

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER MOTIVATION: A PERSONAL VIEW

**Krishna K. Dixit**

*Centre for English Language Education (CELE)*

*Ambedkar University, Delhi*

*Email: [krishnakdixit@gmail.com](mailto:krishnakdixit@gmail.com)*

### **Abstract**

*This brief note on English Language Teacher Motivation (ELTM) is exploratory in nature and it draws on existing literature on teacher motivation in education. It attempts to examine the existing conceptual apparatus to make sense of teacher motivation in order to apply it to ELTM to see the similarities and differences. On examination, it appears that the concept of ELTM can be developed using the conceptual apparatus of teacher motivation but the concepts themselves yield to new meanings with reference to ELTM.*

### **Keywords**

*Teacher Motivation, English Language Teacher Motivation, Teaching, Motivation theories.*

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English Language Teacher Motivation (ELTM) or Language Teacher Motivation (LTM) as generally used, is an emergent concept in the English Language Education (ELE) discourse. This emergence and its growing currency can be witnessed through recent publications such as Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014), Hiver et al (2018), and Kubanyiova (2019). In a way, it can be observed that this is an acknowledgment of the crucial role and place of teachers in enacting powerful ELE. One of the possible reasons for the increasing attention toward LTM could be an increasing focus on change and innovation in ELE accompanied by a realization that teachers are the primary decision-makers and actors in translating the proposed change and innovation into reality in classrooms. As a concept, it is largely fashioned in terms of teacher motivation in general drawing on ‘achievement goal’, ‘expectancy value’ and ‘self-determination’ theories. The achievement goal theory considers the expectancy of success; incentive values; need for achievement; fear of failure, goal orientation, and goal climate as key variables in determining motivation. The expectancy of success and the value attached to the task are crucial parameters for expectancy-value theory. In self-determination theory competence, connection and autonomy are paramount considerations. The variables used to explain teacher motivation are certainly valid and can be applied to exploring LTM as well. However, I think that LTM in a context like India requires consideration of a few other variables. In this brief note, I propose to describe LTM in the Indian education context.

The key differences between general teacher motivation and LTM can be located in the nature or conceptualization of teaching in the context. In most educational contexts, the teachers are expected to produce good results (especially in high-stakes examinations) and are expected to follow a certain methodology for such outcomes. With some notable exceptions, the institutional administration (or employers) dictates and also defines the teaching tasks for teachers. For example, the teachers are told to conduct weekly tests, train students in writing answers for examination questions, support students with ready answers, complete the teaching i.e. ‘covering the syllabus’ at least two months before the examinations, etc. Despite these restricting conditions, the teachers work with enthusiasm and struggle to meet the expectations of employers. In such a working context the issues of autonomy, competence, connectedness, goal setting, and goal climate in their original sense offer little help in making sense of LTM. What matters most is conformity to the whims of employers, enacting their dictates (though they militate against self-ideas and thoughts), and patiently working for a long period of time (usually till the date of retirement) demanding a different take on LTM.

What it all entails is that expectancy-value, achievement goal, self-determination, self-worth, etc. theories can be used to explain teachers' affiliation and their subscription to employer dictates. Otherwise, the teachers remain largely de-motivated or unmotivated given that they are not focusing on the task of teaching language and are not concerned about issues, challenges, and affordances in language teaching and learning. They seem to be not even concerned about student learning in the true sense of the term.

In general, the teachers are often seen to be struggling with their own language proficiency and working towards enhancing it. But this is not officially ever articulated. The desire to undertake experiments or work with new material remains unfulfilled throughout their teaching career. However, they continue to teach and continue to produce the expected results. This makes one wonder what kind of motivation language teachers have as capital to survive and in some cases thrive in the profession. On speculation and drawing on personal experience, it appears that all motivation theories are helpful in explaining it but not in their sense. They are dissociated from the genuine actions and activities and are oriented towards fulfilling top-down mandates. In other words, the teachers are seen operationalizing expectancy and task value with reference to dictates, if working with expectancy-value theory. To illustrate the point, a teacher weighs the options to produce 100% results and speculates the expectancy rate and measures task value in terms of a quiet and peaceful climate for teaching and self-well-being (by not inviting the wrath of authorities). Accordingly, they act in classrooms and the action involves supporting students with notes, practicing writing examinations, supplying important (possibly asked) questions for the examination and so on. In a scenario like this, the very orientation of expectancy and task value has undergone a complete change. If we take the self-determination theory, competence is measured in terms of passivity and patience in receiving dictates, connectedness becomes not being in the bad books of administrators, and autonomy gets reduced to a decision in making teaching lives crisis-free. It is a common experience (but again never uttered) that doing anything different leads one to be taken as not loyal to the institution or authorities as being loyal is one prime expectation of the employer.

This kind of motivation leads to an altogether different vision of teaching. It dissociates teaching from student learning or teachers' professional development and associates it with personal aspirations either professional or personal or sometimes both. Though it needs a thorough investigation and taking the risk of making a (largely unfounded ?) statement, it can be noted that the teaching becomes just an instrument to pursue other goals in life. For instance, one can attend/participate

in academic events with a free mind or think of making some material assets. Here the notion of vision as described by Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) includes not the learning of students and teachers but of working towards personal goals.

To conclude, LTM in a context like India needs to be understood not in terms of existing motivational discourse and the variables considered therein. It needs to be explored in qualitative sense to deduce other constituting variables in determining motivation in being and staying a teacher till retirement and probably thereafter. One last comment drawing on Ramachandran et al (2005) is that in India teacher motivation is all about being obedient to authorities, attending duties regularly and punctually, and being enthusiastic about authorities views and whims. I think LTM is not an exception to it.

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