

English Language Teacher Motivation in Sri Lankan Public Schools

Sujeewa Hettiarachchi
University of Michigan, USA

Abstract—Drawing on in-depth qualitative data from fifty-four surveys and five interviews, this study investigated aspects of motivation and demotivation among Sri Lankan English language teachers. The participants included a convenience sample of English teachers currently employed in public schools. The results of the study revealed that students themselves, the act of teaching students, and the prestigious social position for English teachers in Sri Lanka are main motivators for teachers. The main demotivators for the participants included limited facilities for teaching and learning in schools, inefficiency of school administration and zonal education offices, difficulties in obtaining teacher transfers, the discrepancy between the English curriculum and students' English proficiency, and the poor relationship between colleagues. Overall results of the study indicate that teacher demotivation is a significant issue in Sri Lankan public schools which needs the immediate attention of the country's education policy designers and management.

Index Terms—motivation, demotivation, English teachers, public schools, Sri Lanka

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Teacher motivation is a construct which has received significant attention in mainstream education during the last few decades. Recent studies on teacher motivation in education have explored different reasons for new teachers to join the profession, factors that motivate and demotivate teachers, the impact of teacher motivation on their teaching, the relationship between teacher motivation and student motivation, and the measures by which teacher motivation can be increased in different working scenarios (e.g., Addison & Brundrett, 2008; Dinham & Scott, 2000; Pelletier, Levesque, & Legault, 2002; Roth, Assor, Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007; Smithers & Robinson, 2003).

In Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research, teacher motivation is currently viewed as a variable which has a strong impact on learner motivation (Gardner, 2007). In addition to teaching language, ESL/EFL teachers are expected to increase learners' intrinsic motivation by employing different motivational strategies in instruction (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008, p. 52). However, the extent to which teachers are able to motivate their students depends on how motivated teachers themselves are (Atkinson, 2000; Bernaus, Wilson, & Gardner, 2009; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). As Bernaus et al. (2009) concluded regarding learner motivation, "teacher motivation is the most important variable because if teachers are not motivated the whole notion of strategy use is lost" (p. 29).

Despite the significance attached to it in mainstream education, teacher motivation still remains a highly overlooked area of research in SLA and TESOL (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 157). Except for a handful of studies by Pennington and her colleagues since the 1990s, Doyle and Kim (1999), Connie (2000), Tiziava (2003), and Bernaus et al. (2009), the number of reported studies on teacher motivation in SLA/TESOL is extremely limited. Consequently, this prevents us from precisely understanding what motivates and demotivates ESL/EFL teachers, how their (lack of) motivation affects their teaching practices in classrooms, and what impact teacher motivation has on learner motivation and language achievement. These are all significant questions in many second and foreign language scenarios in the world. This is why Dörnyei (2001), stressing the significance of teacher motivation in SLA and education, states that "far more research is needed to do this important issue justice" (p. 157). A survey of literature of the last ten years shows that this statement is still true and possibly more applicable to TESOL than to mainstream education.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Motivators and Demotivators for Teachers

Dinham and Scott (2000), in a survey study involving 2000 teachers in Australia, New Zealand, and England, report that teachers are often motivated by "matters intrinsic to the role of teaching" while their demotivation is mainly caused by "matters extrinsic to the task of teaching" (p. 390). This has been a common finding in many other studies as well (Spear et al., 2000; Addison et al., 2008). According to Dinham & Scott (2000), common intrinsic motivators for teachers include student achievement, helping students modify their attitudes and behavior, positive relationship with students and others, self-growth, mastery of professional skills, and feeling part of a collegial supportive environment. Meanwhile, major demotivators include the nature and the pace of educational change, teacher workload, the community's poor opinion of teachers, the negative image of the teachers portrayed in the media, and lack of support services for teachers (p. 389). In their review of teacher motivation studies conducted in the contexts of England and