

Appraisal and Review of Role Perception and Job Satisfaction among Expatriate English-Teaching Communities in Japan and Thailand

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role, [rɒl], n. one's function, the special activity or purpose of a person,
what one is appointed or is expected or has undertaken to do.

(The Concise Oxford and Paperback Oxford Dictionaries)

Introduction

Perception of 'role' in life is inseparable from total perception of self. It is an integral part of that perception. Dissatisfaction with one's role implies lack of satisfaction with one's self, a sense of lack of completion, of routes wrongly taken, potential unfulfilled. For many individuals, and certainly for teachers, role is not wholly self-ordained however, but is a combination of factors determined by others (job responsibilities and duties accepted as part of a received contract) and factors or activities successfully appended to this set of accepted criteria by one's adapting self.

To explore levels of 'job satisfaction' among expatriate university teachers, and to discover how they perceive their 'role', a 25-item questionnaire was developed over time and distributed to over 300 such teachers working in Japan and Thailand, of which 239 replied. Job satisfaction levels were assessed via respondents' perception of their actual labels and

activities, and, conversely, through what they would ideally hope to be labeled as and to be doing. The survey was latterly qualitatively appended by way of selected personal interviews, to gauge what, if any, shifts in role perception and job satisfaction have occurred among targeted teachers during a recent period of technological and pedagogical revolution.

The current paper, then, represents a comprehensive up-to-date collation and collection of data and critical thinking surrounding a project that has developed and morphed over a number of years. As such, suggestive embryonic and subsequent stages of this project have previously been reported and discussed in print and in conference presentations: see Hoy (2007, 2009), Hullah (2001, 2006), Hullah & Hoy (2013). Results, findings, and issues raised at all stages of this project have deep and significant implications for all expatriate teachers of language, literature, and cultural studies working at any level in Asia.

Rationale and genesis, literature review, and methodology

In 21 years and 13 years' worth of university teaching in Japan and Thailand respectively the authors have both repeatedly been struck by the glaring lack of unity of perception of role among native-speaker English teachers at tertiary level. We have observed that, from individual to individual, these English teachers see and define their function and role in markedly different ways, even those working under identical job titles in similar institutions. In short, we have noted a distinct lack of consistency in the ways that imported teachers of English at tertiary level in Japan and Thailand conceive of their own *raison d'être*, their own purpose, and their own position.

In 1997, Barry O'Sullivan and Paul Hullah — at that time inter-departmental colleagues at Okayama National University in western Japan — thought it might be a timely, interesting, and enlightening exercise to attempt to conduct a survey in order to identify and collate the

variety of these ways in which respective teachers appear to regard their role, and to thus attempt to demonstrate general trends (O'Sullivan & Hullah, 1998). O'Sullivan and Hullah saw this as being of potential value and particular relevance (at least) to the holders of the almost 11,000 teaching positions occupied by expatriate teachers at Japan's approximately 1,200 tertiary educational institutions at that time.

The study primarily approached the topic of 'role perception' among expatriate teachers in Japanese tertiary institutions. It did this by attempting to elicit responses that would identify differences between how these teachers saw themselves, and how they believed they were seen by others (by implication, their then employers, colleagues, and students). It was hoped that the resultant observations could be systematized in terms of the 'labels' used to signify role and the activities in which the respondents participated. The study sought to establish a distinction between perceived 'Actual' and 'Ideal' situations, and to isolate any significant, consistent disparities between the two. Following Freisen and Sarros (1989), the study regarded job satisfaction as a function of role perception, and thus operationalized the construct 'role perception' as a combined product of:

(Job Satisfaction)+(Ideal vs. Actual Activity)+(Ideal vs. Actual Label)

In this working model, based on O'Sullivan's and Hullah's personal experience as teachers and conversations with others in the same profession, the former two elements were decreed to be the major factors, while the latter, 'Label' was held to be of significantly lesser pragmatic importance. Therefore, the study was designed to include questions pertinent to these areas in the approximate ratio of 2: 2: 1.

In short, the initial study sought to discover:

- a) what expatriate teachers of English at tertiary level perceived their actual role to be
- b) what kind of activities these individuals undertook in the course

of their job

- c) to what extent (a) and/or (b) diverged from the teacher's 'ideal' conception of his/her role and the activities which constituted that role
- d) to what extent expatriate teachers of English at tertiary level were satisfied with their position and role.

In 1997, this was the first survey of its kind that had been thitherto attempted in Japan. Even today, 16 years later, the still relatively small body of research that exists on the role perception of university level teachers has tended to concentrate on the teacher in his or her own cultural environment, typically the USA (Kelly and Hart 1971, Rich and Jolicoeur 1978). In addition, these and other studies have taken as their focus the dichotomy between teaching and research (Fischer 1965, Page 1972, Sample 1972, Wilson and Wilson 1972, Ladd and Lipset 1975). The same can be said of the many studies which have explored the area of teacher burnout, seen by Freisen and Sarros (1989: 179) as having 'been linked with identifiable psychological and behavioral responses to unmediated work stress in a variety of helping professions'. In 2004, the University Teachers Union *Survey of Foreign Nationals at Japanese Universities* (available online at <http://www.utu-japan.org/>) extensively investigated contractual and administrative issues for expatriate ELT instructors and looked at working conditions in a detailed factual manner but did not address the specific area of role perception by self and others that O'Sullivan and Hullah's original study sought to probe.

The Thai connection

The many thousands of expatriate university teachers currently working in Thailand represent an important element of the government's strategy to increase Thailand's international competitiveness, particularly, though not exclusively, through increasing the numbers and

fluency of those speaking English. It is a general axiom of industrial psychology that a happy worker is a good worker and this is true of education too. On the basis of their survey of educational research on job satisfaction, Hoy and Miskel (1982: 124) conclude that 'satisfied educators seem to perform at higher levels than dissatisfied educators'.

Research done on job satisfaction among expatriate teachers in Thailand has mostly hitherto focused on pre-tertiary teachers. A discussion of teacher recruitment to developing countries and the factors that lead to success or failure is found in Armitage & Powell (1997). Anthony (2001) has written a Master's Thesis dealing with the influence of organizational culture and demographics, specifically nationality, on job satisfaction at international schools in Thailand. These sources are useful but university teachers need to be understood in their particular context.

We could only find one paper investigating the job satisfaction of expatriate university teachers in Thailand. In her Master's thesis, Charutat Chandrasurin (2005) used Herzberg's two factors theory to investigate the relative levels of job satisfaction of Thai lecturers and expatriate lecturers in the humanities department of a large Thai public university. Overall, she found that the expatriate lecturers were somewhat less satisfied than their Thai colleagues. Chandrasurin surveyed both sets of lecturers on their satisfaction in relation to a number of issues: achievement, recognition from colleagues and superiors, the work itself, work responsibilities, career advancement, salaries, personal development and research opportunities, interpersonal relationships, physical working conditions, status, and the quality of supervision and management. Expatriate lecturers were more satisfied than the Thai lecturers in only two categories, physical working conditions and their feeling of personal achievement in the job. Chandrasurin's research proposed several reasons for these lower satisfaction levels which are relevant to this research and which we will discuss later. However, its focus is narrow and specific: one faculty at one university. We would hope to see what the picture is more generally.

Thanks to O'Sullivan and Hullah's research, the issue of job satisfaction among expatriate university teachers across the whole system *has* been addressed to some extent in the Japanese context, which has certain similarities to the Thai context (and this is what stimulated Hoy, originally, to contact Hullah). Both Japan and Thailand are historically non-colonized Asian countries with a dominant national language, generally fairly low levels of English, and at least perceptually, relatively homogeneous national cultures. Hullah had addressed the issue of satisfaction among expatriate teachers of English in Japanese universities in two studies, one in 1997 and later published study, through the lens of 'role perception'. Hullah (2006: 50) had seen a teacher's perception of his or her role as integral to the perception of self and he had claimed that 'Dissatisfaction with one's role implies lack of satisfaction with one's self, a sense of lack of completion, of potential unfulfilled.' He wanted to know what teachers believe their role to be, what activities they undertake, to what extent their ideal conception of their role diverges from the work they actually do, and their levels of satisfaction with their current position and role. Hullah had noted that in his long experience of teaching at universities in Japan expatriate teachers' role perception had often been marked by confusion and inconsistency. With seven years of teaching experience at a Thai university, these remarks resonated with Hoy so he contacted Hullah and asked him for permission to slightly modify for use in Thailand the questionnaire he had developed to test role perception in Japan. (The questionnaire is reproduced in its entirety below as Appendix 1.) We decided to compare our results in the hope that this comparison, the present study, might enrich the picture in both countries and further isolate significant factors bearing on expatriate university teachers' job satisfaction.

The study instrument and sampling methods

In 1997, O'Sullivan and Hullah designed and developed a quickly

answerable questionnaire that would focus attention on to the main issues, and precisely and effectively elicit responses that could then be analyzed statistically in order to draw conclusions. Initial open-ended versions were revised and Likert-scale items substituted based upon feedback from active teachers who completed and commented on a series of pilot models. In this respect the creators of the original instrument hoped that the final version was satisfactory in terms of both face and content validity. Over 250 copies of the final questionnaire were distributed to teachers working all over Japan of which 218 were returned and used as data: over 130 copies were handed personally to teachers attending the 1997 JALT Conference in Hamamatsu and most were filled in 'on the spot'. The rest were distributed and returned by post. In 2006 and again in 2012, selected teachers who had responded to the 1997 survey and had remained thereafter in teaching in Japan were re-surveyed by means of the original instrument.

In Thailand, the more recent sample was a convenience sample. In December 2007, Hoy gave out several survey forms to colleagues by hand and by email and asked them to distribute them to their colleagues and return them to him either personally or by email. By the end of January 2008, 33 replies had been received. The sample was not large but it did have some variation, which indicated its potential for representing many views. The replies came from six different universities, namely Mahidol, Chulalongkorn, Prince of Songkhla, King Mongkut's University of Technology, Thonburi, Mahanakorn University, and Dhurakij Pundit University. This is a quite good range of universities, encompassing the public and private sector, universities located in central Bangkok, Bangkok's neighbouring provinces and more distant provinces, large and small universities, and more or less well-known and obscure universities.

Results and discussion

Results are detailed below as Appendix 2. As for the situation in

Japan, there is a clear and significant difference between actual and ideal scenarios for all the 'Label' questions. It is interesting to note that there is a tendency for the respondents to indicate in their first two answers a telling dichotomy, reflecting that observed by Rich and Jolicoeur (1978), that is, whereas teachers ideally regard the researcher/academic aspect of their role as of greater significance than their general teacher/instructor function, they believe that they are actually perceived in a directly contrary sense, as general teachers first and foremost and as researchers/academics to a markedly lesser extent. There is a clear pattern of dissatisfaction in the results of all nine questions in the 'Activities' section. In all cases respondents express a desire for more involvement in all aspects of their work situations.

While the limitations of this study, in terms of sample size and the relatively narrow scope of questions posited, restrict the generalizability of any results, the quite strong trends suggested by the data are of real value and would appear wholly to justify re-examination of this area over a decade later. The 1997 results indicated that there was a pervasive and disturbing feeling of lack of job satisfaction within the expatriate English teaching community at tertiary level in Japan at that juncture. This dissatisfaction stemmed most certainly not from the stereotypical selfish workers' complaint of being 'overworked and underpaid' and is thus the more surprising, and perhaps more credible, for that reason. Teachers did not wish for more money, but did generally crave more involvement in the set of activities comprising their job. This sense of dissatisfaction with level of involvement in activities undertaken as part of the job was reinforced by a worrying discrepancy between the manner in which teachers were actually regarded and the way in which they would ideally have preferred to be perceived.

In 2006 and again latterly in 2012, 12 teachers known to have been respondents to the original 1997 survey (each of them had remained in teaching in Japan between 1997 and the present) were personally re-surveyed by means of the original instrument, sent to them as an email

attachment that they completed. They then scanned the completed paper and returned it, after having taken a personal photocopy. Hullah conducted a follow-up interview with each respondent, by telephone in 2006 and by Skype in 2012. These interviews were not recorded. This was a time-consuming process. Suffice it to declare at this juncture that among these 12 individuals, who have each been consistently involved in teaching in Japan for over 15 years, the general consensus is that things have hardly changed at all. Where things have changed, the change has been token and superficial, 'practically imperceptible' as one respondent put it. It seemed that, in reality, job satisfaction for imported tertiary English-teaching faculty in 2012 was no better than it had been back in 2006, ditto 1997. This was indeed extremely depressing to know.

As for the situation in Thailand, while bearing in mind that Thai results stemmed from quite a small sample, there were definite strong indications of what expatriate teachers in Thai universities think about their situation in regards to their satisfaction with the job they are doing and the situation they are in. Question 1 revealed that the sample indicated strongly that they would like to broaden their job profile. The overwhelming majority of the sample saw themselves as language instructors and while they wanted to be seen as doing only slightly less of this type of work, they overwhelmingly wanted to become more engaged in the work of 'academic/researcher'. They also wanted to a lesser extent to become more involved as administrators and student counselors.

The respondents wanted to engage more in every activity listed in Question 2, indicating a feeling that their talents were under-utilized. Most emphatically, the sample wanted better lines of both formal and informal communication with colleagues and superiors. Although Question 1 revealed that they ideally did not want to take up administrative roles very much more, they did want a much greater level of involvement in administrative decisions. They also wanted much greater involvement in syllabus planning and thesis supervision, and to a lesser extent, more involvement in curriculum planning and test development. All of these,

we think, could be taken to reflect the desire to adopt the role of 'academic/researcher' that we saw expressed in Question 1.

On the whole, Question 3 indicated that expatriate staff were generally somewhat more satisfied than dissatisfied with means indicating more positive than negative feelings on the questions of the appropriate use of skills, opinions being taken seriously by employers, the position meeting their preconceptions, levels of enthusiasm about their job, their level of contentedness with their current position, and having benefitted professionally from their employment in Thailand. However, the score was lower for the question of the appropriateness of their qualifications to their present position. There was a strong feeling, which, interestingly, was much more pronounced among those with higher positions, that the pay for their work was lower than it should be. It seems clear that experienced teachers do not believe that they are being adequately rewarded.

This survey did not address the qualifications or ability of the staff involved in the survey to do the jobs that they wanted to do and this is something universities in Thailand would have to address if they were to adopt any of the recommendations made here. But if we take the survey at face value, there are many things that universities and policy makers might think about to enhance the satisfaction levels of expatriate staff. These recommendations would, however, have ramifications in many areas that would have to be dealt with not just by the universities and expatriate staff themselves but also policy makers in the areas of immigration and labour law. Universities, if they are to do the right thing by their expatriate staff, should not adopt the fallback position, that these are political matters outside their control. Universities are political actors in many areas and they need to push policy makers in this direction. There are policies which work against the desire of expatriate staff to engage in academic and research work. Most are employed on one-year contracts, which very clearly will tend to work against the development of long-term research plans. Furthermore, work permits are normally only granted for one year.

In Japan, clearly, there was something rotten in the state of job satisfaction within the imported tertiary EFL teaching community in 1997 which is still rotten today, and which therefore merits further in-depth study today. Lack of realistic revision of the system at any level, both on an individual level and on a professional level is nurturing a long-established climate of disillusionment and dissatisfaction among some teachers. We hope that this study will mark an important step towards a greater understanding of personal and professional issues which affect and construct the role of the tertiary level NS language teacher not only in contemporary Japan, but also in a broader global context, as some or many of the issues raised by this survey will be issues familiar to all L2 educators in all teaching contexts.

In summary, results in both Japan and Thailand demonstrate that respondent expatriate educators are significantly more unhappy than happy with their role, and suggest that low levels of job satisfaction within the expatriate teaching community may be indirectly (or in some cases even directly) related to certain outdated cultural preconceptions. Expatriate university teachers crave more engagement in their jobs and better lines of communication at all levels. To address these concerns, universities and educational policy makers need to redefine the place of expatriate teachers within the higher education sector. This is a relatively small-scale research project that gives merely a few pointers to possibilities of increasing expatriate teacher satisfaction. It is by no means conclusive and follow up research is needed and encouraged. For ourselves, we think it is a research process that needs to be driven by Japanese or Thai researchers and 'imported' expatriate teachers in both countries for the truest and most comprehensive picture to emerge in Japan and Thailand. For all its obvious flaws, this survey does (alas) at least partly confirm an enduring and ongoing impression that many of us involved in expatriate teaching have formed, of a pent-up and often frustrated energy that expatriate university teachers in Japan and Thailand labor under and for which they are seeking a positive and productive

outlet. It seems unsurprising to us that, as our research confirms, responsible expatriate teachers are clearly seeking more engagement in and ownership of their jobs. We believe that this is something that all universities should welcome and take positive steps to facilitate.

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Appendix 1

Please circle the appropriate response to the following questions					
Title: Professor Ass. Prof. Lecturer Instructor Teacher					
Part-time/Full-time					
Type of Establishment: National/Prefectural University Private University Junior College					
Years at Tertiary level (Thailand/Japan): 0-2 3-6 7-10 10-15 Over 15					
Age: Under 30 31-44 45-55 Over 55					
Years at Tertiary level (total): 0-2 3-6 7-10 10-15 Over 15					
Sex: Woman Man					

1. To what extent do the following labels apply to your current position?

ACTUAL SITUATION						LABEL	IDEAL SITUATION					
Not at all		Very much					Not at all		Very much			
1	2	3	4	5	6	1. Researcher/Academic	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2	3	4	5	6	2. Language Instructor/General English Teacher	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2	3	4	5	6	3. Administrator	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2	3	4	5	6	4. Student Counsellor/Advisor	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2	3	4	5	6	5. Other (specify) _____	1	2	3	4	5	6

2. To what extent are you involved in the following activities as part of your job?

ACTUAL SITUATION						ACTIVITY	IDEAL SITUATION					
Not at all		Very much					Not at all		Very much			
1	2	3	4	5	6	1. Administrative decisions	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2	3	4	5	6	2. Formal exchange of information/ideas with staff	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2	3	4	5	6	3. Informal exchange of information/ideas with staff	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2	3	4	5	6	4. Social interaction with other staff	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2	3	4	5	6	5. Social interaction with students	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2	3	4	5	6	6. Developing curricula for specific courses	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2	3	4	5	6	7. Programme planning and design (multi course)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2	3	4	5	6	8. Formal student academic supervision (thesis)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2	3	4	5	6	9. Entrance-test development	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2	3	4	5	6	10. Other (specify) _____	1	2	3	4	5	6

3. Please indicate the extent of your agreement with each of the following statements:

	Disagree						Agree
1. My skills are appropriately used in my current position.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
2. My opinions are not taken seriously by my employers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
3. My position meets my preconceptions of it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
4. I am not a valued member of staff.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
5. I am optimistic about my future career at this institution.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
6. I am as enthusiastic about my work now as I was when I arrived here.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
7. I am content with my present position.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
8. My qualifications are not directly relevant to my current position.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
9. I should be paid more for the work I do.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
10. I have not benefitted professionally as a result of my work in Thailand/Japan.	1	2	3	4	5	6	

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Appendix 2

Table 1 Results for ‘label’ section

	Thailand Actual (M, SD)	Thailand Ideal (M, SD)	Japan Actual (M, SD)	Japan Ideal (M, SD)	ALL Actual M	ALL Ideal M
1. Researcher/ Academic	2.82, 1.59	4.21, 1.69	2.09, 1.29	4.86, 1.20	2.46	4.54
2. Lang. Inst/ Gen. Eng Teacher	5.03, 1.61	4.54, 1.57	4.94, 1.34	3.23, 1.61	4.99	3.89
3. Administrator	2.34, 1.44	2.73, 1.61	1.44, 1.02	2.94, 2.01	1.89	2.84
4. Student Counsellor/ Advisor	2.50, 1.60	3.23, 1.66	2.22, 1.73	3.84, 1.46	2.36	3.54

Table 2 Results for ‘activity’ section

	Thailand Actual (M, SD)	Thailand Ideal (M, SD)	Japan Actual (M, SD)	Japan Ideal (M, SD)	ALL Actual M	ALL Ideal M
1. Administrative decisions	2.29, 1.38	3.70, 1.62	2.08, 1.02	4.56, 1.08	2.19	4.13
2. Formal staff exchange	3.28, 1.26	5.09, 0.82	1.87, 1.14	5.22, 0.98	2.58	5.16
3. Informal staff exchange	4.12, 1.23	5.29, 0.68	2.62, 1.26	5.40, 1.11	3.37	5.35
4. Social staff interaction	3.03, 1.31	3.81, 1.15	2.80, 1.08	4.87, 1.23	2.92	4.34
5. Social student interaction	2.41, 1.32	2.78, 1.43	2.04, 1.13	2.88, 1.31	2.23	2.83
6. Developing curricula	4.28, 1.67	5.19, 0.90	2.52, 1.61	5.39, 0.98	3.40	5.29
7. Programme planning	2.93, 1.65	4.39, 1.48	2.87, 1.59	4.97, 1.03	2.90	4.68
8. Formal academic supervision	2.06, 1.77	3.58, 1.86	2.57, 1.41	4.78, 1.45	2.32	4.18
9. Test development	3.65, 1.77	4.22, 1.48	2.94, 1.49	4.49, 1.48	3.30	4.36

Table 3 Results for ‘job satisfaction’ section

	Thailand Overall (M, SD)	Thailand Instructor/ Teacher M	Japan Overall (M, SD)	ALL Overall M
1. My skills are appropriately used in my current position.	4.06, 1.50	4.23	3.04, 1.54	3.55
2. My opinions are not taken seriously by my employers.	3.27, 1.74	2.92	4.46, 1.10	3.87
3. My position meets my preconceptions of it.	3.97, 1.33	3.46	3.34, 1.17	3.66
4. I am not a valued member of staff.	2.58, 1.52	2.54	3.99, 1.09	3.29
5. I am optimistic about my future career at this institution.	3.67, 1.24	3.46	2.66, 1.29	3.17
6. I am as enthusiastic about my work now as I was when I arrived here.	4.18, 1.63	4.00	3.25, 1.27	3.72
7. I am content with my present position.	4.26, 1.39	4.08	2.41, 1.49	3.34
8. My qualifications are not directly relevant to my current position.	3.09, 1.65	2.92	4.07, 1.48	3.58
9. I should be paid more for the work I do.	4.51, 1.54	2.92	1.99, 0.97	3.25
10. I have not benefitted professionally as a result of my work in Thailand/Japan	2.88, 1.78	2.77	2.56, 1.53	2.72