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ABSTRACT

In this study, we explore the teaching motivation of two experienced South Korean teachers of English from an Activity Theory perspective. In the fall semester of 2013, we interviewed two female teachers with a similar amount of teaching experience in comparable school districts as study participants in an in-depth qualitative inquiry. Our findings indicated that teachers’ beliefs about effective teaching methods functioned as a crucial mediational tool for their teaching motivation, and that the two teachers’ motivation levels progressed differently depending on how each of them exercised agency as a teacher. This study implies that, like L2 learning motivation, L2 teacher motivation also changes over time via dynamic interactions between the agents and contextual factors in an activity system. Pedagogically, the implication is that school administrators should be required to help teachers adjust to students’ differing needs by providing a supportive learning environment.

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1. Introduction

Like the motivation of teachers in other school subjects, second language (L2) teacher motivation has been considered strongly related to student motivation and L2 achievement (Bernaus, Wilson, & Gardner, 2009); however, to date, there are relatively few studies that have investigated motivational changes among second or foreign language teachers (e.g., Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011; Igawa, 2009; Sugino, 2010; Zhao, 2008). Furthermore, most studies related to L2 teacher motivation have focused on the identification of factors influencing teachers’ job satisfaction or initial career motivation (Kim & Kim, 2015). Given that both individual and contextual elements influence teacher motivation, a more comprehensive framework is necessary to completely understand the motivational dynamics affecting L2 teachers. On this basis, the present study investigates the motivational changes of South Korean (henceforth, Korean) English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers by adopting a Vygotskian Activity Theory (AT) perspective.

EFL teachers in Korea are facing an ongoing conundrum. In Korea, English language education “has been highly controlled by the government” (Choi, 2006, p. 20). The South Korean Ministry of Education requires virtually all college-bound high school students to take the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT), whose scores are a major component of entry into Korean
universities. English is one of the mandatory subjects on the CSAT, and the test mostly comprises reading comprehension questions. Thus, in order to increase the students’ CSAT scores, many EFL teachers working in college-bound high schools have relied on the traditional grammar translation method (GTM), which focuses on improving students’ grammar and reading abilities. In addition, school administrators often require teachers to stay at school until late in the evening to monitor and advise students on their self-study, because they believe that longer study hours at night will lead to an improvement in CSAT scores.

However, the mandated role of EFL teachers has changed since the implementation of the 6th National Curriculum, in which the communicative language teaching method was officially introduced (Ministry of Education, Science & Technology, 2011). The national curriculum has been reformed to develop students’ English communication competence (Kwon, 2015; Kwon & Kim, 2010); but this curriculum change has not been fully actualized in everyday teaching practice because some teachers are more accustomed to the GTM. As a consequence, an increasing number of students who are disappointed with the GTM and yearn to improve their oral/aural English skills have gone abroad to study English, many of them at a young age (Korean Education Development Institute, 2011). It is within this situation that Korean EFL teachers have been experiencing the heavy burden of needing to both effectively teach their students English content oriented toward CSAT preparation and improve their students’ English communication skills. Moreover, the exam-oriented, rigid education system in most college-bound humanities high schools in Korea prevents EFL teachers from implementing communicative teaching comprehensively. This lack of school autonomy and the gap between communication ideals and CSAT-focused realities have resulted in a lack of self-confidence among EFL teachers regarding their classroom teaching practice (Han, 2005), eventually leading to teaching demotivation among them (Kim, Kim, & Zhang, 2014).

Given the rarity of research on EFL teacher demotivation and the context of Korean English education, we undertook this study to investigate motivation levels among Korean EFL teachers. We focused on experienced teachers who were over 40 years old, assuming that they had experienced more fluctuations in motivation level due to the various changes in English education policy. In the next section, we briefly review teacher (de)motivation research and then discuss how AT can function as a sound theoretical framework in teacher motivation studies. The administration of semi-structured life-story interviews and the nature of our qualitative data analyses are explained in the Methods section. In the Results section, we discuss the stories of two teachers, Anna and Bona, focusing on similarities and differences between their motivational trajectories. In the Discussion, we examine how the findings of this study differ from those of previous research and how the AT approach can correctly describe and coherently explain issues in L2 teacher (de)motivation.

2. Literature review

2.1. Different perspectives on teacher (de)motivation research

Second and foreign language teachers’ teaching (de)motivation has been long neglected as a research topic, and only in recent years has it begun to be conducted in earnest. One early study, Kassabgy, Boraie, and Schmidt (2001), explored the factors associated with job satisfaction, reward, and motivation in teaching among 107 experienced EFL teachers in Egypt and English as a second language (ESL) teachers in Hawai‘i. The study showed that teachers’ job satisfaction was highly correlated with job rewards, among which internal rewards (e.g., performing to the best of one’s ability, having good relationships with others) were stressed over extrinsic rewards (e.g., salary, title, opportunities for promotion). Igawa (2009) investigated why Japanese, Cambodian, and American groups of in-service English teachers chose to teach English and showed that the more popular reasons were related to internal aspects of teaching, such as preference for English and desire to contribute to society. Zhao (2008) similarly studied the motivation of 17 EFL teachers in China on the basis of their narratives about their teaching history, and found that both social and psychological factors affected their motivation to become a teacher and maintain a career.

Recently, the research on teacher motivation has started to focus on its fluctuation over time. Studies have found that teacher motivation also increases or decreases due to influences of teaching context, policy change, or curriculum change at a national level. For example, Sugino (2010) demonstrated the existence of teacher demotivation among L2 teachers in Japanese universities, caused by students’ attitudes, class facilities, teaching materials, curriculum, working conditions, and human relationships. Among these factors, negative student attitudes in class played the most detrimental role in demotivating teachers. Similarly, Kumazawa (2013) investigated the teaching motivation levels of four novice high school EFL teachers in Japan and revealed that their motivation decreased due to conflicts among their ideal self (ideal future self-image), ought-to self (future self-image influenced by external pressures), and actual self (what they actually were or perceived themselves to be) (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Despite these insightful findings, however, the previous studies have limitations: they have only concentrated on internal or external factors affecting teacher motivation. Ushioda (2009) states that motivation emerges from “relations between real persons, with particular social identities, and the unfolding cultural context of activity” (p. 215) and that it is hence necessary to use a theoretical framework that is adequately sensitive to both individual uniqueness and contextual influences. In addition, Kim (2009, 2013) states that motivation is a multidimensional, dynamic psychological construct, and advocates a more interdisciplinary paradigm to study motivation. In this paper, we propose the use of activity theory (AT) as a holistic system for assessing L2 teacher motivation and investigate the role of contextual specific for motivation as well as the evolving nature of motivation as a whole.
2.2. The use of AT in teacher (de)motivation research

In order to study teacher (de)motivation, we used Engeström’s (1999) activity model because he highlights the contextual and societal dimensions of activity to a greater degree than Leont’ev (1978), who developed the initial model of AT. Engeström elaborated six essential elements of human activity: subjects, meditational tools (or instruments), objects, rules, communities, and division of labor. In Fig. 1, the subject of any activity refers to an agentic individual or group engaged in the activity (e.g., an L2 teacher, an L2 learner). The instruments are any physical and symbolic tools (e.g., textbooks, the L2, teacher’s belief) that mediate between the subject and the object. The object is the goal (e.g., an increase in a student’s L2 competence) that the subject wants to achieve through the activity; it can later be transformed into a visible outcome (e.g., the achievement of L2 communication skills). Achieving the object can be encouraged or hindered by interactions with other elements. The rules here are explicit and implicit regulations and norms (e.g., the use of the L2 in the classroom), while the community is a group or an organization to which the subject belongs (e.g., class, school). Finally, the division of labor refers to the shared responsibilities among members of the community engaging in different modes of participation in an activity (e.g., instructors’ teaching L2 and students’ learning L2).

According to the AT model, L2 teaching is a unique professional activity with specific motivational characteristics (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). L2 teacher motivation is complex in that it fluctuates while interacting with sociocultural factors in the dynamic context of the teaching profession. Thus, in order to understand L2 teacher motivation in depth, it is essential to use an inclusive approach. The AT model can be a useful option in this regard for the following reasons: 1) AT is comprehensive enough to examine the interactions between individual teachers and their social, cultural, and historical contexts; 2) AT can effectively explain the contradictions or tensions often identified in the L2 teaching context; and 3) AT can capture longitudinal changes in L2 teacher motivation (Kim & Zhang, 2013). In teaching, all elements are interconnected and constantly shift with reference to each other over time. This means that there may be potential conflicts among the elements. Thus, an L2 teacher’s teaching approach and techniques as well as his or her motivation change with the influences of many factors and with the teacher’s efforts to cope with and adopt different ways of dealing with contradictions over the course of his or her teaching history. As a framework that explains qualitative change in an activity over time, AT has the potential to illustrate and explain L2 teachers’ motivational changes and capture possible tensions among the elements surrounding their teaching (de)motivation.

Furthermore, in the AT approach, the mismatch within and between elements or between activities leads to a contradiction; and whether this contradiction can be resolved or not depends on how each subject exercises their agency. According to Gao (2010), agency is defined as the participants’ will and capacity to achieve desired and intended outcomes, presupposing a critical appreciation of contexts and reflexivity. Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) emphasize that by exercising agency, L2 learners actively engage in creating the terms and conditions of their L2 learning. To date, several studies have found that learner agency as well as learning contexts play an essential role in the formation of learners’ L2 learning strategy (Gao, 2010), language socialization (Fogle, 2012; Kim & Kim, 2013), and the L2 learning process (Deters, 2011). In relation to L2 teachers’ motivation, agency explains their initial teaching motivation; later, as teaching experience accumulates, their agency is co-constructed and renegotiated with their surrounding communities (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001), which leads to changes in teacher motivation levels.

Another crucial concept closely linked to agency in AT is that of the meditational tool (instrument), a category including not only physical tools but also symbolic artifacts that influence human activities. For instance, given that the effectiveness of study-abroad experiences has been shown to be mediated by L2 learners’ beliefs in developing L2 proficiency (Yang & Kim, 2011), teacher beliefs can act as meditational tools in a teaching context, because they function supportively or negatively for teachers’ motivation levels depending on their relationship with other contextual factors.

Despite the above-expressed advantages of using AT in teacher (de)motivation research, to date only a few studies have done so. Kim and Zhang (2013) exemplifies the application of AT to L2 teacher motivation by reexamining the findings of
Kumazawa (2013). In her study, Emiko, one of the participating teachers, initially had strong intrinsic motivation to become a teacher because she wanted to have a positive influence on her students. However, she experienced emotional conflict and stress when she started work because of her extracurricular responsibilities and her tight schedule, which prevented her from exercising her agency and preparing for her classes in an adequate manner. These conflicts consequently demotivated Emiko. From an AT perspective, Emiko’s activity system at this stage is illustrated in Fig. 2, in which the tensions among elements are displayed as dotted lines.

Zhang (2014) investigated four novice Chinese EFL teachers’ (de)motivation over an 8-month period and schematized their motivational fluctuations from an AT perspective. Two of the teachers experienced steady or regained motivation via positive reflection on their teaching or community support; however, the other two experienced demotivation because they lacked the willingness or ability to overcome their conflicts, which were mainly caused by the negative influence of the teaching community or by students’ negative attitudes toward learning English. Zhang opined that despite the similar contexts in which those teachers taught, they displayed different motivational trajectories depending on each one’s unique exercise of agency and (un)willingness to reflect on their teaching.

These studies show how teacher (de)motivation can be illustrated within an AT framework. They demonstrate that a teacher’s motivation is closely interconnected to his or her environment and show why some teachers became de/remotivated (while others did not) and what factor(s) served as mediational tool(s) (e.g., reflection). Given these benefits of the AT method, we use it to investigate motivation levels among experienced Korean EFL teachers. The specific research questions taken up are:

1. What motivational changes did the teachers experience in their professional development?
2. What are the factors influencing teacher motivation within the framework of AT?

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Participants

We interviewed five in-service Korean EFL secondary school teachers and one former teacher. However, to allow in-depth, thick description, we present the contrasting cases of only two of these teachers. Richard (2003) claims that the focus of case study should be on a particular unit or set of units and that sampling needs to be purposeful depending on the case’s intrinsic or instrumental value. In this study, to highlight the different teaching motivations of the two teachers, we selected Anna and Bona (both pseudonyms) out of the six teachers interviewed. Anna and Bona shared much of their teaching context: both had started their teaching careers in Pocheon, Gyeonggi Province, and then moved to Ilsan (in the same province); and both worked in humanities (as opposed to vocational) high schools. After working at four schools, Anna had resigned in February 2013 to begin a new career as a translator; and after 6 years in Ilsan, Bona had moved to Paju in 2013 and continued her teaching. Both had approximately 13 years’ teaching experience (see Table 1).
3.2. Data collection and analyses

We collected data mainly from semi-structured, retrospective life-story interviews. The use of life-story interview is well recognized as a method to gain “a subjective perspective on and understanding of the broad scope of topics or issues that individuals experience” (Atkinson, 2001, p. 128). It is an effective way to investigate how the interviewees describe and interpret their past experiences as well as their present life world, as Shoaib and Dörnyei (2005) also demonstrate in their study. The present study intends to explore two participants’ perceptions of their past and present teaching experiences; and thus, the life-story interview method was adopted for data collection. The first interview took approximately 90 min to obtain the general and motivation-related information from each participant. The second and third interviews were conducted for approximately 20 min each to clarify their previous comments. All the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. To understand the school context better, we also collected information on school history and curriculum from the school websites.

Before the interviews, participants filled out a background profile specifying information including amount of teaching experience and reason(s) for becoming an EFL teacher; then, we asked each participant to visualize their motivational change in a graph. Before drawing the graph, we explained what the numbers on the vertical line meant and how to draw the lines. The participants were asked to draw the motivational change from the beginning of their teaching career to the present, with an emphasis on capturing the most- and least-motivated periods of their careers. In order to avoid influencing their retrospective drawings, no graphic information was provided, except in the case of confusion. We then asked the participants why they had drawn those specific curves (e.g., “Why did you feel you were most or least motivated during this specific period?”) and what elements were involved in their motivational fluctuations (e.g., “What was your teaching goal or objective?”; “How did you try to achieve that goal or objective?”; “How much time and effort did you invest in the class?”; “What rules or regulations did you set in order to achieve the goal?”; “How was your personal life at that time?”; and “What were your views of the educational situation at your school at that time?”).

To specify the components of the activity system, we coded the data in two steps, based on Charmaz’s (2001) guidelines for analyzing interview data. First, we coded the themes expressed by participants to define what was happening in the data (open coding). This initial coding generated several categories, for instance “perceiving the gap between my teaching object and students’ responses” and “being satisfied with my relationships with students.” Next, we sorted and synthesized the data using this initial coding, based on interviewees’ inferred and explicit meanings, and selected interview portions relevant to AT analysis in order to connect them with the model (selective coding). For example, we combined the initial codes “focusing on grammar,” “using textbooks,” and “using no games or [Microsoft] PowerPoint presentations” into a single code, “teaching methods.” This code concerned the instruments that teachers had used to achieve their teaching goals, and it consequently fell under the component of a mediational tool in our AT-based analysis. In this way, coded themes were categorized as one of the elements in Engeström’s (1999) activity theory model. The figures and discussion in the Results section below reflect the findings from the above coding process.

4. Results

In this section, we report the motivational changes of the two EFL teachers from an AT perspective. After showing the structure of the motivational trajectories between them, we present the participants’ stories in parallel according to motivational level: the most motivated phase first, and the least-motivated phase later. The stories highlight the salient features that influenced the teachers’ motivational change in each period and the similar or different factors involved in these changes.

4.1. Overall motivational trajectories

The two participants, Anna and Bona, had different motivations for becoming EFL teachers. Majoring in English language education in college, Anna had started her teaching career immediately after graduating; in contrast, Bona had first studied mathematics education in college, but later reentered college to major in English education because it was a better field in terms of finding a job.

The following figures depict the overall motivational change patterns of both teachers. Anna’s teaching motivation was highest at the beginning, and then started to decrease after 3 years of teaching. In contrast, Bona started teaching without much passion, but her motivation kept increasing along with her teaching experience.
4.2. The most motivated phases: little tension within the environment

As shown in Figs. 3 and 4, the two participants' highest motivational periods were different. However, the reasons and the related factors during these periods show remarkable similarities between the two teachers. First, they had passion and self-confidence in teaching. Anna reported that she had a passion to teach well once she had become a teacher and Bona said that she gained self-confidence as she tried to improve her ability in English.

They also had realistic teaching methods and teaching objects during these periods. Anna had believed that her students at her first school most urgently needed to learn English grammar and reading in order to prepare for the CSAT. Unfortunately, Pocheon, the rural area in which she was teaching, lacked the resources (e.g., libraries, private after-school classes, good tutors), which she believed the students needed to learn effectively. Thus, she adopted the traditional GTM widely used in Korea, explaining grammar explicitly and providing line-by-line first-language (L1) translation. Despite these traditional and not entirely beloved methods, Anna thought that students had shown positive responses and appreciated her teaching.

Similarly, Bona came to appreciate the value of the GTM more, at least for the students in Grade 12, as she accumulated teaching experience. Recognizing the importance of the CSAT for her students and realizing that the test's English section still puts emphasis on reading comprehension ability, she set herself the teaching object of helping students understand written texts. At that point, she started to believe that the GTM would be helpful, and the students' positive responses encouraged the change in Bona's view of the GTM from negative to positive.

In addition, both participants showed acceptance of their responsibilities as teachers and had positive perceptions of the school context in which they had worked. Thus, Anna willingly stayed at school until late to facilitate students' studying on weekdays, believing that her efforts were worthwhile and would bring her rewards in the form of career fulfillment. Furthermore, she had colleagues with whom she could talk about her classes and school life. This communication made her more motivated and satisfied with her teaching life, as shown in Excerpt 1.

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**Excerpt 1**

Anna: ... The senior teachers took a great deal of care of novice teachers, and there was another new English teacher. We frequently talked about classes on the way home.

Anna: I virtually lived at the school. I went to the school very early in the morning and stayed until 10 pm because I was a homeroom teacher and monitored students’ after-class self-study. I gladly accepted my responsibility as a homeroom teacher.

Bona's contextual factors, such as the presence of a supportive school community and the rules of the class, also positively influenced her in this period of high motivation. As she gained more teaching experience, she became more able to reflect on her teaching practice and the school system. She implemented a new teaching strategy in class and began interacting more...
with students and colleagues, leading to better relationships with them, as mentioned in Excerpt 2. She also started to participate more actively in school administration and found meaning in her life at school. Her view of her school responsibilities changed accordingly.

The activity systems of the two participants' teaching motivation during their respective highly motivated career phases are illustrated in Figs. 5 and 6. They show few tensions among elements, leading to the teachers' greater satisfaction with their teaching, as influenced by the positive outcomes.

However, there were some points that seemed to cause later conflict in both activity systems (visualized by the jagged arrows in Figs. 5 and 6). Although Anna believed that using the GTM was the right strategy to achieve her teaching goals, it is also true that she probably had no other option as a novice teacher. She also mentioned her concerns over her health due to the heavy burden of being a homeroom teacher. Similarly, Bona was concerned about the possibility of conflict between her, the instrument (GTM), and the teaching object. She felt that tensions might be caused when she taught students in Grades 10 and 11, because the school’s policy required a communication-oriented approach significantly different from the GTM. Thus, although the above-mentioned factors did not produce explicit conflict at this phase, their volatility clearly had the potential to change the teachers' relationship to other factors and thereby to lead to conflict.

4.3. Demotivated or amotivated phase: conflict with the environment

Anna experienced the most difficult period of her teaching career after moving to Ilsan1; on the other hand, Bona experienced maladjustment in her first school, which was later alleviated. In this section, we present the factors that reduced the teachers' motivation to its lowest levels, and what their reactions were to these factors, person by person.

4.3.1. Anna's case: too large a gap between the ideal and the reality

In the second school, Anna started to think anew about the efficiency of the traditional teaching method and to apply a critical eye to it because of its failure to encourage students' active participation in class activities. She decided to use new

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1 The Korean Ministry of Education uses a job-rotation system in which all teacher candidates wanting to work at a public school need to take the regional teacher appointment exam. After passing the exam, each new teacher is assigned a school by the regional school board. All teachers are required to switch to another school in the same region after teaching for 5 years at a given school.
methods such as games and visual materials to motivate her students to participate more in class. However, these strategies were insufficient to entice them to play an active part in class. This situation made Anna feel deflated, as she reported that she had not been sure whether the students had actually learned much through these new strategies.

Anna’s students’ low English proficiency also significantly increased her demotivation with regard to teaching. Most of her students were underachievers, who did not seem highly motivated to learn English. It was difficult to teach them; despite her efforts, she did not succeed in eliciting the responses that she desired from her students, as described in Excerpt 3.

The local community of English language teachers was not friendly or nurturing, either. The school asked Anna to monitor the students’ study until late in the evening, so that more of them would pass their college entrance examinations. She felt obligated to fulfill this request as a homeroom teacher, but had no hope that doing so would help more students gain admission to college. In the interview, she reported having felt pessimistic about her teaching and about school policies at that point (see Excerpt 4).

As a result, Anna came to focus on her perceived limitations as an English teacher and as a homeroom teacher. She believed that her hard work was not helpful to her students and that she would not make a difference to their lives or English proficiency and would not be fulfilled by her work. The demotivation and low achievement of her students and the ramifications for their future led Anna to believe that she had inadvertently misled or even cheated her students, and that she could do little to improve the situation. Gradually, she lost confidence as a teacher and any sense of meaning in her teaching life. That was when she decided to change careers.

**Fig. 6.** Complex model of the activity system of the most-motivated stage of Bona’s L2-teaching career.

Excerpt 3
Anna: There were too many students who did not know much English and were not motivated to learn English. … There were a lot of underachievers and dropouts. … I expected that when I made efforts to motivate them, the students would follow me. However, the students didn’t respond.

Excerpt 4
Anna: … English teachers didn’t talk to each other much about classes. The reason might have been that their classes were too difficult.
Anna: Frankly speaking, there were not many students who could enter college. However, I had to encourage them to study until late at night by giving them hope, although in vain. I felt like a fraud.

As a result, Anna came to focus on her perceived limitations as an English teacher and as a homeroom teacher. She believed that her hard work was not helpful to her students and that she would not make a difference to their lives or English proficiency and would not be fulfilled by her work. The demotivation and low achievement of her students and the ramifications for their future led Anna to believe that she had inadvertently misled or even cheated her students, and that she could do little to improve the situation. Gradually, she lost confidence as a teacher and any sense of meaning in her teaching life. That was when she decided to change careers.

**Fig. 7** illustrates the activity system of Anna’s teaching motivation during this phase of diminishing motivation. In this phase, conflict among elements emerged, as illustrated in the figure by the dotted lines. Her teaching object was precluded by school rules, and her teaching methods (instrument) did not match the students’ level of proficiency or interest (community). Further, she did not wholeheartedly embrace her responsibilities as a homeroom teacher, and the teachers’ community did not fulfill her need to discuss and share teaching methods and receive emotional support. These circumstances dragged her down to a deeper level of frustration and demotivation.
4.3.2. Bona’s case: maladjustment to the school system

When Bona was first appointed to a teaching position, she was unsure how to conduct herself independently as a teacher; she normally followed lesson plans that had been set by other teachers. Similarly, other more experienced English teachers had chosen the English textbooks in use, and Bona merely accepted their decisions on this matter. She did not have an objective (or object in the AT framework), for her class, and instead merely used traditional teaching methods to help her students answer workbook questions about grammar and vocabulary. Bona attributed her maladjustment in the classroom mainly to her lack of self-confidence in her English proficiency and teaching methods. Excerpt 5 shows her awareness that passing the teacher-appointment exam does not necessarily imply a high level of English proficiency. She felt guilty about using the GTM but could not think of any alternatives.

Bona also believed that she had not been familiar enough with the school system to contribute by performing administrative duties at her school. She had had a passive-onlooker mindset, and showed little interest in how the school worked. As a result, she was dissatisfied with school life and tried to find meaning in her life outside school. She focused on her hobbies and on meeting other people in her free time, leading to further maladjustment at school.

Fig. 7 shows Bona’s motivational activity system during this initial period. She was not ready to teach or to manage her school responsibilities at the time, which resulted in conflict between her vague object and the school environment. She thought that her English proficiency and knowledge of teaching methods were insufficient, and she felt guilty. Further, because she passively went along with other teachers’ decisions instead of taking active charge of her own practice, it was difficult for her to create a teaching object of her own, find personal meaning in school life, actively participate in school management, or engage with the school community. This led her to becoming dissatisfied with teaching and entering an amotivated phase.

5. Discussion

In this section, the main findings of the study are discussed. The two participants whose data are considered here demonstrated different but equally dynamic motivational changes in relation to teaching English, although they were of a similar age and had a similar amount of teaching experience with students of a similar age in similar school districts. In other words, the similar context does not seem to have affected the teachers in the same way. These differences are discussed below using teacher beliefs/values as a mediational tool and the concept of agency from an AT perspective.
5.1. Teacher beliefs/values as a mediational tool

Previously, teacher motivation studies have recognized that teacher beliefs/values mediate their (de)motivation the most, but they have not systematically addressed changes in beliefs/values and motivational fluctuations. In Igawa (2009), for example, the teachers valuing teaching itself was closely related to their choice of teaching career and their job satisfaction. In Kumazawa (2013), Emiko also placed the most value on teaching itself. As a result, when preparation time for the classes was prevented by other responsibilities, she was demotivated. However, these studies only focused on the relationship between teacher beliefs/values and their (de)motivation at a specific point in their teaching career.

In contrast, the AT approach, as stated earlier, allows us to examine how teacher beliefs/values, as mediational tools, change within the given contexts and affect teachers' motivation levels, whether supportively or detrimentally, depending on the extent to which their teaching beliefs/values are in line with the contextual factors. The findings in this study revealed that the two participants' beliefs about effective teaching methods and the responsibilities of a homeroom teacher mainly mediated their (de)motivation; and as they moved to a different school district, their beliefs and motivation levels changed accordingly.

For instance, Anna initially believed that the GTM would be beneficial for students to improve their vocabulary and grammar abilities. She also believed that, as a homeroom teacher, providing extra student care after-school hours would be helpful to prepare them for the college entrance examination. These beliefs were quite compatible with the school's objectives and students' expectations, leading Anna to initially feel satisfied with teaching life and to enter a high-motivation phase. By contrast, Bona had believed that the GTM was not a proper method to improve students' communicative competence, and this belief negatively impacted her teaching because it triggered the conflict with her lack of English proficiency.

In addition, this study has shown how the teachers' initial beliefs had changed and how these changed beliefs affected their teacher motivation by interacting with the environment. When she moved to Ilsan, Anna eventually lost her belief in the effectivenes of the GTM because she realized that the method demotivated students and left them disinterested in class. Additionally, she did not maintain her earlier beliefs about the homeroom teacher's role. Her experience told her that long periods of English study at school often did not foster students' success on the college entrance examination, and she concluded that this practice was not advantageous to her or to her students. In contrast, Bona's beliefs changed in a positive direction, which positively affected her motivation. Based on her students' positive responses to the GTM, she came to believe that it could help them to achieve their immediate object, which was to understand the meaning of English written texts in sufficient depth to do well on their exams. Her changed beliefs have helped her become a more dedicated, motivated teacher.

The above examples underscore the important role that the teacher beliefs/values had in mediating teacher motivation levels and further support the appropriateness of AT in presenting changes of teacher beliefs resulting from the influences of other contextual factors. Furthermore, these findings imply that teacher motivation is often the result of teaching context.

5.2. Agency and motivation in teachers

Although the findings indicate that the participants' motivation was mediated by their environmental factors and the teacher beliefs, they do not negate the importance of teachers' agency in their motivational change. Rather, teacher agency
could explain the reason why the two participants’ motivation levels became distinctive, even in a similar context. Previously, Zhang (2014) displayed the different motivational trajectories of Chinese EFL teachers, depending on each teacher’s unique exertion of agency, despite their similar teaching contexts. However, Zhang targeted only novice teachers and focused on their initial career motives, the discrepancies between their ideal and actual L2 selves, and their motivational changes in the initial stage of their professional career. In contrast, this study has investigated how EFL teachers actually experienced motivational fluctuation as their years of teaching accumulated, rather than showing the reality gaps between before and after the beginning of their teaching career. Thus, the present study has better shown the long-term fluctuations in experienced teachers’ English-teaching motivation in relation to the macro-sociocultural dimension of the school system. To this end, AT has played a focal role in describing the exercise of participants’ agency and its relationship among the related factors.

Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) consider a person’s agency to be intimately linked to the significance that person places on things or events and to that person’s unique history. This explains the different initial teaching motivation levels of the two participants. Anna had started her teaching career with a strong desire to teach English well. She valued teaching and felt the importance of taking care of students. In contrast, Bona had chosen teaching somewhat arbitrarily as one of many professions she could provide a positive influence on her students’ lives, and she came to find personal meaning in her professional life. Thus, she willingly started to take on the responsibilities of a homeroom teacher and did the administrative work as a member of the school. Gradually, she moved from a peripheral position to full, legitimate membership (Lave & Wenger, 1991), becoming actively involved in the school community where she teaches. Members of the school community came to view her in a positive light, which resulted in enhancing her sense of professional agency and increasing the level of her teaching motivation as well.

Through the AT system, we are thus able to understand Anna and Bona as subjects with personal agency and to see how similar contextual elements affected their motivation differently. Further, the AT perspective has coherently shown us that teachers’ motivation levels are not stagnant but fluctuate over time as the internal and external factors that influence them interact dynamically.

6. Summary and implications

This study has shown that despite the similar teaching contexts, Anna’s and Bona’s teaching beliefs and their exertion of agency mediated their teaching motivation on a differential basis. More importantly, and unlike most previous qualitative studies describing L2 teachers’ life experience at certain points, this study has also provided for L2 teacher motivation changing over time, based on the dynamic interactions between the individual teacher and other elements in the AT systems—in this paper, in particular, teaching methods and the school community. These motivational fluctuations have been systematically described and explained through an AT framework that shows the evolutionary relationships among elements.

However, this study has some, mainly methodological, limitations. First, we used retrospective life-story interviews to identify motivational changes over a period of more than 10 years—the dynamic process behind interviewees’ recollections was not captured in real time. Further, we could not obtain other types of data such as class observation data or student or participant diaries to support the identification of phases in the participants’ teaching motivation and practice. Additionally, this study considered only two teachers, both at the high school level. Given the dynamic fluctuation in motivation common to both of these participants, future research should include more participants from various levels of schooling in various locations and with various amounts of teaching experience.

The findings of such studies will provide the scholarly community with more specific information regarding the factors involved in teacher (de)motivation, how teachers’ beliefs are formed and changed, and how all these elements interact with teachers’ attitudes to teaching. In particular, concerning teacher education for both novice and in-service, experienced teachers, these findings on teacher (de)motivation from the AT perspective might imply that continuous (re)training on teaching methods and how to apply them to the school contexts is most beneficial in increasing teacher motivation. Furthermore, the school community also needs to support teachers’ critical reflection on their teaching and provide a platform for group discussion about the teacher’s role in the given school context (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015).

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