

### 1.3 How to motivate and retain young teachers

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#### Introduction

Ask more or less anyone what motivates people and you will hear more or less the same answer: money. Without exception, every time I run a workshop on how to motivate teachers, the participants pick ‘salary’ as the most important factor. The participants at this workshop at IATEFL 2017 were no different. Their answers to the question ‘What do you think motivates teachers?’, collected at the beginning of the workshop, are shown in Figure 1.3.1. There is research to support this belief. Andy Hockley (2006) surveyed 105 teachers about their motivations at work and found that salary was one of the most commonly identified factors for teacher motivation. But is that still true now?



Figure 1.3.1: *Word cloud showing participants’ thoughts on the question ‘What motivates teachers?’*

#### Generation Y

Much of the teaching workforce is now comprised of members of Generation Y, sometimes called ‘Millennials’ (i.e. those born between 1980 and 1994); members of this group are often thought to be motivated less by responsibility and compensation and more by career opportunities and work/life balance compared with their Generation X counterparts (i.e. those born between 1965 and 1979) (Barford and Hester 2011). A metaphor often used for rewards and punishments in motivation is that of carrots and sticks—but what if those we are trying to motivate are not rabbits but monkeys? Are we using carrots when we should be using bananas?

To find out, over a period of two years, I surveyed 468 expatriate teachers, 169 of whom had recently resigned from their positions and 299 of whom had recently renewed their contracts. All teachers worked in the same private language teaching organisation (LTO) in China. Of the teachers in the organisation, 83 per cent were Generation Y (born post-1980), and around half taught adults and half young learners. Teachers who resigned were asked to select the primary reason for their resignation. Teachers who renewed their contracts were asked to select the primary reason they renewed their contracts. The results are shown in Figure 1.3.2.

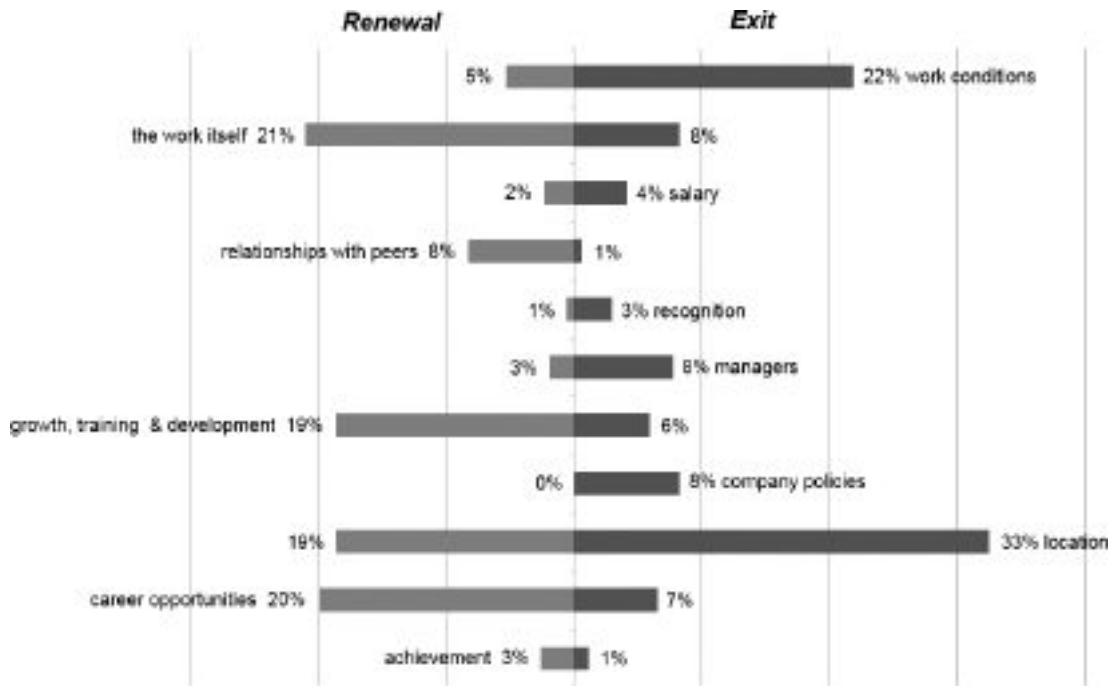


Figure 1.3.2: Teachers’ motivations for contract renewal or exiting the LTO

**Results**

From Figure 1.3.2 it is clear that in this study, salary was one of the least important reasons for teachers to either leave the LTO or renew their contracts. If this is true for Generation Y teachers in general, many of our policies and incentive structures are at odds with our teachers’ motivations. The importance of this should not be underestimated. There is a correlation between teacher effectiveness and teacher tenure (Henry, Bastian and Fortner 2011). Motivating teachers to stay in the profession for longer is a matter not only of saving recruitment costs but also of helping students learn.

The four main motivators for teachers to renew their contracts in this study were growth, training and development; location; career opportunities; and ‘the work itself’ (i.e. teaching). The main reasons teachers left the LTO were dislike of the location (the country or city they lived in) and work conditions (working hours, time off, work/life balance, and so on).

**Implications**

Instead of investing in salary increases for teachers in an attempt to motivate and retain young teachers, LTOs can instead invest in teachers’ growth, training and development by sponsoring teachers to undertake professional qualifications and allowing teachers time away from class to team teach and peer observe. LTOs must also invest in teachers’ career progression. Not everyone can be (or may want to be) a manager, but ‘career opportunities’ doesn’t necessarily mean ‘management’. Smaller increases in responsibility can be effective in motivating teachers; these might include mentoring new teachers, coordinating materials or running training sessions.

In terms of reducing demotivation, LTOs need to help expatriate teachers integrate into the culture of their new location. In this study, ‘location’ was the most influential factor in teachers’ decisions to renew their contracts or resign. Showing teachers where

to eat and how to use public transport, and providing housing and local language lessons should all help to decrease turnover. Teachers' comments about working conditions were usually related to scheduling and holidays.

## Conclusions

We might know what (we think) motivates us, but we probably know much less about what motivates our teachers. Ultimately the only way of accurately knowing is to ask them. When it comes to motivating teachers, there may be no better advice than that of George Bernard Shaw: 'Do not do unto others as you would that they should do unto you. Their tastes may not be the same.'

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## References

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## 1.4 The elephant in the classroom: exploring learner engagement

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### Introduction

Learner engagement could be considered a fundamental construct, yet it has not been clearly defined. It has often been likened to learners' mental and physical *involvement*. However, it has been argued that engagement is distinct from the latter, and is also not the same as the constructs of motivation and commitment (Svalberg 2009). This emerges when all these constructs are compared to engagement according to three domains: the affective, the cognitive and the social (interactive). For example, the elements of *alertness*, *focused attention*, and *action knowledge* that fall under the cognitive domain are indicators of engagement but not of motivation or commitment. What this signifies is that although we may perceive our students to be motivated, involved and on-task, this does not necessarily mean they are engaged.

### Exploring perceptions of learning engagement

With these reflections in mind, I realised that it was not possible to use the verb *to be engaged* without knowing what it entailed. In an attempt to understand and look for evidence of engagement, I explored the views of a group of 30 learners at a post-secondary school in Malta. Based on Svalberg's (2009) criteria for identifying engagement, I created a grid-like questionnaire consisting of self-rating questions. I considered it would be insightful to gather information on learners' levels of engagement. Hence, instead of asking 'How alert is the learner?' or 'How focused in the learner?', I asked my learners to answer questions such as the ones shown in Table 1.4.1.