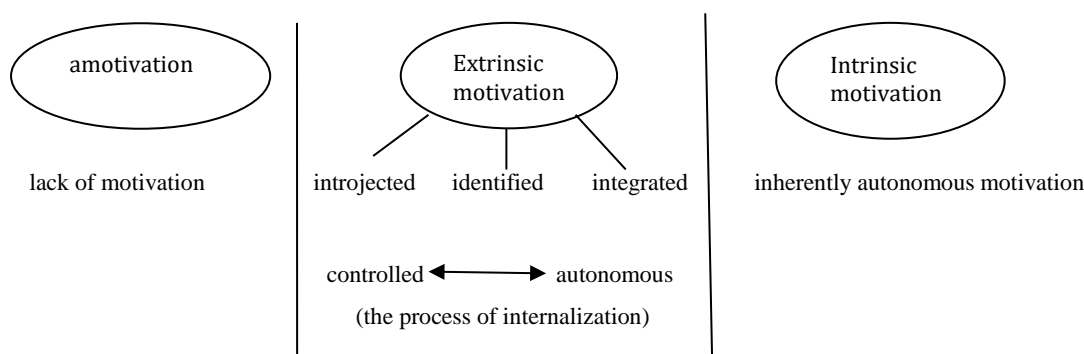


Figure 1. The self-determination continuum showing amotivation, extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation

Consequently, within the theoretical framework discussed above, factors explored under intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, underpinned by self-determination theory, may facilitate an understanding of: a) the factors affecting EFL teacher motivation in the Thai university context; and b) any appropriate measures to sustain or improve teacher motivation.

ESL/EFL Teacher Motivation

The studies on teacher motivation began in the 1990s when researchers began to realize that there were few studies in this area and how teacher motivation could have a major impact on student motivation as Dörnyei (2001) suggested that the teacher's level of enthusiasm and commitment is one of the most important factors that affect the learners' motivation to learn.

Based on the self-determination theory, in order for teachers to fulfill the intrinsic needs, they should feel a sense of class autonomy, a sense of accomplishment in teaching as well as a feeling of being connected to students, other teaching staff and the administration staff. According to Aoki and Smith (1999), teachers are intrinsically motivated when they have capacity, freedom, and responsibility to make choices for their own teaching. On the other hand, teacher's level of motivation is also affected by their physical and social surroundings. Dörnyei (2001) defines these extrinsic influences into two categories: (a) macro-contextual influences, and (b) micro-contextual influences. Macro influences are related to all members of society ranging from parents to politicians as well as people on the street. Micro influences, on the other hand, are teacher specific and relate to the physical teaching environment which includes class size, resources and facilities, collegial relations, school rewards and feedback and institutional policies. Consequently, extrinsic factors such as unsatisfactory salary, poor working conditions, low status and heavy workload can contribute to demotivation among teachers (Spear, Gould, & Lee, 2000).

However, as noted earlier, very little is known about ESL or EFL teacher motivation (Kassabgy et al., 2001). A study conducted by Pennington (1992) surveying 95 U.S. language teachers at post secondary level on ESL teacher motivation was probably the first in this field and it was found that the enhancement of teacher motivation came from personal growth and career options. Later, Pennington (1995) studied ESL teachers in secondary schools, also by questionnaires, in the United States, Australia and Hong Kong and concluded that they were mainly motivated by intrinsic work process and human relations factors.

A study investigating demotivating factors among teachers was conducted by Crookes (1997) and it was found that lack of training, lack of control of curriculum, irrelevant administrative workload, isolation and inadequate pay for preparation work among factors that demotivate teachers. He further highlighted the need for professional development and the training.

Dinham and Scott (2000) conducted a survey among 2000 teachers in Australia, New Zealand, and England and reported that teachers are often motivated by intrinsic factors while some extrinsic matters can demotivate teachers. Some intrinsic factors that motivate teachers include student achievement, positive relationship with students, development of professional skills and a sense of belonging to the institution. On the other hand, some external demotivating factors for L2 teachers are heavy teacher workload and lack of support from the institution they work for.

Kassabgy et al. (2001) surveyed ESL teachers from Egypt and Hawaii with closed and open-ended questionnaires about their rewards, satisfaction and views on motivational factors. They found that teachers value intrinsic aspects of work more, and that there is a positive relationship between rewards (both intrinsic and extrinsic) and job satisfaction.

Wang (2005) conducted a study that explored intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors among EFL teachers in China. The study found three factors influencing teacher motivation in China: demographic traits, intrinsic factors relating to their inner feelings about the job, and extrinsic factors relating to the characteristics of work itself.

Another study by Addison and Brundrett (2008) argued that teacher motivation is mostly related to intrinsic factors such as positive responses from students, the sense of achievement from their teaching and supportive colleagues. However, poor responses from students, working long hours and heavy workload were listed as extrinsic demotivating factors.

From studies discussed so far it was found that these studies are primarily concerned with ESL teachers at school level. Additionally, factors that motivate L2 teachers are mostly intrinsic ones while those that demotivate L2 teachers are extrinsic factors. Most importantly, regarding studies on EFL motivation in a Thai university context, only a few studies (Cho,

2013; Kitjaroonchai & Kitjaroonchai, 2012; Vibulphol, 2016) have been conducted and they focused on strategies to improve motivation among Thai EFL students. As a result, the aim of this study is that the findings may provide insights to the improvement of EFL teacher development and management system that could ultimately benefit both teachers and students and to add to the existing knowledge of ESL/EFL teacher motivation.

Research Methodology

Participants

Although all academic staff (n=70) at Chulalongkorn University Language Institute (CULI) in Thailand were asked to take part in the completion of questionnaire, only 23 questionnaires were completed and returned to the researcher. Among the respondents who completed the questionnaire, nineteen (82.61%) were female instructors. Three respondents (13.04%) were male instructors while one did not identify his/her gender. The majority of respondents held a master's degree (n = 15, 65.22%) and eight instructors (34.78%) held a doctoral degree. On average, this group of respondents had 13.54 years of teaching. Most of the respondents were between 31 and 40 years old (n= 8, 34.78%), six (26.09%) between 41 and 50 years old, five (21.74%) between 25 and 30 years old, and four (17.39%) aged 51 years old and over.

Instrument

Questionnaire

A self-completed open-ended and close-ended questionnaire was used in this study. For content validity, the questionnaire had been validated by experts in the field. The questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first section elicited personal information of the participant. The second and third sections were close-ended question statements which participants had to rate on a 5-point Likert scale. The second section probed the extent to which intrinsic and extrinsic factors contributed to a teacher's choice of profession while the third section asked to what extent the current teaching job affected intrinsic and extrinsic factors with 32 items matching those in the second section.

Section four of the questionnaire consisted of 3 open-ended questions which aimed to expand on the information from close-ended questions. They asked for recommendations for possible improvement with two questions addressing factors that could have positive and negative influences on their job.

Results

The first research question: What are the factors that affect EFL teachers' motivation in Thai University?

According to the result, the participants think that most of the characteristics mentioned in the questionnaire are somewhat important with 20 items receiving overall means of 4.0 or higher, while only 1 item was rated below 3.0 or somewhat unimportant. Intrinsic factors were identified as: (1) imparting knowledge, (2) personal achievement or challenge and (3) service to society. In contrast, factors related to material returns, job security and interactions with students, colleagues or management were categorized as extrinsic factors. In this study, it was found that most of the items with the mean score of more than 4 were intrinsic items. These intrinsic items are listed in Table 1 below:

Table 1*Items reflecting intrinsic factors*

| Items reflecting intrinsic factors | means |
|---|--------------|
| Helping my students to learn English | 4.696 |
| Having the freedom to do what is necessary in performing a good teaching | 4.565 |
| Being able to work independently and use my own initiative | 4.522 |
| Having a job in which I can learn and develop my abilities to my full potential | 4.391 |
| Having a job in which I can perform to the best of my ability | 4.348 |
| Providing service to society | 4.304 |

As shown in Table 1, helping students to learn English (which falls under the theme of *imparting knowledge*) was rated the most important. Other factors which are related to personal achievement or goals were rated near the top range of very important with providing service to society receiving the lowest mean score. In summary, regarding research question one, it was found that intrinsic items were rated as more important than extrinsic items with helping my students to learn English being the most important factor that can motivate teachers.

The second research question: What can be done to increase the motivation of EFL teachers in Thai University?

The information from the third section of the close-ended questionnaire reveals the extent to which the participants' current teaching job affected their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In other words, the question aims to look at the teachers' degree of motivation through job satisfaction. This information together with comments from the open-ended questions from the fourth section addressed the second research question. The findings revealed that 13 items out of 32 items were rated above the means of 4 (4 = agree), which suggested that participants were perceived to be satisfied with these aspects of their current jobs.

Table 2*Items reflecting satisfactory in their job*

| Items reflecting satisfactory in their job | means |
|---|--------------|
| I work for a reputable organization | 4.304 |
| My job is challenging | 4.261 |
| I have flexible working hours | 4.217 |
| I have a job in which I can perform to the best of my ability | 4.217 |
| I have a friendly relationship with my students | 4.13 |
| My teaching job is enjoying and stimulating | 4.087 |
| My students evaluated me positively | 4.045 |
| I know that I am helping my students to learn English | 4.043 |
| I know that I am providing service to society | 4.043 |
| I have good relationships with my colleagues | 4.043 |
| I have a good relationship with the person I report to | 4.0 |
| I am proud of my job | 4.0 |

It is interesting to note that the top four items with highest mean scores represented a mix of both intrinsic factor (I have a job in which I can perform to the best of my ability) and autonomous extrinsic factors which include a sense of belonging to the institution and flexible workload.

Apart from these job- related factors, the findings also revealed that items which show the satisfaction of the needs to be connected to others such as good relationship with students, colleagues and management were the factors that keep teachers satisfied. According to SDT, it is believed that these feelings of relatedness (Gagne & Deci, 2005) could result in the more motivated employees and support teacher's tendency to internalize the values and regulation of the organization. This study seems to confirm this assumption with 'I have a friendly relationship with my students', 'My students evaluated me positively.', ' I have good relationships with my colleagues.', ' I have a good relationship with the person I report to.' rated above the overall means of 4.0 meaning the participants were satisfied with these aspects of their job.

In summary, in an attempt to answer research question two, it was found that teachers appeared to be half satisfied with their job with only 13 out of 32 items being rated higher than the mean score of 4.0. Among these 13 items, most were related to personal feelings and good relationships with students, colleagues and management or what SDT terms the feeling of relatedness. It is important to note that this strong sense of relatedness could help teachers internalize the value and regulation of the organization, thus, moving them closer to gaining intrinsic motivation.

Apart from the data gained from the two sections of the questionnaire, comments from the open-ended questions in section 4 were also analysed and then categorized to find out what could improve motivation among teachers. Qualitative comments from the teachers provided some further insights into a) the factors that could motivate and demotivate them in their workplace and b) what could be done to improve the situation.

Based on SDT, the data obtained from the open-ended questionnaire will be categorized into three sections: items that lead to amotivation (i.e. lack of motivation), items that are extrinsically motivated and items that are intrinsically motivated. According to the result of the open-ended questionnaire, it was found that teacher's amotivation can result from lack of motivation among students, heavy workload, low salary and poor employee welfare, lack of cooperation among colleagues and unethical and unprofessional administration. These demotivating factors are mostly extrinsic factors with low salary and heavy workload being cited as the most common demotivating factors. Relationship with students and colleagues is also cited as a demotivating factor among participants in this study. It is interesting to note that this dissatisfaction with interpersonal relations could result in what Kottler, Zehm, and Kottler (2005) called "professional burnout" which leads to depersonalizing the relationships with students and coworkers or becoming cynical about the job.

In terms of what could be done to improve the situation, it was found that most of the comments were related to fringe benefits and salary which are both considered extrinsic factors.

Fringe benefits:

Most of the comments suggested an improvement in new teaching resources and better physical working environment as commented below:

"Modern and working equipment in class e.g. computers, projectors, screens, and loud speakers"

"implementation of new classroom management and the use of IT in the classroom"

Salary:

Almost all of the comments received mentioned higher salary as a mean to improve motivation in their workplace. Some of the comments were as follows:

" a pay rise never hurts. "

"Higher salary so that teachers can focus more on teaching in their classes. "

“ increase teacher salary”

Discussions

The findings for this study revealed some insights into what is important for teachers to maintain their motivation in their teaching careers. It is interesting to first of all note that unlike other jobs, teacher is a profession whose practitioners are paid more in intrinsic rewards than financial ones (Hastings, 2012). This is especially true in countries like Thailand where although teaching might comparatively not offer great material benefits, it is often considered as having a good job. Moreover, most teachers are working in the government sector and this offers them job security, and benefits such as medical housing and tuition fees for their children.

Interpersonal relationship or the feeling of relatedness is also important to teaching professions, as teachers must interact both with co-workers and their students (Nias, 1981). In a study of secondary teachers' perceptions of working conditions in five countries, Menlo, Marich, Collet, Evers, Fernandez, and Ferris (1990) determined that, “the development of warm, personal relationships with students is the second-strongest influence on professional life quality for US teachers” as well as for teachers in almost all of other countries studied. In researching the job satisfaction of ESL/EFL teachers, Pennington (1995) agreed that intrinsic motivation and interpersonal relations provided teachers with the bulk of their support, but that teachers almost universally complained of pay and other extrinsic elements of their work. Although the results showed that most participants believed a desire to educate and impart knowledge to students are key factors in motivation, some of the extrinsic factors such as work autonomy, job security, opportunity for professional development are the sources of demotivation among teachers in this study. These factors can have a negative influence on teacher motivation that systematically undermine and erode the intrinsic character of teacher motivation. Stress, a lack of autonomy in the classroom, a sense of efficacy, and a career structure providing opportunities for professional development and advancement can all result in job dissatisfaction (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2010).

In terms of professional development, most of the participants suggested ongoing professional trainings as a way to improve motivation. During the past decades, there has been an attempt to define what an effective professional development might be. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) suggested that staff development should provide occasions for teachers to reflect critically on their practice and to fashion new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learners. Even traditional staff development models such as workshops can be motivational if they give teachers control by asking them to set their own agenda at the beginning of a meeting, asking for their analysis of problems in class and respecting their answers (Zemmelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1993).

Heavy workload was another major de-motivating factor among teachers. This seems to confirm the findings from other studies conducted among Thai EFL teachers which cited teaching loads as the most troublesome problem for Thai EFL teachers (Prapaisit, 2003). One way of dealing with this issue might be through administrative support. Although institutions might have restraints in terms of reduction of workload, a management might be able to implement some of the policies that involve team work or collaboration between teachers.

Implication for future studies

Related future studies that can build on the research findings are important and can be undertaken in a number of ways to overcome the limitations in this research. Fundamentally, the researcher believes that the limitation of this work is the bases for future research. The following points could be the focus for future research in this area:

1. the relationship between EFL teachers' motivation and their performance, and student's achievement
2. comparative studies between the English language teachers' motivation in the private and the public universities
3. the sources of professional burnout and how to overcome the problem

Limitation of the study

Though the present study managed to provide some of the insights into what motivate L2 teacher and what could be done to improve L2 teacher motivation, there were some limitations to the study. First, only EFL teachers in public university in Thailand were surveyed. Consequently, findings may not be generalizable to other sectors such as schools, private English language schools, private universities or other tertiary institutions. Second, the number of participants was small and thus the study was limited in terms of scope. Finally, an interview with these teachers might yield more detailed and descriptive data to the present study.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to find out factors that motivate L2 teachers working at public university in Thailand and how their motivation could be enhanced. . After analyzing the data, it was found that the teachers were motivated mostly by intrinsic factors and autonomous extrinsic factors. However, demotivating factors among teachers were also mostly extrinsic ones which include heavy workload, salary and working conditions. Future studies could look into motivation among teachers who work with students from k-12 and private universities. In addition, future research might investigate teacher motivation defined through age and gender groups of teachers.

About the Author

Pimpan Syamananda received her B.A. (English) from Chulalongkorn University, M.A. (English Language Studies and Methods) from University of Warwick, U.K., and M.A. (British Cultural Studies) from University of Warwick, U.K. She is currently an instructor at Chulalongkorn University Language Institute (CULI). Her research interests include language assessment and motivation in language learning.

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