

ELT Research Papers 13–03

# Inspiring English teachers: a comparative study of learner perceptions of inspirational teaching

Martin Lamb and Martin Wedell



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10 Spring Gardens  
London SW1A 2BN, UK

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**Martin Lamb** is Senior Lecturer in TESOL at the School of Education, University of Leeds. He has taught English as a Foreign Language in Sweden, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Bulgaria and also worked as a teacher educator on development projects in the latter two countries. At Leeds he is Co-ordinator of the MA TESOL Studies and teaches a range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses. His main research interest is language learning motivation and identity.

**Martin Wedell** is Senior Lecturer in TESOL and Head of International Education at the School of Education, University of Leeds. He has been a language teacher, materials writer, teacher educator and test developer in the UK, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, China and Hungary. He teaches modules on Teacher Education, TESOL Change, and Approaches and Contexts, on the MA TESOL at Leeds and in China and researches ways of supporting the local implementation of national TESOL changes.

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# Abstract

This is the first of two reports on a project that tried to find examples of inspiring English teaching in the state school systems of Guangzhou, China and Jakarta, Indonesia. The project's rationale was to expand our understanding of what makes language teaching motivating, especially what inspires long-term individual effort to learn the language in developing country contexts where official provision is limited in terms of time, resources and quality assurance.

In this report we focus on the responses to an online survey that asked learners to nominate a teacher they had had in school who had inspired them, to describe their teaching and to tell us what it had inspired them to do. Some 279 valid responses were obtained, and 163 different teachers were nominated, some of them many times by different learners.

The inspiring teachers were said by learners to have a range of different qualities, with personal and professional virtues proving just as important as methodological competence or innovation. Some intriguing differences were found in the preferences of Chinese and Indonesian learners. Although inspiring teaching may be quite rare, it can have long-term effects on learners, generating interest, a sense of progress, and a desire to invest more effort into learning outside the classroom. These benefits may be mutually reinforcing.

Overall, the study reinforces the notion that teachers can play a pivotal role in inspiring young people to study but also warns against simplistic context-universal prescriptions for how it should be done.

# 1

## Introduction

The word inspire has its origins in medieval beliefs about the power of supernatural beings to breathe spirit into earth-bound mortals; contemporary understandings of the term are reflected in the first two definitions found in the Chambers 21st Century Dictionary (2011 online): '1. ...to stimulate (someone) into activity, especially into artistic or creative activity 2. to fill someone with a feeling of confidence, encouragement and exaltation'. Being innately subjective, human inspiration is not easy to predict, measure or describe. Furthermore, it may be only much later that a person or event is recognised as being inspiring. Perhaps for these reasons, inspiration is not a term much used in the research literature on second language (L2) motivation, nor in well-known guides for new English language teachers such as Harmer (2007) and Scrivener (2011), which understandably focus on describing professional methods and techniques that can be predicted to develop their learners' L2 knowledge and skills in a broadly motivating way.

Yet all teachers need to think about the longer-term impact of their work. Language learning is never accomplished in a single classroom or course but inevitably involves years of sustained effort in diverse contexts. The motivation required to sustain that effort in the face of inevitable challenges and distractions may come from many sources but for younger learners one of the most significant is surely the teacher, the person officially charged with mediating the subject matter for their pupils. Teachers are the most frequently cited motivational influence mentioned by learners in Shoaib and Dörnyei's (2005) study of lifelong language learning, for example. Arguably this long-term motivational effect – what we shall call here inspiration – is especially important in the state-school systems of developing countries, where official provision is most constrained in terms of number of contact hours, available resources and a heavy assessment burden, and which are still characterised by high levels of failure and frustration (Nunan, 2003; Graddol, 2006).

Our goal in this research then was to find examples of inspiring English teachers in the state-school systems of two developing countries. Although inspiration may be highly individual in both its causes and effects, we believed that if we asked sufficient numbers of learners to tell us about teachers who had inspired them, we would find commonalities in respect to teacher personality, behaviour and style that would be describable and which could usefully inform the guidance offered to novice and experienced language teachers. We chose to focus on the state-school systems of China and Indonesia because of our own long personal work experience in the two countries (Wedell in China, Lamb in Indonesia), and also because we wanted to explore whether inspirational teaching in the two countries – so often lumped together as Asian – would have similar or different features.

The broad aim was not only to describe these features but also to publicise them in such a way that other English teachers working in similar state-school contexts in Asia, and perhaps elsewhere, would be encouraged to reflect on their own teaching style, and perhaps find inspiration in some outstanding examples. The research is therefore being reported in two parts. This first report will review the literature on motivational teaching and describe the overall methodology of the project; it will then present findings on the nature of inspiring teaching in the two national contexts and how it affected the learners. The second report will present detailed portraits of some individual teachers, identified as inspiring by several of their learners.

# 2

## Motivating language teaching

Given that it is widely recognised as a central component of effective language teaching (e.g. Bell, 2005; Brown, 2009), it is perhaps surprising that researchers have only recently started investigating what makes teaching motivating. For many years L2 motivation research, influenced by the social psychological theories of Gardner and Lambert (1972) among others, tended to focus on *learner* motivation (e.g. whether they were instrumentally or integratively oriented to the L2), rather than on how they were affected by classroom experiences. As theorists and researchers became more aware of the situated and dynamic nature of learner motivation, however, more attention was given to how it was, or could be, shaped by pedagogy.

One approach taken by researchers has been to draw pedagogical implications from psychological theory. For example, in their influential book Williams and Burden (1997) elaborated a social constructivist view of motivation and derived 12 principles for motivating teaching, starting with a recognition of its complexity; Wu (2003) and Jones, Llacer-Arastia and Newbill (2009), among others, used self-determination theory to design interventions that successfully boosted language learners' intrinsic motivation, in elementary school and university classes respectively; Egbert (2003) draws on flow theory to suggest ways teachers could design more motivating classroom tasks; and Magid and Chan (2012) used the concept of the ideal L2 self to help students clarify their goals and boost their efforts to learn English. Other researchers have focused on the all-too-common phenomenon of demotivation, and considered what teachers can do to prevent it (e.g. Chambers, 1999; Littlejohn, 2008; Sakui and Cowie, 2012).

The line of research most closely related to our study, however, is that initiated by Dörnyei and Csizér's (1998) report on Hungarian English-language teachers' views about what motivated their learners. Their celebrated list of 'ten commandments for motivating language learners' – which placed 'setting a personal example with your own behaviour' on top – was further elaborated by Dörnyei (2001) who created a taxonomy of 35 'macrostrategies' organised according to where in the teaching/learning process they occurred. Thus, providing a pleasant learning environment is an important part of 'creating the basic motivational conditions'; helping learners to

set personal goals helps in 'generating initial motivation'; 'maintaining and protecting motivation' is served by well-designed classroom tasks and promoting learner autonomy, for example; while providing constructive feedback helps in 'encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation'. Recognising that such a long detailed list could be intimidating to teachers, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) stress that a reasonable professional aim is to be a 'good enough motivator' using 'a few well-chosen strategies that suit both the teacher and the learners' (p. 134).

Since then, a handful of researchers have carried out empirical studies to find whether Dörnyei's strategies do actually motivate. Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) devised a classroom observation instrument and used it in tandem with a learner questionnaire to measure the motivational impact of various teaching strategies; they found that, even in the relatively constrained context of Korean school classrooms, what the teachers did mattered – learners in classrooms where teachers used motivational strategies, such as connecting lesson content to pupils' lives and using pair or groupwork, tended to have more positive attitudes and to display more motivational learning behaviour (e.g. participating in class activities). Papi and Abdollahzadeh (2012) obtained similar results in Iranian classrooms, while Moskovsky et al. (2012) went a step further by setting up a quasi-experiment in Saudi Arabian classrooms, producing results that indicated a direct causal link between the teachers' motivational strategies and the learners' motivation over the eight-week period. In a separate line of enquiry, based on a distinction between 'traditional' and 'innovative' teaching strategies, Bernaus and Gardner (2008) found that Spanish learners' *perceptions* of their teachers' strategy use was what affected their L2 motivation and achievement, rather than the actual use of the strategies.

Promising as this research is, there are at least two reasons why we should be cautious in drawing pedagogical principles from it for advising novice teachers. When systematic study of teaching methodology was in its infancy, Kharma (1977) warned of the tendency to generalise about motivation; 'This seems to be very dangerous indeed. Motivating factors may vary so widely from one community to another that what applies to one situation may not apply at all to another' (p. 103).

Dörnyei (2001, 2007) himself has always stressed the need for his motivational strategies to be interpreted in the light of local sociocultural realities. Chen, Warden and Chang (2005) argued that in Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC) such as China learners of English often have a 'required motivation' – pressing them to meet familial expectations and succeed in exams – that may obviate the need or even desirability of Western-produced motivating teaching strategies. Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) addressed this question directly by comparing Taiwanese and Hungarian teachers' views of motivational strategies, and found that although both nationalities agreed on the need to 'promote learner self-confidence' and 'create a pleasant classroom climate', for example, they gave different priority to other methods such as 'promoting learner autonomy' (favoured by the Europeans) and 'recognising students' efforts' (favoured by the Asians). Sugita and Takeuchi (2010) provide further evidence from Japan that CHC teachers may prioritise different motivational strategies from their Western counterparts. Following Kharm (1977), however, we must be careful not to generalise from CHC cultures to other Asian cultures such as the Malay-Indonesian, where other educational values may prevail.

The second caveat regarding the 'motivational strategies' approach concerns the possible assumption that stimulating classroom experiences have *long-term* effects on pupils' motivation. The lists of strategies used by researchers originate either in theory or in previous teacher surveys, e.g. Dörnyei and Csizér's (1998). Even if the strategies do constitute motivational pedagogy for learners,

as some of the above research studies confirm, we cannot be certain that they lead to learners investing effort in learning the language outside the classroom, over the long term – the kind of motivation that one would expect correlates most closely to the achievement of L2 communicative competence, especially in state-school systems where time is limited and lesson content constrained by assessment practices. In particular, and as Papi and Abdollahzadeh (2012) acknowledge, the teacher's motivational practice might influence learners' classroom behaviour in a positive way, encouraging attention, participation and volunteering, but not necessarily touch on 'deeper levels of motivated behaviour (e.g. self-regulatory capacity)' (p. 588), which are essential for initiating and guiding independent study of the language. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) point out "there is a critical difference between 'motivating' students and 'developing their motivation'", defining the latter as 'socializing and generating healthy forms of internally driven motivation' (p136). Further, one hears anecdotally of learners inspired by negative experiences, such as public dressing downs or exam failure (just as sportsmen and women may recount a distant past defeat as the inspiration for present success). We would therefore argue that it is necessary to complement the current research on motivational strategies and their effect on learners' immediate classroom behaviour, with a more open-ended inquiry into 'inspirational teaching' and its longer-term effect on pupils' learning behaviour beyond the classroom.

# 3

## Research methodology

Our aim in this phase of the study was firstly to identify learners in two large Asian cities who felt that they had had an inspiring English teacher during their state-school careers, and then to ask them to explain what it was about the teacher that had inspired them and how contact with an inspiring teacher had affected them. The questions that we eventually agreed that we would like to try to answer were:

1. What are the qualities of English teachers that learners regard as ‘inspiring’?
2. What effect have the inspiring teachers had, according to the learners, on their feelings about English, and what they do to learn it?
3. What similarities and differences are apparent in the responses of Chinese and Indonesian learners?

### Location of the study and learner participants

The study was carried out in two large East/South East Asian cities, Guangzhou and Jakarta. These were chosen because of our familiarity with these contexts and hence our ability to identify appropriate research assistants in each. Our target population was learners aged 14–22 currently studying in or having recently completed their study in state schools in either city. We chose this age range since we felt that they would have enough experience as learners to recognise the influence of the teacher on their learning, while being young enough for their nominated teachers to probably still be active in junior high or secondary state schools.

### Research design

We wanted to solicit the views of as large a number of English learners as possible, but were aware from initial piloting that reaching them through their teachers risked biasing the responses – there would be an inevitable tendency for pupils to nominate their current teacher, even if the teachers themselves did not intend that outcome. We therefore decided that our main research tool should be an online survey (see Appendix A) hosted by a University of Leeds website using licensed BOS software, and which could be promoted by the British Council offices in Jakarta and Guangzhou and any other local web platforms and/or social networking sites (for example Facebook in Indonesia and QQ in China) from which individuals

might pass on the link to friends in an informal way, producing a large ‘snowball’ sample.

The survey began with a very brief welcome in English, Bahasa Indonesia and Chinese introducing the idea of being inspired by a teacher and inviting participation. There then followed a small number of closed questions designed to enable us to identify the nominated teacher for phase-two follow-up and to generate personal data (current age, age at which they had had the inspiring teacher, and gender) that would help us confirm that the learner was truly referring to a former teacher. The main data on which we would draw to answer the above questions was generated by the three open items:

1. *What was it about the teacher that inspired you?*
2. *How did your thoughts or feelings about English change?*
3. *What extra effort do you make to learn English (now or in the past)?*

These could be answered using English, Chinese or Indonesian.

### Data-gathering process

The online survey went live in February 2012 and was initially intended to remain open until May, though this was later extended to October in order to try to generate more responses (see below). The way this was promoted in each country is detailed below.

#### Indonesia

Approximately 55 state schools were contacted directly through email or post. All were sent information about the research and were asked to let their students know about the online survey, without putting any pressure on them to respond. With each email/letter we sent a poster that we asked to be placed in a prominent place on a school noticeboard. An indeterminate number of other schools were informed about the survey through personal contacts of the local research assistant. The local office of the British Council assisted in disseminating news of the research through its own newsletter and by including it in PowerPoint presentations made to local schoolteachers in March/April 2012. Meanwhile, knowing that Indonesians are among the biggest users of networking sites in the world (socialbakers, 2012), we created a Facebook

page called *Inspired by an English Teacher?*, briefly explaining our purpose and containing a link to the online survey, and several existing Facebook groups of Indonesian learners and teachers were contacted requesting that they publicise the page to members. In the event, Facebook's own data suggest that viewings of the page were limited and it received only 69 'likes' – it is not known how many of these went on to complete the survey. A supplementary paper survey was also used in Indonesia. This instrument and the rationale for its use are described in the data-analysis section below.

### China

Despite the apparent ubiquity of social-networking sites worldwide, there was no obvious online forum that we could be certain that many learners in Guangzhou would look at. Facebook is not accessible in China and the cost of advertising the survey via one of the commonly used local sites such as QQ and Sina Weibao was prohibitive. Consequently, publicising the survey depended greatly on the local research assistant, who as a teacher trainer within the city had access to a wide range of schools. Despite his energetic efforts to publicise the survey via his school links and despite additional help from our other personal contacts, including ex-students working at schools and colleges within the city, by the end of the initial survey period only slightly more than 100 surveys had been completed. It was thus decided to draft a flyer in Chinese giving the link to the survey and a brief explanation of its purpose. Flyers were sent to head teachers of Guangzhou secondary schools, with a covering letter requesting them to publicise the survey at assemblies within their schools and to place the flyers on school noticeboards. The covering letter further asked heads to emphasise that students should only complete the survey if they felt it was of relevance to them, and to remind teachers that they had no role in deciding whether students should complete it. Some 10–20 copies of these flyers were sent to 90 schools and six universities in Guangzhou. This initiative more than doubled the eventual number of survey completions. While a minority of respondents did answer the open questions in English, the majority did so in Chinese. Their responses were translated by the Chinese research associate prior to being sent to Leeds.

### Data analysis

Data in English for China and Indonesia was eventually collated into two Excel spreadsheets with a row for each completed survey. These spreadsheets provided the starting point for our data analysis.

The first stage of this analysis was to check each row to try and establish that the person responding was indeed referring to a past rather than current teacher (see results below). For valid responses we then attempted to develop coding frameworks independently. Having done so, we met to review codes and to develop a shared framework for each of the three open questions. We then coded again on the basis of this framework, with the first 30 scripts from each country being independently coded by both researchers. Further meetings followed in which we discussed difficulties with existing categories and or definitions of each category, and also particular responses that did not appear to fit into any existing category. Numerous minor revisions of the coding framework ensued and eventually resulted in the version used to report on the results here.

Responses often contained several distinct 'idea units', which were given different codes. Occasionally the ideas related more closely to the other questions asked, and were then given the appropriate code, e.g. a comment about teacher quality in an answer to question 3 would be coded accordingly and added to the data for question 1.

# 4

## Results

### Number of responses

We had anticipated receiving around 1,000 responses to the online questionnaire. In the event, a total of 380 responses were received, of which 238 were included in the data analysis. Apart from a few invalid responses, we decided as far as possible to exclude those respondents who were still being taught by the inspiring teacher (for example, they were still the same age as when they reported having the inspiring teacher). Our reasoning was that we wanted to be sure that the motivational effect of the teacher was long lasting, rather than temporary.

There are two possible reasons for what we initially considered to be the disappointing return rate. Either we had not managed to spread word of the survey to sufficient numbers of learners, or fewer than expected learners were choosing to respond to it, presumably because they had not had an inspiring state-school English teacher. In order to test this latter hypothesis, we decided to produce an additional paper version of the questionnaire for distribution in Indonesia, which had thus far produced far fewer valid responses. This was distributed among 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> year students at the English departments in faculties of education at four relatively prestigious higher education institutions in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Some 228 paper questionnaires were distributed, and 41 (18 per cent) of the respondents nominated an inspiring teacher. These responses were then added to the online responses, producing final totals as displayed in Table 1.

The lack of response to the online survey suggested that inspiring teaching is not very common in state schools in Guangzhou and Jakarta. The paper survey in Indonesia reinforced such an interpretation. Of any group of learners, it might be expected that English teachers-in-training at elite institutions in the capital city would be able to think of school English teachers who had inspired them – but only 18 per cent of them could. One further set of figures corroborates the finding. The paper questionnaire included three items that asked respondents to indicate, on a scale of 1–4, how motivated they were to learn English, how hard they worked to learn English, and how much they had been inspired by a school English teacher to learn. The respective average scores for these items were 3.8, 3.7 and 2.4. In other words, the students were indeed highly motivated to learn English but for the majority, their teachers had not provided that motivation.

We will now present the findings of the survey (both online and paper) according to the three main questions. In Tables 2–4 in Appendix B, the columns on the left present the main and sub-categories, while the columns on the right show the number and proportion of responses from each sub-population (Chinese and Indonesian) that fell into each category (note that because percentages were rounded to the nearest decimal point, they do not all add up to 100). The final columns on the right give the total number of responses in each category, along with the percentage of respondents (n=279) who made the relevant comment.

**Table 1:** Responses to online and paper surveys

	No. of valid responses	Av. age of respondents	Av. age when inspired	No. of teachers nominated	No. of teachers nominated more than once
China	155	16.4	13.5	82	12
Indonesia	83	17.1	13.9	81	8
Indonesia paper	41				
Overall	<b>279</b>	<b>16.7</b>	<b>13.7</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>21</b>

## Qualities of the inspiring teacher (Q1)

Learners' comments about their inspiring teacher were placed in three main categories – what the teacher did (54.3 per cent), what they were like as a person or as a professional teacher (33.1 per cent) and their relationship with the learners (12.7 per cent). The 'total' column in Table 2 shows that individual students are inspired by different things, with a wide variety of compliments made. In some cases one particular quality seems to have made an overriding impression on the learner, as when this 22-year-old remembers her junior high school teacher: 'He believed that I could do things that I myself didn't. He gave me opportunities to prove my ability' (Ind 31). In other cases the teacher seemed to embody a range of qualities that came together to provide an inspiring experience, evidenced in this Grade 9 student's comments about her Year 7 teacher: 'She is lively and she like talking with us. She is interested in English. And she always plays some games about English with us. She has beautiful smiles. We can see that she is very hard to teach us and she really do a good work' (Ch 80).

Inspiring teachers can be admired for quite distinct personal qualities, though there is a clustering of comments around the notion of kindness/patience which, combined with the valuing of teacher-learner relationships, suggests that the human quality of empathy is fundamental to most inspiring pedagogy. The data is peppered with comments such as 'he taught us with love' (Ind 16) and 'She is not only my teacher, but also my friend' (Ch 56), and in both contexts learners refer frequently to ways the teacher offered reassurance and personal words of encouragement. Sometimes a specific event is remembered, as in the case of this Chinese learner five years on: 'It was one small test that happened at the beginning of my middle school life. I failed to it, and she just said some encouraging words to me. From that time on, I worked hard in English...' (Ch 41).

Several teachers are praised for their high proficiency in English, or for their cultural knowledge and understanding; in fact, having studied or lived abroad earned the teacher cachet, as in this gushing description from a 15-year-old Indonesian: 'She's still young, she's graduated from Universitas Indonesia, and got a scholarship to America. That was enough to inspire me and my friends, she told us her experiences there, made us feel 'wow'! Her competence in English is the best in the school' (Ind 27).

There is too a sprinkling of native-speaker teachers among those nominated. In such cases it is not the

fact of their nativeness that the learners remark on but their novel teaching methods, e.g. 'J\_ often used some interesting language in the class ... When we did not understand some English words, he would teach us the words and helped us memorize them through many interesting games ... He would make some funny sounds in the class so as to help make the class active. Through games J\_ trained us for leadership and team-work' (Ch 101).

There are some systematic differences between the two national groups, with Indonesian learners apparently favouring more novel methods of teaching, particularly those that make the classroom a fun place to be, though within a structure of discipline. They also place more value on clear and comprehensible lessons, sentiments pithily expressed by this learner: 'she is firm and fun in teaching, also when she teaches it is absorbed straight into the brain and easy to understand' (Ind 62\*)<sup>1</sup>.

By contrast, Chinese learners tended to find inspiration in competent delivery of a traditional style, and valued teachers who gave them advice and encouragement to take specific steps to learn, and who were hard-working themselves (e.g. 'He always checked my homework carefully and often helped correct our pronunciation during the class breaks' [Ch 93]).

## Effect on the learner (Q2)

Table 3 presents the changes that learners reported in their feelings or thoughts about English, in order of frequency. Four of the top five changes are clearly affective, and thus signal the importance of the emotional component of motivation. In terms of developing an interest in English, there is often a sense of revelation, in that the teacher made the learner see the subject in a new light: 'When I first learned English, I regarded it mainly as an indispensable tool for modern world communication. Gradually as I took Miss Y\_'s class, I found out that English was a subtle language in which one had various ways to express his or her ideas; English is beautiful, with lots of slangs and allegories just like Chinese' (Ch 43). Often the newfound interest is related to the second most common change, a sense of progress, as here: 'I feel more love English after she taught me. After she gave me some constructive and good comments about my speaking skill, I like to learn it more. My vocabulary is better too after she taught me. And I like it because my good changes in English' (Ind 37).

Sometimes the inspiration has effects beyond language learning. Some 26 learners felt that they

<sup>1</sup> An asterisk indicates that the quotation is translated into English

had changed as a result of their interaction with the teacher, often referring to a general increase in confidence or maturity as a person, e.g. 'Helped expand my vision and develop better toward the world outside China' (Ch 70); at other times mentioning specific qualities they had developed, e.g. 'she taught me discipline, respect, and obedience to parents' (Ind 81). We did expect to find more comments referring directly to becoming more autonomous or independent as a learner, though this change might be inferred from many of the comments about independent learning strategies given in answer to Question 3 (see next section). It is also worth pointing out that many respondents were in their early teens and their comments sometimes reflect a residual dependence on the inspiring teacher, e.g. 'And she also told me that I must accepted English subject well. That's why I love English' (Ind 85).

Again some systematic differences are evident between the national groups. Chinese learners gained more interest and sense of progress, while Indonesians took more enjoyment from the learning process. There are far more references to exams and tests in the Chinese data – for example, 16 of those learners who felt that they had made progress in English made reference to their improved assessment scores, while only four Indonesians did. In fact, the most frequent comment of Indonesians related to awareness of the broader significance of English, i.e. its role in international communication. This may reflect the higher levels of contact between Indonesians and the outside world, as well as the comparatively lighter exam pressure that allows them to conceive of English as more than just a school subject even while still in the education system. Indonesians also report more changes in their goals as a result of the inspiring teacher, though many of these referred to wanting to become a teacher and were written by respondents to the paper questionnaire who are currently in pre-service training.

### **Actions taken by learner (Q3)**

The overwhelming majority (over 95 per cent) of learners reported that they had taken action in response to their interaction with the inspiring teacher. Over a third (37.3 per cent) stated directly that they put more effort into studying English or devoted more time to it. Most respondents were more specific about what they had done, mentioning strategies that they had used to learn English; these were classified as either class-related – that is, they seemed to involve more intensive participation in classroom activities or revision of what they had done in class – or independent strategies, that is, they were undertaken on their own initiative without reference to the teacher or what they were doing in school. As expected, the latter were much more common than the former, as we would expect an inspired learner to be galvanised into action outside the classroom given the limited time dedicated to English in the official school curriculum. In some cases learners merely reported changing their strategies or trying to use English more in their daily lives. Others detailed what they did: watching English-language films or TV programmes (often using the subtitles in some way to support their learning) and listening to English songs were popular, as were reading and speaking activities. One major surprise was that only three learners mentioned use of ICT (though in two cases the use of the term 'chatting' was ambiguous and might have referred to online activity). Given the familiarity of these young people with ICT and the internet, the result suggests that their computer-mediated communication is mainly in their L1, and that they are not yet aware of the potential of the internet for learning English.

In general, the Chinese learners mentioned proportionately more learning effort/activity than the Indonesians. Almost half of them directly stated that they devoted more effort or time to English, compared to only a quarter of the Indonesians, and they were especially diligent in class-related strategies. The recitation of texts, for example, was mentioned as a learning strategy by 15 Chinese respondents and not a single Indonesian. In fact text-based activity – reading and writing – was more popular with Chinese learners, while practising speaking was favoured by the Indonesians. The Chinese preferred grammar, the Indonesians vocabulary. Finally, Indonesian learners are much more likely to develop their English by attending a private course.

# 5

## Discussion

We will now return to the three research questions that motivated this part of our research project, dealing initially with the first two questions. The survey did uncover many inspired learners, though not quite as many as we anticipated. The online survey may not have reached as many learners as we hoped, but the responses to the paper survey – indicating that less than one in five of English teachers-in-training could think of a school teacher who had inspired them – remind us that the teacher is but one possible source of motivation, and that the challenging conditions of work in many state-school systems (a dense, heavily assessed curriculum, a single fixed textbook and a timetable of several large classes each day) may not be conducive to inspirational teaching. An interesting hypothesis to test is whether a higher proportion of language learners are inspired by teachers in better-resourced education systems.

When inspired, however, learners are stimulated into activity, mostly independent learning outside the classroom – for the Chinese learners this often related back to what they did in the classroom, while for the Indonesians it tended to involve other kinds of activity. Broadly speaking, the study contributes evidence to support Moskovsky et al.'s (2012) claim for a causal link between motivational teaching and enhanced learner motivation, and for a further link to intensified learning behaviour (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1:** Learner perceptions of causal links



We must acknowledge that this desirable association is probably more honoured in the breach than the observance, but nevertheless the study is an endorsement of Anderman and Anderman's (2010) 'most important conclusion...*Teachers can and do impact student motivation!*' (p.2). As the results in Table 3 have shown us, the effects on learner motivation are extremely varied and almost all the learners mentioned more than one. In fact, rather than a linear sequence of cause and effect, the complex process is probably better represented as a virtuous circle of interacting factors, whose effects build on each other gradually over time (cf. Lamb, 2011).

For example, a learner starts to find the teacher's lessons interesting, and participates more – their teacher notices them more, asks them to do more, and they feel a sense of progress in the language; their growing competence then allows them to find uses for the language outside class, which in turn increases their awareness of the significance of English... and so on.

As indicated above, not all the effortful learning described was truly autonomous, for some of the younger respondents indicated a continuing dependence on the teacher; for these respondents, it is possible that the inspiration was temporary and the effects will wear off. But in describing these effects – a deepening interest in the language, a sense of progress, increased confidence – even these younger learners are showing awareness of their agency, which as McCombs (1994) argues is the basis of self-determination and a precondition for the kind of long-term self-regulated effort that language learning demands. As for the older learners, describing teachers of several years ago, we must assume that their effort and engagement with the language is now self-motivated rather than done to please their former teacher.

As regards the inspiring teaching, it is interesting that the tri-partite division we found corresponds roughly to that put forward 35 years ago by Girard (1977), on the basis of his survey of French pupils' 'ideal English teacher': he/she has to offer a good model (both personal and professional), they have to be a 'good technician of language teaching', and they also need to be a 'good psychologist' (p. 102). The inspiring teacher has many of the qualities of a good teacher. There is also a clear overlap with several of the key motivational strategies prioritised by teachers. For example, the number-one strategy for both Hungarian and Taiwanese teachers – 'setting a personal example with your behaviour' (Dörnyei & Csizer, 1998; Cheng and Dörnyei, 2007) – is reflected in our respondents' praise for their teacher's professionalism, while other advice – present the tasks properly, make the learning tasks stimulating, create a pleasant atmosphere – would clearly be endorsed by our learners even if the realisation of such strategies will differ according to the local context (see below). As Dörnyei (2001) himself has stressed, no teacher can possibly use all these strategies, and instead they have to adopt those

that suit their style of teaching and their learners' own preferences; and our results attest to the very diverse ways in which teachers can motivate.

However, if there is one dominant theme in the testimonials offered by the learners, it is the human connection that was made by the teacher – something in them, or something that they consistently did, struck a chord in the learner that still reverberates. The teachers have all achieved what many regard as the profession's greatest reward – a personal transformation in their learners – and they have accomplished this by leaving a lasting impression in their minds, whether a distinctive methodology, an exemplary professionalism, or the quality of their care for individuals. In doing so, they remind us of the socially mediated nature of motivation, of the importance of 'supportive interpersonal processes which foster the development of autonomy and the growth and regulation of motivation from inside' (Ushioda, 2003: 100), and of the fact that these processes may not be strategic pedagogical decisions, or even something that the teacher does consciously, but the product of innumerable personal interactions over time.

Turning to the third research question, there are discernible differences in the responses of Chinese and Indonesian learners, which support the view that sociocultural factors influence perceptions of motivational teaching. Firstly, there are some similarities between the Chinese learners' views and those of the Taiwanese teachers in Cheng and Dörnyei (2007). We also found little evidence of Chinese teachers actively promoting learner autonomy, rather learners valued their advice on how to study the class materials more effectively. Further, while they appreciated enthusiastic teaching, they appeared to value most highly instruction that helped them achieve curriculum goals (above all, scoring well in exams). Indonesian learners had different priorities; for them fun definitely had a positive connotation, and novel teaching techniques, especially those that emphasised humour, game-playing and spoken language, were inspiring and memorable.

# 6

## Conclusions

The relatively small size of the dataset, the fact that a few teachers received multiple nominations and so may have skewed the distribution of responses, and the inevitable fallibility of human memory means we should be cautious in interpreting the results of the study. Nevertheless we believe there are some lessons to be learned about when and how teachers influence language learners' long-term motivation:

- While good or professional teaching may be commonplace, inspirational teaching – the kind that learners remember for positive reasons years later – is probably quite rare.
- However, even in the relatively constrained context of developing-country state schools, teachers can be very positive long-term influences on their learners.
- The sources of inspiration are many and varied: any teacher, implementing any kind of methodology, has the potential to inspire, if they can make a personal connection with a learner.
- The personal and professional qualities that are most likely to inspire learners will vary according to the educational culture.
- There are also probably universal motivational qualities that have broad appeal. These include: patience and kindness, attention to individual learner needs, an encouraging manner, professional diligence, impressive subject knowledge.
- Inspiring teaching can change the relationship of a learner to a subject, making it seem enjoyable to learn, important in their lives and also something that they can do well.
- The effects of inspiring teaching are often mutually sustaining: learners who develop an interest in the subject put extra effort into learning it; the extra effort then generates a sense of progress, which builds self-confidence. For other learners, the starting point might be the self-confidence that a teacher inspired, which then fuels interest and effort.

Some of the teachers captured in our survey may only have been successful in inspiring the individual who responded; being realistic, teachers will rarely inspire a whole class anyway, because the process is always subjective. Other teachers, though, garnered multiple nominations from previous pupils; in the second phase of the project we visited some of them in their schools, and our second report will describe their teaching and how they said that they learned to be inspiring.

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# Appendix A – the online survey

## Welcome 欢迎 Selamat Datang!

Sometimes people are so inspired by a teacher in school that they start to think or feel differently about the subject, and make an extra effort to learn it. Are you one of those people? Have you been inspired by a school English teacher, now or in the past?

If so, and if you're aged between 14 and 22, maybe you can help us with this research. We would like you to tell us who this teacher is, and to answer a few questions about them. It should only take you 10–15 minutes, but we would appreciate it if you would make your answers as full as possible.

Please answer every question, in either ENGLISH or your MOTHER TONGUE. The information you give is anonymous and confidential and will be used only for the purpose of our research.

## BAHASA INDONESIA VERSION

Kadang-kadang orang begitu terinspirasi oleh seorang guru di sekolah sehingga mereka mulai berpikir berbeda tentang mata pelajaran, dan berusaha lebih keras lagi untuk mempelajarinya. Apakah Anda termasuk satu di antara orang-orang ini? Apakah Anda terinspirasi oleh seorang guru Bahasa Inggris, sekarang atau di masa lalu?

Jika ya, dan jika Anda berusia antara 14 dan 22 tahun, mungkin Anda dapat membantu kami dengan riset ini. Kami menginginkan Anda menggambarkan guru itu, dan pengaruhnya. Tolong jawab sepenuh mungkin. Survei akan makan waktu hanya 10–15 menit.

Jawablah setiap pertanyaan, dalam Bahasa Indonesia atau Bahasa Inggris, terserah Anda. Kami dapat menjamin kepada Anda bahwa informasi yang Anda berikan akan tetap dirahasiakan dan akan digunakan hanya untuk tujuan riset kami.

## CHINESE VERSION

有时候学生会因为受到老师的启发而对某一学科进行思考或者有不同的感受，因而开始努力学习。你是否曾经有类似经历？你曾经或者现在有受到过学校英语老师的启发吗？

如果有，并且你介于14至22岁之间，你就有可能会给我们的研究提供帮助。请告诉我们给予你启发的老师是谁，并回答一些相关的问题。此问卷只需10到15分钟就可完成。希望你尽可能提供完整的回答。

请用英文或者中文作答。你所提供的信息将会不记名且不对外公开，仅限我们研究所用

# The main survey

You can write your answers in English OR Chinese OR Bahasa Indonesia.

## Background information

1. What is the full name of the inspiring English teacher?

2. What is the name and district/town of the school?

3. How old were you when they taught you?

- 12    13    14    15    16    17    18

4. How old are you now?

- 14    15    16    17    18    19    20    21    22

5. What are you doing now?

- Still at school    Studying in higher education (English major)  
 Studying in higher education (Other major)    Working    Other

6. Are you male/female?

- Male    Female

## Description

Please give as much **DETAIL** as you can / Tolong jawab sepenuh mungkin / 请尽可能提供详尽回答

7. What was it about the teacher that inspired you?

8. How did your thoughts or feelings about English change?

9. What did the teacher inspire you to do? That is, what extra effort do you make to learn English (now or in the past)?

# Appendix B – tables

**Table 2:** Qualities of the inspiring teacher

	Main category	Subcategories	China	Per cent	Indo	Per cent	Total	As percentage of all respondents (n=279)
1	What the teacher did	General methodology – good/effective teaching	3	0.9	3	1.0	6	2.2
	METHODOLOGY	Use of novel methods	6	1.9	27	9.2	33	11.8
		Effective use of traditional methods	16	5.0	1	0.3	17	6.1
		Fun/humorous/lively classes	11	3.4	38	13.0	49	17.6
		Interesting classes	19	5.9	1	0.3	20	7.2
		Strict/firm/serious classes	11	3.4	17	5.8	28	10.0
		Comprehensible lessons/clear explanations	7	2.2	23	7.8	30	10.8
		Paid attention to learner strengths/weaknesses	10	3.1	13	4.4	23	8.2
		Gave advice on learning	39	12.1	14	4.8	53	19.0
		Gave advice on life generally	14	4.3	18	6.1	32	11.5
		Encouraged learners to take particular actions	30	9.3	13	4.4	43	15.4
<b>SUBTOTALS</b>		<b>166</b>	<b>52.5</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>57.1</b>	<b>334</b>		
2	What the teacher was like	Nice/kind	10	3.1	11	3.8	21	7.5
	PERSONAL QUALITIES	Patient	16	5.0	11	3.8	27	9.7
		Humorous	11	3.4	8	2.7	19	6.8
		Smart (i.e. intelligent)	0	0.0	5	1.7	5	1.8
		Other (e.g. easy-going, young, assertive, beautiful)	10	3.1	14	4.8	24	8.6
	PROFESSIONAL QUALITIES	Dedicated to job/hard worker	28	8.6	8	2.7	36	12.9
		Treated work and students in an ethical way	4	1.2	7	2.4	11	3.9
		Showed passion for English	10	3.1	3	1.0	13	4.7
		Had a good knowledge or skill in English	17	5.2	17	5.8	34	12.2
		Had good cultural knowledge/understanding	8	2.5	5	1.7	13	4.7
	<b>SUBTOTALS</b>		<b>114</b>	<b>35.2</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>30.4</b>	<b>203</b>	
3	Teacher's relationship with learners	Good relationship with class as a whole	12	3.7	11	3.8	23	8.2
		Had a personally close relationship	18	5.6	4	1.4	22	7.9
		Offered reassurance, praise and encouragement	12	3.7	21	7.2	33	11.8
	<b>SUBTOTALS</b>		<b>42</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>12.4</b>	<b>78</b>	
<b>TOTALS</b>			<b>322</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>615</b>	

**Table 3:** Effects on the inspired learner

	Main category	China	Per cent	Indon	Per cent	Total	As percentage of all respondents (n=279)
1	English became interesting	58	28.2	25	14.9	83	29.7
2	Gained a sense of progress in English	44	21.4	27	16.1	71	25.4
3=	Felt greater confidence in one's English	26	12.6	18	10.7	44	15.8
3=	Became more aware of the importance of English	15	7.3	29	17.3	44	15.8
5	Enjoyed learning more	17	8.3	20	11.9	37	13.3
6	Changed as a person	13	6.3	13	7.7	26	9.3
7	English felt easier to learn	10	4.9	11	6.5	21	7.5
8	Changed aspirations	2	1.0	16	9.6	18	6.5
9	Became more autonomous/independent	11	5.3	4	2.4	15	5.4
10	Became more aware of nature of the language	10	4.9	5	3.0	15	5.4
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>206</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>374</b>	

**Table 4:** Actions taken by inspired learner

	Main category	Subcategories	China	Per cent	Indon	Per cent	Total	As percentage of all respondents (n=279)
1	GENERAL EFFORT	Generally studying more and/or putting more effort in	75	25	29	19.3	104	37.3
2	CLASS-RELATED LEARNING STRATEGIES	Revising classwork	3	1	6	4.0	9	3.2
		Preparing for classwork	2	0.7	0	0.0	2	0.7
		Participating actively in class	8	2.7	2	1.3	10	3.6
		Reciting texts	15	5	0	0.0	20	7.2
		Memorising words or texts	3	1	3	2.0	6	2.2
		<b>SUBTOTALS</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>42</b>	
3	INDEPENDENT LEARNING STRATEGIES	General change in learning strategies	30	10	13	8.7	43	15.4
		Using English more, in general	13	4.3	9	6.0	22	7.9
	Multimedia resources	Watching film or TV	17	5.7	15	10.0	32	11.5
		Listening to music or songs	9	3	10	6.7	19	6.8
		Using English in computer games, online chatting, fb etc	2	0.7	1	0.7	3	1.1
	Skills/knowledge	Speaking practice/activity	32	10.7	22	14.7	54	19.4
		Listening practice/activity	17	5.7	2	1.3	19	6.8
		Reading practice/activity	45	15	13	8.7	58	20.8
		Writing practice/activity	7	2.3	0	0.0	7	2.5
		Grammar work	11	3.7	3	2.0	14	5.0
		Vocabulary work	6	2	11	7.3	17	6.1
	Private course	Taking a private course	5	1.7	11	7.3	16	5.7
		<b>SUBTOTALS</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>64.7</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>73.4</b>	<b>304</b>	
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>450</b>	

