

The effect of emotional labour on English teachers in Japan

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This research investigates the extent to which emotional labour is experienced by non-Japanese teachers of English as a foreign language in Japan, what coping mechanisms are employed and how it impairs individual performance. Understanding these issues is pivotal in improving the competitive advantage of these organisations and the productivity of the many individuals that continue to work in the industry. The research has demonstrated that teachers carried out surface acting on a daily basis and several instructors acknowledged the need to perform deep acting over a sustained period of time. Whereas some teachers endured the working conditions, the most important coping mechanism involved engaging in camaraderie. Teachers had difficulties not being allowed to exhibit any form of creativity, having excessive workloads, dealing with students who were silent, had mental problems or were xenophobic. These factors made their working conditions stressful and emotionally draining.

Introduction

In many professions and particularly those which are customer facing, a customer's experience is dependent not only on the quality of the product, but also on the atmosphere that is created by the staff that provide it (Bolton, 2017). The study of emotional labour (displaying particular emotions to meet the requirements of a job) is gaining in greater significance with an increasingly large number of workers now employed in the teaching sector (Loh & Liew, 2016).

Hochschild's seminal study *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling* has long been regarded as the most instrumental text on the subject and has highlighted the importance of critically understanding emotional labour in workplaces. Although Hochschild primarily analysed flight attendants and not teachers in her study, it is argued that the teaching profession is an appropriate example of institutionalised emotion with Näring, Briët and Brouwers (2006, p.303) professing that it can be stressful as it "involves a high level of emotional labour".

Resultant coping strategies such as the utilisation of both surface (modifying facial expressions) and deep acting (modifying inner feelings) are prevalent in many classroom situations which can be attributed to the large amount of interaction teachers have with students. Furthermore, teachers are often required to demonstrate inauthentic emotions such as being overly enthusiastic in order to seize the attention of their students (Loh & Liew, 2016). Many teachers consider the performance of emotions which lack in authenticity to be stressful (Ogbonna & Harris, 2004). In order to facilitate disciplined and orderly classes on a daily basis, teachers can incur significant levels of stress (Loh & Liew, 2016) with increasingly high instances of burnout occurring (Anomneze et al., 2016).

The main focus of this article is to explore the consequences of emotional labour on English teachers in Japan, a country where although there is a demand to learn English (Ruegg & Williams, 2018), the working conditions for many teachers have significantly declined in recent years (King et al., 2018a). Although some individuals are revered and deferred to as Thompson & Dooley (2019) posit, there is growing evidence that teachers are gradually becoming less respected, more criticised from socio-economic, pedagogical and linguistic angles, and under greater pressure to acquiesce to the demands of students, than ever before.

The article begins by providing a definition of emotional labour and its relevance to teaching. Then, the teaching industry in Japan is analysed followed by a justification of the methods employed throughout the research project. Findings from the study will then be presented after which a conclusion will be delivered that summarises the main findings of the research.

What is emotional labour?

As Burić & Frenzel (2020) articulated, emotional labour has been conceptualised by academics in two different ways. Firstly, job-focused emotional labour explains the degree of emotional demands that are displayed within a particular occupation. Secondly, employee-focused emotional labour describes the experience of employees managing their expressions and emotions to meet the demands of work. This concept has been conceptualised as emotional dissonance; when the expressions of employees are different from their actual feelings (Naseer & Raja, 2019). Linked to this, there are processes of emotional regulation when an individual attempts to change or adapt their expressions to meet the demands of work (Hochschild, 1983).

Emotional labour and teaching

According to Hargreaves (2000, p.824) “teaching is an emotional practice” with Yin et al. (2019) stating that caring professions such as teaching are more liable to emotional burnout than others. Gregersen, MacIntyre and Macmillan (2020) concurred when asserting that teaching is among the most stressful of professions and King and Ng (2018) affirmed that teachers perform significant levels of emotional labour on a daily basis. They postulate that research into this area requires further examination as modern-day teachers are enduring ever-increasing levels of emotional labour. This situation has arguably risen as a result of multiple demands from schools, colleges, universities and students with the subsequent level of emotional labour increasing significantly in the last ten years.

Further contributory factors such as the commodification of academic institutions (Hall, 2019) and the “McDonaldisation” of education (Romanowski & Alkhateeb, 2020) have also been cited. This focus on achieving greater profits at the expense of academic rigour has made working conditions more challenging for many teachers.

Nair (2019) stressed that schools are gradually becoming more rationalised and in order to alleviate their bureaucratic nature, many teachers are starting to adopt and practise artificially contrived authenticity. Similarly, Lindqvist, Weurlander, Wernerson and Thornberg (2019) discovered that teachers were becoming more pressurised by monitoring schemes to alter their behaviour to performing aspects rather than caring aspects, in order to pass observations or inspections.

Bolton (2017) elucidated that the teaching profession is being increasingly controlled by management in similar ways which follow the forms of emotional labour performed by service sector workers. Hargreaves (1998, p.835) argued that appropriate emotional understanding and effective delivery of emotions remain of paramount importance in the teaching profession. Good teachers are not just well-oiled machines. They are emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy.

However, as Bolton (2017) elaborated, the emotional work carried out by teachers does not accurately correlate to Hochschild's (1983) generic definition, as teachers do not perform their version of emotions to gain profit. Loh & Liew (2016) concurred to some extent when contending that teaching is a unique kind of emotion work, in their discussion of the situation in secondary schools in Singapore. Day (2004, p.48) asserted that the concept of emotional labour "seems at first sight not to relate well to teachers" although Gregersen et al. (2020) claimed due to recent heightened attention on the performance of teachers, the concept is now much more relevant than it used to be. Nevertheless, many academics believe the emotional work performed by teachers is now being devalued as the technical aspects of the job are gaining more in significance (King, 2016). However, Bolton's argument can be refuted to some extent as teachers, like all other emotional labourers, receive financial rewards for their efforts. Moreover, although there are merits in Hargreaves' (1998) description of emotion in teachers it can nevertheless be criticised, as Hebson, Earnshaw and Marchington, (2007) commented that it is extremely difficult to adequately measure facets such as creativity and joy. Nonetheless it is argued that stress is a pervasive factor for many teachers, as discussed by Ogbonna and Harris (2004, p.198), "I've a constant stress headache and my blood pressure must be akin to volcanic pressure."

Lindqvist et al. (2019) added that stress is becoming a common feature in the lives of contemporary teachers, with many individuals seeking refuge in various coping mechanisms.

Coping strategies in teaching

Both surface and deep acting are commonly utilised by many teachers to offset the effects of emotional labour. Ogbonna & Harris (2004, p.1192) provided an example of surface acting in teachers:

It's all about image – creating a brand of 'me'..... I have no problem with faking concern about students if it gets me another increment.

Hargreaves (2000, p.812) further articulated that many teachers create a “Disneyesque culture of niceness” and “mask” and manufacture their emotions in order to please their students.

According to Lindqvist et al. (2019), there are four different coping mechanisms that are used by teachers to combat the negative effects of emotional labour. These include thinking of other things, taking considered actions, expressing individual feelings and looking for support from others. Nissim (2017) expanded on this argument with five further points. Nissim (2017) stressed that putting things into perspective, utilising the support of colleagues, adopting a conservative approach to teaching, possessing rational task-oriented behaviour and attempting to manage each instance, are all successful components in alleviating the onset of emotional tension.

Nonetheless, as King and Ng (2018) commented, although these arguments have their merits, additional research is necessary in order to better comprehend the coping strategies that are specifically employed in the teaching profession. Cowie (2003) contended that it is essential for all teachers to try to like their students as much as they can and if possible, to care deeply for them. This is regarded as a fundamental tenet of remaining in the job. Bolton (2017) added that the decline of this kind of philanthropic emotion work in many teachers has led to a reduction in the quality of teaching.

Cowie (2003, p.259) posited that it is possible to eventually successfully merge deep acting into teaching styles and cites the case of a non-Japanese English teacher who was trying hard to “be himself” rather than “put on a mask”. Cowie (2003) contended that this particular teacher, like many others, was arguably not working without a “mask” but was instead becoming accustomed to the deep acting he must perform in order to teach to meet student expectations. Cowie (2003, p.259) further cited instances of teachers withdrawing from classes and refusing to engage with students as they looked for ways to cope with stress.

The teaching industry in Japan

The once lucrative English teaching industry in Japan has undergone rapid change since the halcyon days of the late 1980s and 1990s. The swift decline in working conditions, labour standards and in teacher salaries has resulted in a great deal of stress and anxiety for those who still work as English teachers (Budmar, 2012).

Moreover, cultural differences between Japanese students and English teachers have long been seen as one of the most stressful aspects of the job, although recently have become more pronounced as working conditions have deteriorated and salaries reduced (Nagamine, 2018).

Emotional Labour in the teaching industry in Japan

Conditions for foreign employees in the Japanese English teaching industry are now at an all-time low and it has become extremely difficult to make savings (Nagamine, 2018).

The emotional tension experienced by many English teachers has been argued by academics in several different ways, with cultural differences between students and teachers cited as a major source of stress. Grumbine, Aka and Hirano (2018) contended that Japanese students have been criticised as being passive, lacking in initiative, and for their generally inadequate level of communication. On the other hand, English teachers have also been ostracised by Japanese students for failing to provide sufficient student motivation and for imposing culturally uncomfortable techniques such as designating specific students to answer questions. Foreign English teachers are often unsure of how to deal with Japanese cultural norms (Yamanaka & Suzuki, 2020). Moreover, Isemonger (2020) argued while direct speech is common in Western societies, Japanese culture is inherently centred on indirect forms of speech that are utilised in order to assist group conformity, maintain a harmonious atmosphere, and to preserve image in front of others.

Cowie (2003, p.260) analysed the emotional labour of nine English teachers in Japanese universities and uncovered two key findings. Firstly, these teachers actively cultivated healthy and warm “emotional relationships” with their students where they exhibited deep levels of caring and provided moral guidance. However, Cowie (2003) also discovered that the emotional relationships of teachers with colleagues were frequently both unhappy and frustrating which were seen as a result of a lack of shared values and beliefs. Furthermore, Hughes and Cao (2018) elucidated that teachers and academic institutions should examine emotions in a collaborative way, in order to improve the level of emotional warmth with students and to enhance the quality of morals utilised in teaching.

Method

A qualitative method was employed in this research in order to generate deep, rich and descriptive data (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2018). As Opsal et al. (2016) contended, qualitative methods are appropriate in fully understanding actual job settings. This form of research is argued as more personal than quantitative methods such as questionnaires and allows the interviewer the opportunity to probe or ask follow-up questions to the respondent. This research is underpinned by an interpretivist paradigm, where multiple realities and perspectives (Denzin, 2010) from non-Japanese English teachers have been created.

Semi-structured interviews that focus on deriving rich and descriptive data (Bell et al., 2018) from respondents were utilised in order to gather the most detailed and accurate answers possible. In terms of the process, the purpose of the interview was clarified, its potential impact, why the respondents were selected and approximately how long the interview would last. Interviewees were able to ask questions at any stage. As King, Horrocks and Brooks (2018) argued, these are essential requirements that facilitate open

and productive interviews. Open-ended questions were employed along with the usage of prompts to keep the conversation moving along.

Sampling and data collection

Convenience sampling was utilised in order to maximise participant availability and generate sufficient qualitative data (Bell et al., 2018). The study took place from August 2019 to February 2020 with 12 participants (see Table 1). The interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 70 minutes with the average interview time being 52 minutes. These were conducted over 6 months due to availability issues with the respondents and researcher. The interviewees were all former colleagues of the researcher. The interview questions can be found in Appendix 1. After all of the interviews were completed, the resultant transcripts were coded, explained, with the subsequent results evaluated, then compared with each other.

Data analysis

Thematic qualitative analysis was employed to identify the most relevant and appropriate themes from the raw data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An inductive approach was adopted in order to allow the data to determine each theme (Bell et al., 2018). A 6-step strategy took place where transcriptions were firstly read and reviewed in detail. Then, the data was coded and highlighted, followed by the generation of 24 initial codes and 8 initial themes. These themes were then reviewed to determine if they accurately represented the data. Subsequently, they were condensed to 5 final themes to provide the most detailed findings possible (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Limitations

The usage of online interviewing and *Skype* specifically is arguably not the most effective form of interviewing, although it was deemed to be appropriate with this particular study due to its overall benefits concerning the distance and cost needed to visit Japan (Seitz, 2016). Moreover, Lo Iacono et al. (2016) asserted that it is problematic to assess the degree of interviewees' feelings due it being of a cognitive nature. Brown (2018) further criticised online interviewing for its inability to detect psychophysical responses such as yawning, blushing and blinking. Nevertheless, Murray and Sixsmith (1998) contended that a greater amount of distance employed in communication can be beneficial in facilitating more honest and frank excerpts that can be especially hard to accomplish in more intimate face-to-face interviews. Jenner & Myers (2019) added that online interviews often create a better degree of responsiveness.

Furthermore, the fact that convenience sampling was utilised could be construed as a weakness. As Bell et al. (2018) elucidated, previous knowledge and experience of dealing with interviewees may result in an unwanted manipulation of the subsequent transcripts. To reduce the possibility of this situation occurring, the interviewer focused entirely on

the interview and did not mention of any prior shared experiences or emotions. Interviewees were addressed on a formal basis throughout the process.

The fact that every interviewee was male was unavoidable due to there being no female English teachers employed at the school. This appears to be a common situation throughout English schools in Japan, so long-serving female English teachers difficult to locate.

Educational setting

The research took place in a medium-sized language school which is part of a national Japanese chain. This school is located in Saitama prefecture. In the branch, there were two Japanese staff and twelve non-Japanese English teachers. These teachers are required to teach eight, 45-minute lessons per day, five days per week to students ranging from two year old children to retirees. Teachers are also required to participate in sales by providing demonstrations to potential students. Class sizes range from one student to five students for adults and up to 20 students for children. Teachers are required to rigidly follow the organisation's lesson structure. This involves five minutes of general conversation, 10 minutes of repeating the teacher, 5 minutes of reading, 10 minutes of questions, 10 minutes for a role-play and 5 minutes of grammar. Personal input is discouraged. Twelve non-Japanese English teachers (the entire teaching team) agreed to participate in the research. Their demographics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants in the study

Respondent	Gender	Age	Nationality	Time in Japan	Job title
A	M	49	British	18 years	Instructor
B	M	50	Australian	19 years	Instructor
C	M	39	Australian	9 years	Instructor
D	M	38	Australian	8 years	Instructor
E	M	35	British	8 years	Instructor
F	M	42	Canadian	16 years	Instructor
G	M	41	Australian	13 years	Instructor
H	M	44	British	11 years	Instructor
I	M	50	British	10 years	Instructor
J	M	40	Canadian	13 years	Instructor
K	M	45	British	14 years	Instructor
L	M	42	British	11 years	Instructor

Findings and discussion

Echoing the work of Hargreaves (2000); Yin et al. (2019); Gregersen et al. (2020) and King et al. (2018a), the interview results have indicated that these English teachers experience emotional labour in similar ways to that encountered by primary and secondary teachers and university lecturers although arguably on a slightly more severe scale.

This section is separated into five different areas – the effects of emotional dissonance, loss of job satisfaction, surface acting, deep acting, and other coping mechanisms.

Emotional dissonance

Several respondents articulated their emotional discomfort when being coerced by staff to sell a product they didn't believe would be beneficial to the student. Although they were required to perform this function on a regular basis, they were unable to reconcile with their beliefs that they were providing a useful and ethical service. Whereas one interviewee realised that this function was necessary in order to generate more business, every other respondent expressed displeasure in being necessitated to sell products due to the pressure needed to succeed. However, Respondent A indicated that he gained a form of perverse pleasure from dealing with negative situations. This interviewee saw himself as a survivor and took pride in his endurance and ability to cope with trying situations commenting that "what doesn't break you makes you stronger".

The fact that all instructors were required to completely adhere to the lesson format and were not allowed to exhibit any form of individual expression was another contributory factor in the onset of emotional labour.

Many instructors said that they were stifled and were not able to provide the best possible lessons to their students when they performed their duties as "drones". Moreover, many teachers felt they were disrespected by the school and were viewed as "a number" and not as individuals. Respondent D compared his predicament to that of a "trained monkey wearing a suit" inferring that although there was a need to portray an image of professionalism there was also the necessity to constantly entertain students which he found on occasion to be demeaning. Virtually every teacher said they understood that this function was part of the job although explained that they struggled to maintain this kind of behaviour over a sustained period of time and had particular difficulty accomplishing this objective with students who were not receptive to their efforts.

The need to present an image of positivity in front of other children was not seen as particularly trying although performing in front of watching parents was explained as much more stressful due to these individuals having unrealistic expectations. The potential negative remarks from parents watching the lesson was seen as both stressful and a motivating fear factor to perform as well as possible on all occasions. These results can be connected to the work of Lindqvist et al. (2019) who elaborated that monitoring schemes created greater levels of stress in employees. This kind of emotional labour can be regarded as distinct to foreign language instructors as this situation arguably rarely occurs in primary schools, secondary schools and universities.

Nevertheless, it should be recognised that there are distinct differences in the types of students that are taught by English teachers in Japan compared to the primary and secondary teachers investigated by Hargreaves and the university lecturers studied by Ogbonna and Harris. As Respondent F explained:

In Japan it seems common practice for doctors to recommend attending English language classes as a form of therapy for patients who have difficulty in relating to other people. Obviously, this leads to a great deal of pressure on the instructor in trying to accommodate this kind of student. I can recall many instances of this....

Moreover, Respondent C explained that occasional experiences with xenophobic students became “emotionally draining” with many instructors believing that they were unqualified to deal with the situation. These types of experiences were not documented in the work of school teachers and university lecturers in the literature review and it can be argued that this form of emotional labour is unique to foreign English language teachers.

Loss of job satisfaction

Whereas many individuals used to be generally content with their previous working conditions, they have now become much more dissatisfied and some even disillusioned, due to not being valued by the school and being forced to engage in more frequent instances of emotional labour.

Respondent A used vivid language such as “atrocious” and “disgusting” to describe the working conditions. These were viewed as one of the worst aspects of the job with Respondent L highlighting the need for some individuals to resort to alcohol and medication after work in order to calm their nerves after a long day of teaching. These kinds of coping measures were not seen in the work of Ogbonna and Harris (2004); Hargreaves (2000) and Bolton (2017). Similarly, Cowie’s (2003) study of university teachers in Japan did not provide the same vigour of complaints, illustrating the degree of emotional labour that different instructors experienced.

Treatment by the branch staff was seen by many interviewees to be unreasonable and exhausting with Respondent F bemoaning that he was “treated like a piece of meat”. A major source of consternation involved being required to teach the same materials to the same students “ad infinitum” and “having several repeat students per week and being expected to provide fresh and entertaining lessons in a stale teaching environment”.

Furthermore, several respondents articulated their displeasure in being forced to teach large quantities of classes of children with Respondent K citing that they were particularly “exhausting” and difficult to control with no training offered to counteract or manage problematic situations. Further complexities included a lack of classroom size, too many children in the class and the need to constantly portray an image of happiness or “artificial delight” as Respondent J remarked, due to the children’s parents watching the lesson through an adjacent window. The interviewees said that they felt pressurised in order to perform although they did not feel happy in what they were doing. Nevertheless, they had to demonstrate an image of enjoying their time teaching classes of large and occasionally disruptive children although their innate feelings did not match their bodily expressions. The need to entertain and “act the clown” was cited by Respondent C and Respondent G correlating to Romanowski and Alkhateeb’s (2020) argument on the “McDonaldisation” of education. Indeed, Respondent A commented that:

One has to assume an unnatural air of delirium when teaching very young children, especially in preregistration demonstration lessons. This is exhausting and soul-destroying.

The lack of direction from the company was another reason cited for an increase in emotional tension. Due to cost-cutting, head teachers and trainers were demoted to the position of regular instructors and their absence has resulted in a lack of support and guidance. More importantly, as the branch staff were in effect the only individuals in charge of delivering feedback to teachers there was a noticeable gap in the quality of comments that were previously given and what is received now.

Cultural difficulties also surfaced when instructors received feedback from the Japanese branch staff. One of the primary reasons for this can be attributed to Japanese people tending to rarely offer praise and instead focusing on areas of weakness when commenting on performance (Nagamine, 2018). Cultural differences between instructors, staff and students were cited as a contributory factor in lowering the atmosphere in the school with the need to “spoon-feed” students who were often intimidated by foreigners viewed as emotionally tiring.

Moreover, the Japanese branch staff's tendency to continually monitor instructor performance in order to enhance their own perceived standards was seen as a lack of trust in the ability of instructors. Respondent F commented that there was a distinct lack of respect from the branch management and Respondent C added that he was “treated like a child” despite being professionally qualified and having taught in Japan for over 11 years. Other instructors remarked that this kind of feedback was demoralising, pedantic and more emotionally destructive than helpful.

Students who were non-committal, reluctant to elaborate or exhibited disinterest were viewed as especially difficult to teach. Respondent H remarked that students who were akin to getting “blood out of a stone” made him exasperated, and reduced his motivation to provide good lessons. Respondent I commented that quiet students made it “difficult to make it through the day”.

A further complaint was that the teachers who tended to entertain their students the most usually received the highest increments leading to those who felt their lessons were of a higher quality becoming disillusioned with both the job and the company. Indeed, Respondent D commented that:

I am not the stereotypical hyper-energetic clown-like performer that many language-teaching businesses in Japan believe that students respond to. I have found that many students find this type of teacher to be tiresome.

Although due to company restructuring and financial difficulties there was no longer any form of foreign management to observe and enhance lesson quality, many instructors still felt pressured when observed by Japanese branch staff and the parents of the children they taught. Respondent E observed that “it's hard to smile when there is a kid jumping

up and down on you”, illustrating the difficulty of faking emotions when in potentially uncomfortable situations.

Virtually all of the respondents answered that appropriate impression management as emphasised by Bolton (2017) and Potipiroon et al. (2019) is a necessity in the profession, as students expect a high degree of customer service at all times. This was seen as particularly important in a country such as Japan which is renowned for its high level of attention to clients. Several teachers said they had become socialised into this form of emotion work which was seen as important to provide consistently in order to maintain a good reputation with students and ultimately solidify their job security.

Arguably, the decline in popularity of the English teaching industry has meant that there is continuous pressure in order to perform optimally at all times, often in trying circumstances. This response was particularly important for teachers with families who were not able to leave Japan and had to “*put up*” with the declining conditions, as Respondent F elaborated. Nevertheless, there was a correlation with the work of Cowie (2003) with every teacher exhibiting caring behaviour towards their students, acknowledging that this feature was a fundamental tenet of his job. Respondent G commented that:

I care absolutely about this. It is the fundamental point of my attitude to my job. I might even be described as a perfectionist and as rather too conscientious. It causes a lot of stress, as it is impossible to achieve perfection in this kind of job with these kinds of conditions.

Despite the universally acknowledged reduction in the standard of working conditions, the need to provide consistently high-quality lessons was seen as important. This was viewed as essential in maintaining individual teaching standards and a sense of pride in their work. Moreover, Respondent J explained that he felt “difficulty in being able to switch off from teaching mode”, articulating that despite being accustomed to the position for many years and knowing the job “inside out”, they still found it hard to relax and return to their normal selves at the end of their shift.

As a result, many instructors have developed their own style of teaching which tended to differ from the method that is sold by the organisation. Several teachers attempt to minimise the focus on grammar (one of the selling points of the company) and facilitate student interaction in order to reduce “the monotony and keep a modicum of sanity” (Respondent B).

In terms of the positive aspects of emotional labour, every respondent cited their enjoyment in teaching students who were genuinely interested in what they were saying, and additionally of the rewards of meeting a large cross-section of the Japanese population. Others commented on deriving pleasure from explaining the cultural, social and historical aspects of their home countries and also the novelty of teaching students who were not Japanese.

Surface acting

The results of the study have demonstrated that many English teachers in Japan have become used to performing emotional acts and consciously perform surface acting on a daily basis in order to maintain their standing with students and to protect themselves from any potential repercussions with staff. Although almost every teacher who was interviewed expressed their reluctance in performing surface acting on a regular basis, they understood it was necessary to facilitate the teaching of the lesson and to realise student expectations, albeit as a façade.

As in the various customer service occupations analysed by Hochschild (1983), the necessity to smile and project an atmosphere of friendliness is essential for non-Japanese English teachers in Japan. This can be argued as particularly important in this industry as many instructors possess limited transferable skills to work in other occupations. Another reason offered by an interviewee was the need to be as relaxed and as friendly as possible with prospective and existing customers as many Japanese students tend to be introverted and afraid of foreigners. Again, this kind of experience can be seen as unique to foreign English language teachers.

Moreover, several respondents admitted they found surface acting easy to perform and were able to “switch off” once the lesson had finished and “switch on” for the next lesson (Respondent L). Furthermore, several interviewees articulated that they had become accustomed to this process after several years of performing surface acting and did not experience any negative effects from doing so. However, Respondent F found it much more difficult to overcome stressful situations:

Pressure, leading to stress and neurosis is common in this business. It can be extremely difficult maintaining one’s composure. The nature of the job means that it is necessary never to get angry with students, and true feelings have to be contained. This leads to a bottling up of anger which has to be dealt with carefully.

The research highlighted that experienced instructors were more capable and adept in dealing with this kind of situation although were also unable to totally eradicate their negative and unwanted feelings. Respondent F dealt with the “anger” in different ways although it was seen as a “necessary evil”.

It was also seen as a task that was essential to regularly accomplish with its severity determined by the degree of perceived fairness of the situation by the individual concerned. Respondent C commented that “it sucks but it’s part of the job”.

Deep acting

Evidence of deep acting was more difficult to locate. This may be due to a form of resistance from the interviewees as the expectations of the school did not align with those who were interviewed. However, several teachers believed they had subconsciously

become more optimistic and patient as a result of teaching a large volume of students over a number of years with Respondent E even seeing it as “therapeutic”.

Bolton’s (2017) contention on the need to enjoy camaraderie with colleagues was also noticeable in the findings. As the teachers in the branch had known each other for several years and were friends socially this was viewed as an important component in dealing with adverse situations. Several instructors viewed this collective siege mentality as an asset in overcoming the effects of emotional labour.

Other coping mechanisms

In line with Bolton’s (2017) analysis that many emotional labourers re-appraise negative situations in a more positive way, to offset emotional dissonance, the same kind of findings originated from this study. Although Respondent K sought refuge in the staffroom and was inclined to “slag off” certain students on occasion who did not try particularly hard or were disruptive and abusive, others tended to be less vocal and reluctant to insult the students they taught. This was particularly true for teachers who used to be in positions of authority (especially trainers and head teachers).

Although these individuals were now the same level as the other instructors in their branch, they still felt it was important to exhibit a positive and professional image at all times. These teachers still continued to feel a sense of duty to both their students and fellow teachers. Although they believed they were not respected nor valued by the company, they nevertheless did not feel it was necessary to complain about their students in the same way as the other teachers did.

Respondent A commented that he was able to both project positivity and feel more optimistic for the duration of a lesson, then revert to “being normal” in the break between the next lesson where they engaged in “the usual banter” with their co-workers. These kinds of conversations can be interpreted as following Bolton’s (2017) concept of utilising camaraderie with colleagues to deal with emotionally difficult situations. The excellent relationship between the instructors was seen as one of the most important reasons for making the job more “bearable” and “tolerable” (Respondent A). These results did not align with the findings of Cowie (2003), who discovered that difficult relationships between teachers were a main cause of emotional tension.

However, a diminished sense of achievement and individual efficacy was cited as a result of organisational bureaucracy that was viewed as constraining efforts to make lessons more interesting and rewarding. These findings can be linked to Nair’s (2019) concept of artificially contrived authenticity, as many instructors resorted to faking their emotions in order to carry out company directives and often suffered the consequences of emotional labour in the process.

Moreover, the concept of burnout was highlighted by Respondent J who commented upon the reliance of some teachers on alcohol and medication:

Stress built up while working makes one feel impatient and frustrated away from the job. A large number of teachers rely on the over-indulgence of the socially-accepted consumption of alcohol after work. I know of several teachers that require nerve-calming, prescribed medication.

Conclusion

Overall, the severity of the discomfort endured by English teachers in this case study can be argued as more intense than the emotional labour experienced by other occupations. Non-Japanese English teachers in Japan are usually limited to working solely in this occupation, due to lacking commensurate Japanese language ability, transferable skills, and not being educated by the Japanese system.

They are in effect “stuck” and “trapped” where they have little prospect of moving. The need to protect these positions that were gradually being phased out due to the economic downturn caused a significant amount of stress.

Moreover, worsening working conditions and a decline in the popularity of the English language teaching industry has arguably created a stress bubble in many teachers that could burst at any time. This situation is further exacerbated for teachers with families whose partners are reluctant to leave Japan.

The results from this study provide greater credence to the work of Yin et al. (2019), Gregersen et al. (2020), King et al. (2018), Hall (2019) and particularly Cowie’s (2003) analysis of English teachers in Japanese universities. Although Day (2004) pontificated that the emotional labour which is performed in the teaching profession is very different to the version hypothesised by Hochschild, the interview findings present a very distinct kind of analysis.

The findings confirm that English teachers in Japan experience the same kinds of emotional labour as primary and secondary school teachers, university lecturers and other kinds of customer service occupations. As was highlighted, emotional labour in teaching is centred on emotional capacities in dealing with others, such as empathy, respect and tolerance. Moreover, the results confirm Cowie’s (2003) argument that Hochschild’s concept of emotional labour is a valid way for English teachers in Japan to view and critically engage with the ever-important usage of emotions in the teaching profession. Evidence of emotional dissonance, loss of job satisfaction, surface acting, deep acting to an extent, and other coping mechanisms such as camaraderie were all discussed in this study.

However, this research admittedly has some limitations which should be acknowledged. Although Seitz (2016) argued Skype is easy to install and use, three interviewees had issues with their Internet connections. This may have led to a degree of discomfort for the participants who may have produced negative answers as a result (Lo Iacono et al. (2016). When there were technical difficulties, questions were repeated, and their meaning explained and re-phrased in case they were not understood (Seitz, 2016). In order to

enhance reliability and generalisability, it is suggested that any future study uses a larger sample size with greater gender balance. This is arguably important, due to the strong connections that have been identified between gender and emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983).

Overall, this paper has added to the work of Cowie as it has explored further, more intense situations that are needed to be overcome by non-Japanese teachers of English as a foreign language in Japan. The requirement to deal with students with mental problems who had been advised by doctors to study English, and the occasional interactions with xenophobic individuals all added to the emotional discomfort.

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Appendix 1: Interview questions

Scene setting

1. Why did you choose to go to Japan?
2. How long have you lived in Japan?
3. Why did you want to become an English teacher in Japan?
4. Have you worked in any other countries?
5. Please describe your main responsibilities.
6. How many students do you teach every week?
7. What aspects of your job do you like the most?
8. What don't you like about your job? What pressures do you face?
9. What were your expectations prior to departure? Were they realised?
10. How has your job changed since you started working in the English teaching industry? For better? For worse?
11. Would you encourage a new teacher to work in Japan? Why or why not?

Organisational issues

12. What kind of training have you received? Has it helped you improve or even hinder your performance in the classroom?
13. What kind of feedback have you received on your teaching? Was it beneficial to your development?
14. Do you feel you are adequately supported by your company? Please cite examples.
15. Describe your relationship with your line manager and your colleagues. Has this affected your job performance in any way?

Teaching style

16. What do you think are the characteristics of a "good" teacher? Do you think you are a "good" teacher? Why or why not?
17. Has your teaching style changed since you started your job? If so, how? Do you think you have fallen into any bad habits? If so, why?
18. Do you care about whether your students' interest is maintained during your teaching? How do you accomplish this?
19. How would you describe your teaching style?
20. Have you copied the teaching styles of others? What ideas have worked?
21. Have you ever compromised your beliefs or teaching style when teaching a student? If so, how did you feel after the lesson?
22. What is the biggest mistake you have ever made in a lesson? Why do you think it occurred?

Issues with students

23. What kinds of classes are most difficult for you to teach (for example; Kids, Business, Eiken, TOEIC, TOEFL, IELTS, general conversation) etc?
24. What class sizes are most difficult (“Man to Man”, small group, large group) etc?
25. What do you think your students expect from you in the classroom? Do you think you always fulfil their expectations? If not, what are your reasons?
26. Can you describe a situation where you had a problematic student in the classroom? How did you feel after the lesson?

Impact on the teacher

27. How has your outlook on teaching changed since you started the job? (In a positive or negative way?)
28. Do you ever feel reluctant to go to work? If so, why?
29. It is widely documented that feeling under pressure is a major problem in the teaching profession. Is that a view you share? If so, how has it affected you?
30. How do you personally cope after pressurised situations in the classroom? Does stress affect you emotionally? Do you feel there is a gap between what you do and actually feel?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for participating in this interview.

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