

## Teacher Motivation and Satisfaction in the United States and Korea

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Recently there has been an increasing emphasis on teachers and their backgrounds in the language learning process in classroom settings. The Autumn, 1998 issue of TESOL Quarterly is devoted entirely to this topic. In their introductory article in this issue Freeman and Johnson argue that "how teachers actually use their (pedagogical) knowledge in classrooms is highly interpretative, socially negotiated, and continually restructured within the classrooms and schools where teachers work" (p.400). There is also a growing realization that not only the learner's motivation to master the language but also the teacher's motivation to provide support for the learner are of great importance to the learning of a second language (Wong-Fillmore, 1994 class lecture). Pennington (1995) recommends the use of employment action plans to improve teacher motivation through serious attention to teacher development, career structure, and academic structure. Pennington's research is very valuable in that it emphasizes the importance of the teacher's intrinsic motivation and teacher autonomy. However, a disadvantage of Pennington's positivist research and actions plans is that she does not uncover some of the underlying social, cultural, and political factors which diminish teacher motivation and cause dissatisfaction and low morale. To understand these underlying reasons a critical approach is necessary. As Crookes (1997) points out "the way teachers teach is influenced by the effects of the social structures in which they are embedded, which create them, and which they in turn create" (p. 73). Taking into account these social structures, which include the socio-historical and political context in which teachers teach, is what Crookes refers to as the perspective of critical applied linguistics. Our interests in these topics led to research using such a critical

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perspective concerning the motivation and job satisfaction which affect our participants'.

This paper is divided into three sections. In section one we will review important studies on motivation and satisfaction, especially among ESL and EFL teachers. In section two we will describe and present the results of our study on teacher motivation and satisfaction among ESL teachers in the United States and EFL teachers in Korea. In section three we will discuss our findings and argue for the need of a critical approach to fully understand the data we have collected.

### **Section 1: Previous Studies on Teacher Motivation and Satisfaction**

A review of the literature of teacher motivation and satisfaction, particularly among ESL/EFL teachers, shows that employment circumstances for many teachers can be described by "alienation" (Auerbach, 1991) and psychological separation between teachers in their working environment and teachers as human beings (Crookes, 1997). Pennington (1995) concludes that "while ESL is a satisfying type of work for large numbers of people around the globe, it has limitations as a lifelong career" (p. 113). This statement can be better understood in light of Maslow's (1954) two-factor model of job satisfaction referred to by Pennington (1995) and Dinham and Scott (1996). Maslow differentiates between "motivator factors" intrinsic to the work itself and "hygiene factors", which are extrinsic to the work of a particular job. For some teachers there are sufficient motivating factors to maintain satisfaction throughout their whole career, but for other teachers at some point in their career the dissatisfiers outweigh the motivating factors.

Pennington calls for the elimination of dissatisfiers. She also states that due to the widespread lack of career structure in the field of ESL/EFL, which co-exists with a generally high level of work satisfaction in the field overall, it is important to ensure that ESL/EFL teachers have the job security, independence, and autonomy to fully experience the intrinsic rewards of their occupation. Therefore, she urges the removal of administrative or structural barriers that prevent the enjoyment of intrinsic occupational rewards and suggests a need to create career ladders and long-term educational projects so that teachers can attain higher levels of expertise. Finally, Pennington calls on ESL administrators to investigate work satisfaction among their own teachers, develop morale action plans to increase teacher satisfaction and to recognize the importance of teacher satisfaction on student satisfaction, motivation, commitment, and educational performance.

Although the findings of Pennington (1995) and other researchers mentioned in her review are extremely important, there are two problems with her research method-

ology. First, she relies too heavily on quantitative research and "recognized survey instruments" (Pennington, 1995, p. 128) such as the MSQ (Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire) and JDI (Job Description Index). Another perhaps more important problem with the kind of research described by Pennington (1995) is the lack of a critical approach to teacher education.

Crookes (1997) divides his discussion of the influences on ESL/EFL teachers' motivation and satisfaction into two levels: (1) a technical level and (2) a critical level. At the technical level his analysis of sources of dissatisfaction among ESL/EFL teachers is quite similar to that of Pennington. He describes five areas in which there has been a "de-skilling of professional S/FL teachers" (see also Pennycook (1989) and Apple and Christian-Smith (1991) for a discussion of the de-skilling of teachers): (1) Curriculum: Because the curriculum in many schools is "mandated by higher authority or determined by the need to prepare students for standardized tests" (p. 68), the fundamental tool of curriculum and program design, for which teachers are trained, is beyond their control. (2) Schooling vs. Education: In many schools two distinguishable functions, schooling and education, are at odds. Although the emphasis in ESL teaching is no longer "Americanization" as it was at the beginning of the 20th century, "the pastoral and socializing functions of schools remain intact" (p. 68). (3) Accountability: This strong socializing function is accompanied by emphasis on "accountability" to school administrators and politicians so that teachers must spend a lot of time on recording-keeping just to complete government reports. (4) Teacher alienation and isolation: There is not only a paucity of chances for professional conversations between teachers due to such factors as the physical arrangements of schools, tight scheduling, and administrative lack of realization about the importance of such conversations but also teacher alienation or "psychological separation between teachers as human beings and teachers in their working environments" (p. 67). (5) Severe under-funding: Because many S/FL programs are severely under-funded, teachers find it necessary to take second jobs, which limits time for professional development. Crookes believes that these five problems can be rectified by "the incorporation of ongoing self-study or internal evaluation components and the support of teacher action research as part of a required and supported program of professional development" (p. 75).

#### **The need for a Critical Approach in Teacher Motivation Studies**

Trying to solve problems only at the technical level is not sufficient, says Crookes, who points out that the way teachers teach is influenced by the social structures which create them and which they also create. Language teaching is inherently political and teachers are political actors whether they like to think they are or not. Therefore, Crookes advocates beginning with the political status of language(s) and then considering political action, if necessary. Crookes' suggestions are mainly concerned with the area of teacher training because he says new foreign and second language teachers

are not prepared for the political struggles connected with the jobs they will take. But Crookes' suggestions are appropriate for all ESL teachers, both new and experienced, in the United States for as Auerbach (1991) points out ESL teachers are marginalized because their students come from non-mainstream cultures. Crookes' suggestions are also useful for EFL teachers in Korea who are marginalized by the discourse of ELT. This discourse includes the "native speaker fallacy", which stems from the tenet that "The ideal teacher of English is a native speaker" (Phillipson, 1992: 185). Other researchers have also pointed to a need for a critical approach in studying teacher education including methodology (Pennycook, 1989; Giroux, 1997), teacher evaluation (Pennycook, 1990), curriculum (Pennycook, 1989; Freire, 1970 and 1994; Auerbach, 1991 and 1995), and explorations of the professional lives of teachers' careers and the concept of professionalism in the field of TEFL/TESL (Johnston, 1997).

## **Section 2: The Study**

This article reports on research the purpose of which was to gather and analyze empirical data about teacher motivation and satisfaction in both an ESL and an EFL context. In the ESL context, one of the authors surveyed 99 ESL teachers at a large community college in California and had dialogic interviews with 5 of these teachers. In the EFL context, the other author surveyed 100 elementary school, middle school, high school, and university EFL teachers in Seoul, Korea and had dialogic interviews with 9 of these teachers.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

A combination of survey research and participatory research were used in this study. The participatory research model used is described by Ada and Beutel (1993). In the ESL context surveys were distributed to approximately 400 ESL teachers at 5 campuses of the community college in California. 99 completed surveys were returned to the author living in California. In the EFL context 100 surveys were distributed and returned to the author living in Korea. Respondents were encouraged to write comments on the last page of the surveys and also were invited to participate in dialogic interviews with the researcher. The interviews with the five ESL teachers and nine EFL teachers were open-ended dialogues. The researchers had a list of guide questions which they used as a starting point for the dialogues, but participants were encouraged to ask questions and comment on anything they felt relevant to the topic of teacher motivation. All of the interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed in full. They were then analyzed and recurrent and common themes were collected. The purpose of the dialogic interviews was to give both the researchers and the participants a chance to explore the issues mentioned in the surveys and any other issues that the researchers and participants subsequently thought of in greater detail. The aim of this research was transferability rather than generalizability (see Johnston, 1997).

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this research was to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the most important factors which increase the motivation of the study's ESL and EFL teachers?
2. Do any factors diminish these teachers' intrinsic motivation?
3. What are the most important factors which lead these teachers to dissatisfaction with their jobs?
4. Is it necessary to adopt a critical approach to understand the factors identified in questions 1 -3?

### **Findings**

The findings of our research can be divided two ways. First, like Pennington (1995) and Dinham and Scott (1996) we found that most of the teachers in our study tended to separate factors that maintain their intrinsic motivation from external factors which make them dissatisfied with their jobs. Second, the teachers in our study mentioned dissatisfying factors at both the technical level and critical level. That is, like Crookes (1997), Auerbach (1991), and Pennycook (1989) who have written about the influence of the sociopolitical contexts in which ESL/EFL teachers live and work we found that sociopolitical factors are very important to eleven of the teachers in our study.

### **The importance of Intrinsic Motivation**

Intrinsic motivation is the most important factor which increased the motivation of the teachers in this study according to both the survey results and the themes in the dialogues. Four ESL teachers and one EFL teacher mentioned that despite factors which make them feel dissatisfied, their intrinsic motivation remains high. One part-time ESL teacher went so far as to describe his job as a vocation and said that if "it's not fun for you, you really should get out of it because it's not financially rewarding". Other factors which ESL teachers indicated in their surveys increased their motivation are "students' good learning attitudes" (61% of the ESL teachers strongly agreed and 39% agreed), "a preferable teaching schedule" (51% of the ESL teachers strongly agreed and 40% agreed), "freedom to choose my teaching style" (50% of the ESL teachers strongly agreed and 41% agreed), "a pleasant building, layout, and general ambiance of classroom environment" (28% of the ESL teachers strongly agreed and 57% agreed), "students' positive reactions to my teaching" (24% of the ESL teachers strongly agreed and 61% agreed), and "freedom to choose my manner of assessment" (27% of the ESL teachers strongly agreed and 49% agreed). Unfortunately, we cannot give survey results for EFL teachers for these categories since the surveys used for ESL and EFL teachers were different.

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### **Factors Which Diminish Intrinsic Motivation**

Four of the ESL teachers interviewed maintained strongly that negative external factors do not diminish their intrinsic motivation. However, one long-time part-time ESL teacher discussed this point more deeply and described a tension she feels between the lack of appreciation and compensation she receives as a part-time teacher and her desire to do her best for her students. She also mentioned her resentment about this lack of appreciation for her work and for adequate compensation. Survey results among the ESL teachers also show that among those ESL teachers surveyed there is some feeling that negative external factors do diminish their intrinsic motivation. For example, 17% of the ESL teachers strongly agreed and 26% agreed that their salary affects their motivation in the classroom. Also, 17% of the ESL teachers strongly agreed and another 17% agreed that opportunities for advancement affect their motivation in the classroom.

Among the nine EFL teachers there was a much stronger feeling that external factors affect their motivation in the classroom. Eight EFL teachers interviewed said that external factors such as the national testing and national curriculum system of Korea, the limited choice of textbooks prescribed by the national textbook committee, and the excessive administrative duties and paperwork they are expected to finish do in fact diminish their motivation in the classroom. Only one EFL teacher disagreed probably because he has an administrative position and the continuation of his job depends on this system. (In Korea teachers are eligible to take such administrative positions — in addition to their teaching responsibilities — after they have enough seniority and have accumulated enough points.) This teacher apparently wants to maintain the myth that if a teacher is good enough then nothing can diminish intrinsic motivation. We call this the “Super Teacher” phenomenon. The “Super teacher” is set up as an ideal to which ordinary teachers are supposed to aspire to emulate, yet most ultimately fail. So it is interesting to see that while four of the five ESL teachers interviewed and a majority of those ESL teachers surveyed believe that their intrinsic motivation and their ability to do as good a job in the classroom as possible are not affected by external factors that make them feel dissatisfied, the EFL teachers interviewed and surveyed admit that they are not doing as good a job in the classroom as they could. The EFL teachers whose motivation is not affected are “Super Teachers”.

### **Factors Leading to Dissatisfaction**

Analysis of the tape-recorded transcripts of interviews with the 14 teachers in the study revealed the following factors which cause dissatisfaction. We have used the descriptors, “at the technical level” and “at the critical level”, which Crookes (1997) uses.

At the technical level:

For the ESL teachers:

1. Lack of respect from administration
2. Lack of advancement opportunities
3. Work loads which are too heavy.
4. The separation and alienation of teachers.
5. Lack of rewards for creativity

For the EFL teachers:

1. The malfunctioning of the educational system.
  - a. Criteria for teacher evaluation.
  - b. The deterioration of the model lesson program.
2. Lack of funding for projects.
3. Lack of autonomy in teaching and in the evaluation process.
4. Teacher isolation and the resulting "deafening silence".
5. Lack of appropriate environments for teaching and overwork.
6. The over-commercialization of the textbook industry
7. Problems in the philosophy of traditional configurations.
8. Problems in teacher support:
  - a. teacher training
  - b. team teaching
  - c. foreign assistant teachers

At the critical level:

For both ESL and EFL teachers:

1. Lack of autonomy due to mandated curricula and tests
2. Differing socio-political beliefs.

**Section 3: Discussion**

While the technical level factors are very important to teachers in our study, the focus of this paper is on factors at the critical level because critical level factors have not been mentioned in previous research on teacher motivation and satisfaction. Indeed, for three of the ESL teachers interviewed and eight of the EFL teachers critical level factors were often mentioned as factors influencing both their motivation and their satisfaction with their jobs. For two of the ESL teachers sociopolitical concerns were seen as at least as important if not even more important than technical level factors. There are no survey questions on critical level factors because we had not considered such factors when we made the survey. These findings came out in the

dialogic interviews. Indeed, we feel that the value of dialogic interviews is that in such interviews factors are discovered which researchers do not think of at the beginning of the research process.

### **Lack of Autonomy due to Mandated Curricula and Tests**

Three ESL teachers in our study described the "political nature" of the curriculum and the state-mandated tests. In his research Fleming (1998) discusses the importance of teacher agency and autonomy to the curriculum development process, but he does not discuss how lack of autonomy affects teacher motivation. In discussing the topic of teacher autonomy three ESL teachers described how they felt limits on their autonomy from government mandates were political and how this lack of autonomy affects their motivation. Two of these three teachers feel dissatisfaction and even resentment because of their department's curriculum and mandatory tests. One ESL teacher contrasts the freedom he has to teach the classes the way he wants to with the constraints of the system of testing his college uses:

*"What increases my motivation and what is certainly one of your questions is the fact that, I think I've said this many times, a lot of people have said this, a one thousand percent plus of the job is that it's your class. It really is your class, right? I feel like this is my class."*

On the other hand, at the end of the semester, he feels frustrated when he has to give his students standardized tests that do not contain material the students have been studying all semester. *"I think students legitimately get angry when the test at the end of the semester doesn't look like what they have been studying all semester,"* he says.

Also, both this teacher and another ESL teacher feel that these tests and also the curriculum to which they are expected to teach are not appropriate and are condescending to their students. Because both the curriculum and the tests are mandated by the state government, they feel the problem is political. The same teacher quoted above commented that the assumption behind his school's curriculum is that the students he is teaching should be trained for only low-level service jobs. He says, *"I think that's totally condescending. I don't think it's accurate about a lot of our students. I think many of them have aspirations to work in more than such low level service jobs."*

Another ESL teacher expresses the same opinion about the condescending nature of her school's curriculum guide.

*"If you look in that curriculum guide, it's very survival-English oriented. I'm not putting down survival English. Some survival skills are necessary, but it's so low level,*



*and most teachers there are teaching a lot more than what's in the curriculum guide. And to me it's racist. It's like these little peons, they're going to be doing the worst work."*

Later in our dialogue this teacher expresses the same position but in more radical voice:

*"They want us to supply these capitalist dogs with cheap labor, and also it fits right in with their racism because they don't want to hire Blacks. 'We don't need them. We can just bring these peasant Vietnamese; they don't know their rights, and they don't care. Let's bring them in. They don't make any trouble. And we have an excuse now not to hire any Blacks.' So then it plays the Blacks against the immigrants."*

Still another ESL teacher expressed the opinion that the curriculum is political:

*"I've gone to some of those TESOL presentations where presenters stand up there and say, 'There's no reason to teach the students accuracy; that's just a political act, to stress accuracy in their expression, in their writing. I just laugh at those people. What do they want to do, train the next force of dishwashers? What are we training people to do, if you don't stress accuracy?"*

A little later this teacher said, *"And now we're seeing what's happened to the state of California based on this methodology, and it's not pretty. And what it does, it further stratifies society."*

For these three teachers there is a clash between their own sociopolitical values and the curriculum, materials and tests they are forced to use for as Crookes (1997) says, "the way teachers teach is influenced by the effects of the social structures in which they are embedded, which create them, and which they in turn create" (p. 73). Auerbach (1991, 1995) and Auerbach and Burgess (1985) describe the hidden curriculum of survival ESL and competency-based ESL. Auerbach (1991) says, "Today, competency-based ESL curricula stress skills needed to function successfully in society, which generally means fulfilling employers' expectations. Recently published texts teach students how to follow orders, apologize, talk about the weather, and call in sick, but rarely teach students how to give orders, complain, file a grievance, organize a union, or get a union to defend their rights." (p. 5). The ideas of the three teachers quoted above and those of Auerbach are quite close.

### **Differing Sociopolitical Beliefs**

Among a faculty at a big California community college like the one mentioned in this paper (which has around 400 ESL teachers) there is bound to be diversity not only in the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of its faculty but also in their socio-political and philosophical points of view. Three of the ESL teachers interviewed make reference to the political nature of teaching, a point that Auerbach (1991, and 1995),

Pennycook (1989, 1994), and Phillipson (1992) make. The fact that these teachers mention factors diminishing their satisfaction which are related to their political and philosophical points of view illustrates that it is important, as Crookes says, to consider "the social structures in which teachers are embedded." (p. 73)

These three teachers hold socio-political beliefs different from one another but all contrary to the mainstream socio-political belief system which underlies the popular methods of our profession today (Pennycook, 1989) and which inform the curriculum and testing methods of the ESL departments in their college. They therefore have frustration when they feel forced to use certain methods, curricula, and tests. Two of these teachers said that this frustration has had a negative effect on their motivation. The other said that nothing has diminished her motivation in the classroom, but she is obviously upset about a lack of focus in the field of ESL on teaching accuracy in writing.

These three teachers' opinions about the inappropriateness of current methods, curricula, and testing methods are not held by all teachers. Naturally, some teachers hold more politically mainstream points of views. There is also disagreement about these issues among the faculty, and this disagreement also leads to dissatisfaction. Therefore, what factors lead to dissatisfaction seems to depend in some part upon one's sociopolitical beliefs. For example, in contrast to the above teachers who feel constrained by a bad curriculum, another ESL teacher interviewed gave a contrary opinion:

*"I don't feel restricted by the curriculum. I look at it as, for people coming in, and there are constantly new part-timers, it gives them a sense of where they are in the continuum of what the students are learning, but it doesn't restrict them. It only says, make sure the important items are covered; otherwise, there might be gaping holes in what the students can learn."*

This teacher is not completely satisfied because like the other ESL teachers she expressed a lot of resentment about the lack of respect from administration and said that she has felt "*totally abused by the system*". But she does not have differing socio-political beliefs from those in the mainstream.

Still another ESL teacher also expressed dissatisfaction with teachers who do not want to follow the curriculum. He wrote this comment on his survey:

*"Lack of program orientation on the part of fellow teachers lowers morale for me. When instructors don't consider the sequence that the students are taking but instead focus on their own "academic freedom", it does the students a disservice, demoralizing the other instructors who send students or receive students from such instructors."*

This teacher's political point of view probably also coincides with the creators of his college's curriculum and of mainstream teaching materials but clashes with those of some of his colleagues.

### **Teacher Apathy or Teacher Passion?**

We can make two comments about the dissatisfaction among the teachers in this study. First, the dissatisfaction is widespread and serious, but there are a variety of reasons why people are dissatisfied. It is not just because of low salaries, lack of advancement opportunities, and lack of respect from administration and from teachers in other departments although most teachers would agree that these factors are very important. There are also other philosophical and political issues on which teachers do not always agree, and this disagreement affects the motivation and satisfaction of some teachers. Second, it seems that there is not apathy among teachers. On the contrary, there seems to be a lot of passion; teachers argue quite vehemently about curriculum and testing issues for example. One teacher describes this passion:

*"I think it's good that teachers have passion about these things. I know I thought, I'm one of the people who's always on a soapbox and it sounds like I'm just angry. But in one other way, I'm not angry. I just feel like it's just a passion about this stuff because a lot of the questions you asked about the motivational questions, because we're the ones who have to determine that. I mean, people who are in the field, so to speak."*

This passion surely comes from the intrinsic motivation every teacher has when s/he enter the teaching field. But it is perhaps also related to each individual's personal, cultural, and socio-political background. Some teachers may eventually give up teaching for financial reasons or because of the stress of working in a field where there is often little overt respect and appreciation given by employers. But while they are teaching, certainly they will naturally continue to believe strongly in their cultural and personal values. We have seen this in our discussion with the teachers in this study describing their feelings about their college department's curriculum and assessment tools.

### **Limitations of this Study**

This study has two important limitations. First, it has been difficult to write about teachers in the United States and Korea in one paper, especially since the researchers initially worked separately with different surveys in different languages. However, since many of the findings are similar, we feel that it is useful to present data and discussion of the two groups of teachers in one paper. Second, we do not assume that the participants in our research are representative of all ESL and EFL teachers, even in their own schools. In participatory research the researcher never assumes that the participants are representative of any population (Ada and Beutel, 1993). Also, in this research, we do not assume that the teachers who completed and returned the surveys are repre-

sentative of all teachers in their schools. It is highly probable that those ESL teachers responding to the survey were just more adamant about their views than those who did not respond. As we have mentioned above, we want to emphasize the aim of this research has been transferability rather than generalizability. Readers of this paper might find that some of the ideas and problems mentioned by our participants ring true for them, too. This realization might help them to understand their own circumstances more clearly. This is our aim.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion we agree with Pennington's (1995) call for the use of employment action plans to improve teacher motivation through serious attention to teacher development, career structure, and academic structure. Crookes (1997) also presents three examples of how to provide administrative support for teacher development such as the "Peer Assistant and Review" program (p. 71). Moreover, we agree with Crookes (1997) and others who call for researchers and administrators to use a critical perspective in looking at the issues surrounding teacher motivation and satisfaction. Crookes says, "We are unlikely to rectify the situation without an analysis that takes into account political factors" (p. 75). Not only racial and ethnic diversity but also diversity of cultural and socio-political perspective should be valued and celebrated not only in our classrooms but also in our teachers' rooms. Researchers such as Pennington (1995) have done excellent work in uncovering many of the factors that motivate teachers and also many of the factors which make teachers satisfied and dissatisfied. But as the research described in this paper shows, a critical approach is also necessary to understand why some teachers react to socio-political beliefs which underlie the curriculum and testing methods of their departments and schools and the methods popular in teaching today. And, why we need to understand that negative reactions to these sometimes interfere with their intrinsic motivation and lead to dissatisfaction.

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