



Title	「立派な英語教師になります！」教育学部英語専攻学生に見る英語教師になるための動機について
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“I’ll be a great English teacher!”

On motivations of English education majors to become English teachers

Shannon MASON

「立派な英語教師になります！」
教育学部英語専攻学生に見る英語教師になるための動機について

メイソン・シャネン

A range of policies to improve and expand the teaching and learning of English in Japanese schools has led to an increased demand for English teachers. Universities and colleges, that provide the only pathway for teacher licensure in Japan, play a vital role in the recruitment and development of the next generation of educators. While entry into education courses is competitive, not all students who graduate go on to become teachers, and this is a growing concern for many universities across the country. Developing teacher capacity requires a more intimate understanding of the motivations of undergraduate students, as they choose a degree in education, as they continue through their studies, and as they make decisions for their futures after graduation. This paper reports on the first phase of a longitudinal study that aims to identify the career motivations of undergraduate students at Nagasaki University, majoring in English within the Faculty of Education.

Introduction

Since 2014, Japan’s Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has implemented a range of education reforms aimed to “enhance English education substantially throughout elementary to lower/secondary school” (MEXT, 2014). Concerns have been expressed about the nature of English education in Japan for several decades, which has focused largely on passive skills of listening and reading, with little focus on developing communicative competence (Fukushima, 2016). Among the reforms include an extension of language education programs in elementary schools, and a diversification of language teaching and learning approaches in secondary schools, to include classes that “will be conducted in English with high-level linguistic activities” (MEXT, 2014). Reforms also extend to teacher recruitment and retention efforts, with frameworks being developed to support improved teacher training programs and teacher employment conditions, and to support the promotion

of leaders in English education (MEXT, 2014).

In order to teach in Japan, one must obtain a teachers' license which requires the completion of a four-year degree from one of 445 nominated universities or 19 colleges across the country (MEXT, 2018). Candidates are then required to sit for one or more tests in the prefecture in which they hope to teach. For those who wish to teach English, there is commonly an additional test of language proficiency. In the MEXT reforms, English proficiency benchmarks have also been set using widely used standardized tests, such as the Test in Practical English Proficiency (EIKEN) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

Because universities and colleges provide the only pathway to becoming a teacher in Japan, they play a vital role in building the supply of teachers, in terms of recruiting students into faculties of education, and then in preparing them with the knowledge and skills needed for their future careers. In the case of recruitment, there does not appear to be any real concern in Japan, with entrance into university education programs being relatively competitive. Teaching is a highly respected profession, one that commands respect and a higher than average salary and benefits, and thus it remains an attractive career option, despite the challenges that teachers face in the current educational context (Cooper & Alvarado, 2006).

Like in many countries and jurisdictions, not all students who enter faculties of education, or even those who successfully complete their education degrees, will ultimately go on to enter the workforce as teachers. Data from Nagasaki University (2018), the context of this study, show that the percentage of education graduates moving into school teaching positions was around 60% in 2017, although the rate over the past six years has averaged 50% of graduates. These rates are comparable to data that is available publicly from other universities. For example, at Kumamoto University (2018) in the neighbouring prefecture, 61% of the most recent cohort of education students went on to teaching positions. At Kwansei Gakuin University (2018), one of Japan's largest private universities, less than 40% of graduates went on to careers in education. At Fukuoka University of Education (2018), 60% of graduates from 2017 went into teaching positions, despite it being one of Japan's ten universities that specializes in education.

Career motivation is a multidimensional construct that draws on wider understandings of motivation to understand individuals' career plans and decisions (London, 1983). Mainly in response to teacher shortages in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, there has been considerable international research interest in recent years in teacher motivation at all stages of the career path, including that of pre-service teachers, that is, students who are undergoing teacher training. Understanding the motivations of teachers not only serves to inform recruitment and retention initiatives, important links have been made between teacher motivation and teaching quality in a number of countries (Organisation for Economic Co-operation

and Development [OECD], 2005).

In a review of recent research in the area, Han and Yin (2016) note that common in many studies are teachers who are motivated by intrinsic and altruistic factors, such as a desire "to work with children or adolescents, a desire to impart knowledge, [and] the opportunity to continue one's own education and service to society" (p. 4). Other studies show that motivations are culturally dependent, illustrated by the higher importance placed on extrinsic motivators such as job security and career status in some developing countries (Watt & Richardson, 2008). Motivations are also temporal, changing throughout a students' teacher training, particularly as a result of their experiences during teacher practice (Sinclair, 2008).

The investigation of the motivations of language teachers, and particularly of English language teachers, is less well represented in the literature. In a small study of 36 practising foreign language teachers in Australia, Mason (2010) found that participants were motivated to become language teachers due to inspirational teachers of their own, positive experiences abroad, a love of languages and teaching, and a desire to interact with students. On the other hand, the same study identified two participants who chose not to teach language after graduation, in both cases citing a lack of preparation for the job, particularly in the area of language proficiency. In another study, one of the few studies including English teachers in Japan, more than half of the 27 participants cited a love of English as a motivating factor in their career choice. Five participants were also influenced by the compatibility of the profession with their desire to continue working after marriage and childbirth, and in some cases there was pressure from parents to chose the female-friendly career (Igawa, 2009). This is a factor that appears to be unique to the Japanese context, as it is rarely raised in studies in other countries.

With increased pressure on faculties of education to improve the rates at which graduates enter the teaching profession, there is a need for a more nuanced understanding of the motivations of undergraduate students at all stages of their teacher training. This is particularly true in the case of English teachers, because of the increased social and political emphasis on English education, which will continue to place pressure on the teacher supply chain. In response, this study aims to better understand the motivations of English education majors at the researcher's university. Specifically, the study attempts to answer the following four research questions:

1. Why do students choose to enter the Faculty of Education as English major students?
2. How strong are students' motivations to pursue a career as an English teacher after graduation?
3. What aspects of a career as an English teacher excite and interest students?
4. What aspects of a career as an English teacher concern students?

The answers to these questions have the potential to contribute to knowledge at both local and wider levels. At the local university level, the findings may help to inform faculty policy and practice on the recruitment of new students. It may also help to identify possible strategies for increasing motivation in students, and also for alleviating potential areas of disengagement. The findings also serve to complement the wider international research body, furthering our understanding of teacher motivation, by providing findings from a cultural and social context that is rarely included in international literature.

The study

A mixed-methods longitudinal case-study design was adopted as the most appropriate means of investigating career motivations. The research will be conducted over a period of time, with students completing questionnaires and focus group interviews twice a year. This will allow the identification not only of push and pull factors, but also of temporal changes as students continue through their studies. This paper reports on the first period of data collection for this study.

In May 2018, all current English major students in the Faculty of Education at Nagasaki University ($n=34$) were invited to complete a self-administered online survey. The survey was developed and administered using the online platform Survey-Monkey, and included both quantitative and qualitative questions. Questions were written in both English and Japanese, with students given the option to respond in the language that they felt they could best express their opinions.

For data analysis, student responses were entered into a spreadsheet. For quantitative data, counts, ranges, and averages were calculated. For qualitative data, manual content analysis allowed for the grouping and identification of common responses according to themes.

Results and discussion

In total, 33 English major students completed the initial questionnaire, a participation rate of 97% of the total cohort of English majors in the Faculty of Education in 2018. The participants included 18 male students and 15 female students from freshman ($n=10$), sophomore ($n=8$), junior ($n=7$), and senior years ($n=8$). In this section, the findings and discussion are presented together in response to each of the research questions.

Why do students choose to enter the Faculty of Education as English major students?

The data analysis identified seven main factors raised by the respondents concerning their motivations for initially entering the degree, with some participants giving more than one answer. The most common response was a desire to teach and work

with children (Table 1). Following, respondents expressed a love of English and/or a desire specifically to become an English teacher. A similar number were influenced by a desire to improve the current state of English language education.

Table 1

Motivations for students entering the Faculty of Education as English majors, n=33

Motivating factor	n	%
A desire to teach and work with children	14	45%
A love of English / learning English	8	26%
A desire to become an English teacher	8	26%
A desire to improve English education	7	23%
Influence of an inspiring English teacher	6	19%
An aptitude for English	4	13%
Influence of a family member	1	3%

For the most part, participants in the study appear to have entered their university studies with a clear destination toward teaching, if not English teaching. Unlike many other countries where teacher shortages mean that demand outweighs supply, completion of an education degree brings with it no guarantee of future employment, and so it is likely that students who enter education degrees in Japan, particularly those in specialised areas such as English education, are more committed to a career in teaching, at least at the time of enrolment. While this is true of education students in many parts of the world, a review of international research found that in some countries, such as China, Malawi, and Turkey, teaching is seen by many as a “fallback” career (Heinz, 2015). This is not the case in Japan.

How strong are students' motivations to pursue a career as an English teacher after graduation?

In response to the second research question regarding students' future career motivations, the majority of participants indicated that they intended to follow a career in English teaching (Figure 1).

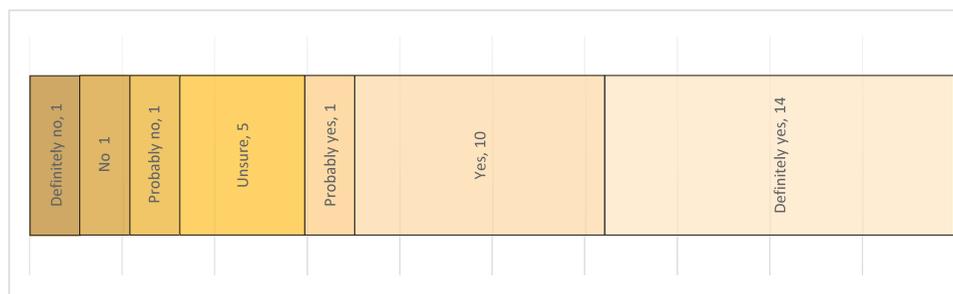


Figure 1. Education students' plans to become an English teacher after graduation

While the limited sample precludes statistical analysis, there were some general trends that were observed across the year levels (Table 2). For the most part, students in the first year of their study were strongly motivated to pursue teaching as a career (responding 'yes' or 'definitely yes'). There was only one exception where the respondent remained 'unsure'. This reflects a high level of idealization of teaching as a career, that brings many young people into faculties of education. Indeed, the title of this paper, "I'll be a great English teacher", was a phrase used by one of the first-year participants, during their self-introduction at the freshman faculty welcome, a phrase that was met with loud cheers from senior students, and was subsequently repeated by other first-year students in their own self-introductions.

Table 2

Level of motivation to enter an English teaching career, by year level

	1st year n=10	2nd year n=8	3rd year n=7	4th year n=8
1. Definitely no	0	0	0	1
2. No	0	1	0	0
3. Probably no	0	0	1	0
4. Unsure	1	3	0	1
5. Probably yes	0	1	0	0
6. Yes	3	3	3	1
7. Definitely yes	6	0	3	5

Despite an initial high level of motivation, students begin to exhibit more uncertainty about their career choices as they progress through their teacher training. While this could be a phenomenon unique to this particular cohort of students, international literature tells us that pre-service student motivations do change over time. For students at this university, the second and third years of study include extended periods of time in schools as part of their teaching practice obligations. Their experiences in schools give students a better understanding of the realities of teaching, with one participant commenting that they had realised that being a teacher is 'not just teaching'. While intrinsic motivators may pull students toward teaching in the beginning, as they become more aware of the realities of the job they may start to question their career choice. For example, teachers in Japan have among the longest working hours of teachers in the world (OECD, 2014), an issue that is presented regularly in mainstream and social media.

It is interesting to note that of those who indicated a very strong intention to teach in the future ('definitely yes'), a number were also considering careers in other areas. In total, two-thirds of the participants (n = 20) noted that they were considering a career choice other than English teaching. A number were considering following a

path to elementary school teaching, where the teacher is responsible for teaching all core subjects, which now also includes English. Of the other career options students were considering, the most popular choices were careers in the public service, the travel industry, and careers within the broader area of education, such as within local boards of education (Figure 2).

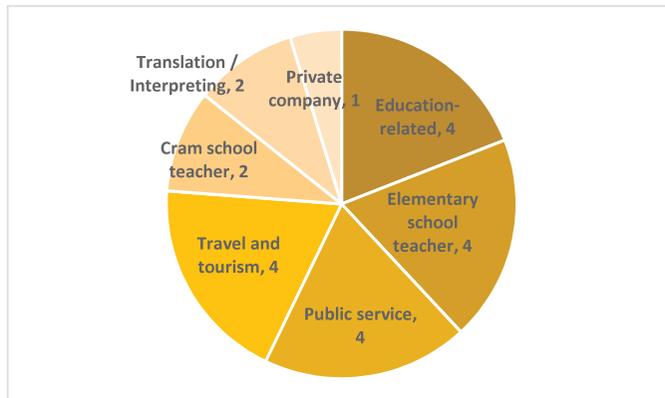


Figure 2. Other career options being considered by English education majors.

There are two possible explanations for this discrepancy between participants who are highly motivated to become English teachers, but who at the same time are considering other careers. First, applicants far outnumber teaching positions in most jurisdictions, making securing a permanent teaching position extremely competitive. It may be the case that although students are highly motivated to enter a teaching career, they are considering alternatives in the case that they are not successful. The second potential explanation lies with social desirability bias, where respondents “report an answer in a way they deem to be more socially acceptable than would be their ‘true’ answer” (Callegaro, 2011). From their entry into university there is an expectation, sometimes implicit while at other times very direct, for education students to follow the path to teaching. This pressure may come from university teachers and school teachers who guide them through their teaching practice, but it may also come from their peers, family members, and from the student themselves. That they will follow the expected path to teaching is perhaps the most desirable answer for respondents, regardless of their real intentions. As this study progresses it will be interesting to see how closely students’ stated motivations mirror their ultimate career choices.

What aspects of a career as an English teacher excite and interest students?

The participants offered multiple areas of interest and excitement in entering a career in English teaching. Mirroring the motivators that brought them into the Faculty of Education at the outset, students continue to be motivated for the most part

by a desire to work with children, and secondly by a desire to impart a love of English (Table 2).

Table 3

Aspects of an English teaching career that excite or interest students

Interest factor	n	%
Engaging with students, seeing students grow and learn	23	70%
Imparting a love of English on students	10	30%
Being able to use English	3	9%
Gaining experience and knowledge in the field	2	6%
Imparting important skills on students (cultural awareness, expressiveness)	2	6%
Building relationships with co-workers	1	3%
Working with Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs)	1	3%
Learning different approaches to teaching	1	3%
Teaching own developed lessons	1	3%

All of the responses provided by the participants relate to different areas of professional and personal experiences and development. Harnessing this passion for teaching is important for guiding education students toward a career in education. Extrinsic factors that may be seen in other studies, were not raised by students in this phase of the study. This is likely a result of the way in which the question was posed. It would be unlikely that a student would be excited by job security or workload, even though these may be factors that influence their decision. Subsequent data collection will help to further investigate the range of motivating factors, including the role that extrinsic factors may play.

What aspects of a career as an English teacher concern students?

In response to the final research question regarding the aspects of English teaching that concern them, many respondents were concerned about their own ability to fulfill their role, in terms of their English proficiency level, and to a lesser extent their teaching ability.

Identifying the concerns held by education students is important because they present factors that may potentially drive them away from an English teaching career. In this case, the most common concern raised by participants was their own language proficiency, and particularly, whether they have (or will have) a level of proficiency that will allow them to carry out their role confidently and competently. There is a clear implication for faculties of education to ensure that students have enough opportunities to develop their language skills, not only in order to be able to confidently complete their duties, but also so that they can pass the language examination requirements for acquiring a teachers' licence. Participants are also concerned

Table 4*Aspects of an English teaching career that concern students*

Concern	n	%
English proficiency level, English ability	12	36%
Teaching ability	9	27%
Classroom management / control of students	4	9%
Work-life balance	2	6%
Dealing with students' parents	2	6%
Ability, undefined	1	3%
Developing relationships with other teachers	1	3%
Dealing with pedagogical changes	1	3%
Passing the teachers' licence exam	1	3%
Living away from home	1	3%

about their teaching skills and classroom management skills, and this has implications for the time that students spend during their pre-service education in schools, and the level of responsibility they have during that time.

Conclusion

This paper has reported on the early stage of a longitudinal study of the motivations and intentions of undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education in a single university in Japan. While the scope of the study is small, and thus generalizability to wider populations is limited, the results reveal some patterns that appear to be congruent with those seen in international studies. In particular, students generally enrol in education degrees with an expectation that they will enter teaching, motivated primarily by an intrinsic desire to work with young people. However, career motivations vary once students embark on their studies, and the result is a wide variety of levels of motivation to teach. This suggests that students have different responses to their pre-service training experiences. This study has identified a number of concerns that may negatively impact on students' desires to follow a path to English teaching, and more investigation is needed to determine the relative importance of these factors in influencing students' final decisions. The findings of this first phase provide an important foundation for this study, and as the study progresses it is hoped that a clearer picture of teacher motivation can be painted, through the investigation of nuanced and contextualized temporal changes at various points of students' teacher training experiences.

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