

# A Multiple Case Study on the Role Perceptions of English as a Foreign Language Teachers at Japanese Universities\*

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## Abstract

This paper is part of a larger study that explores the subjective perceptions of professional roles by university English teachers in Japan and identifies factors that contribute to the formation and development of such role perceptions. The roles that teachers believe they fulfill and are expected to fulfill are the fundamental concept for being a teacher (Farrell, 2011). These roles are related to teacher cognition—which can be summarized as “what language teachers think, know, and believe” (Borg, 2006, p. 1)—and they regulate teachers’ classroom practices. The complex mental activities of language teachers have been investigated mostly in secondary school settings, while the cognition of English teachers at Japanese universities remains unexplored. This qualitative study aims to fill this gap, detailing a multiple case study in which three experienced university English teachers participated. The interview data reveals how their initial role identities were constructed and transformed over the course of their careers. The authors discuss role perceptions in relation to various issues, including prior learning experience and teacher education programs, such as pre-service teacher training and professional development.

## 1. Introduction

As part of the discourse of internationalization and globalization, the Japanese government has attempted to heighten the English abilities of Japanese individuals by implementing various policies. In 1989, the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme, known as the JET Programme, was launched to increase students’ exposure to spoken English in junior and senior high schools. In 2003, with the revision of the Course of Studies curriculum guidelines, the government developed a strategic plan, known as the Action Plan, to cultivate “Japanese with English abilities” (Ministry of Education, Culture,

Sports, Science, and Technology, 2003). Several strategies have been implemented since then, such as introducing English activities to elementary education and teaching English in English at senior high schools. In the higher education sector, the government started the Global 30 Project to increase the number of international students studying at Japanese universities and the number of Japanese students studying abroad. Given such a rapidly changing environment surrounding English education in Japan, this study has been undertaken to better understand English education at Japanese universities by focusing on the complex mindsets of English teachers in this context.

While there have been a considerable number of studies conducted on language teachers, only a limited number of studies have been carried out in the Japanese university context. Some

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of these examples have discussed the identity formation of such teachers from a sociocultural perspective (e.g., Nagatomo, 2012; Simon-Maeda, 2004). Fuisting (2017) investigated English teachers' identities in relation to their employment status: tenured, limited-term contract, or part-time. Whitsed and Wright (2011) conducted interviews with foreign part-time teachers at Japanese universities and pointed out the discontinuity between the national level discussion on English education and how such education is actually treated at an institutional level. These studies have raised serious issues that could influence teaching, but they have mostly approached teachers from sociocultural and sociopolitical perspectives. In contrast, the current study approaches teachers from education-based and psychological perspectives because its interest is in teachers as educators rather than as members of a university community. Teachers play an important role in classrooms, and it is essential, as Varghese et al. (2005) pointed out, to understand teachers in order to understand language teaching and learning. The current qualitative study, which three English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers took part in, thus aims to gain insights into teachers' complex mindsets through their role perceptions, which are understood as the roles that they believe they are playing as English teachers at Japanese universities.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1 Roles of English teachers

The roles of English teachers have often been discussed in the teaching methodology literature (Harmer, 2001; Hedge, 2000; Littlewood, 1981; Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Tudor, 1993;

Widdowson, 1987). In the context of communicative language teaching, for example, Harmer (2001) asserted that "teachers are (or should be) facilitators—helping their students to achieve their goals, whether coaching them, teaching them or tutoring them" (p. 117) and pointed out that the facilitator role involves several sub-roles: counselor, monitor/evidence gatherer, prompter/editor, resource/tutor, and organizer/task-setter. Richards and Rodgers (1986) pointed out that the roles of teachers are deeply related to the individual teacher's belief systems. The roles that teachers are expected to fulfill are determined by the instructional design, and this is determined by what teachers believe about language and language learning.

Farrell (2011) coined the term "professional role identity" to refer to individual teachers' subjective role perceptions. It is defined as "the configuration of interpretations that language teachers attach to themselves, as related to the different roles they enact and the different professional activities that they participate in as well as how others see these roles and activities" (Farrell, 2011, p. 55). Farrell (2011) regarded role identities as the most fundamental part of being a teacher and conducted a qualitative study with three experienced Canadian English as a second language (ESL) teachers in order to examine how these teachers perceive their teacher role identities. In order to investigate professional role identities, which are usually hidden in a tacit level of awareness, he oversaw 12 reflective group meetings over a two-year period. He reported that 16 role identities were described in the reflective group discussions and classified them into three main categories: teacher as manager, teacher as acculturator, and teacher as professional. Farrell

(2011) also pointed out that these role identities are not fixed or stable but are in flux and dynamic. The roles that teachers fulfill, or are required to fulfill, can be shaped and reshaped by “a teacher’s evolving (and ever-changing) philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and beyond practice” (Farrell, 2017, p. 184).

Farrell’s notion of professional role identity corresponds to the instructional identity proposed by Pennington (2015). Identity is a complex concept that has been discussed in various disciplinary fields, such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and applied linguistics. Because of the complex, multifaceted, fluid, and evolving nature of identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009), it is not easy to define this concept. Instead of defining identity, Pennington (2015) proposed a useful framework to examine teacher identity. Her framework consists of two types of frames: practice-oriented and contextual. The former consists of instructional, disciplinary, professional, vocational, and economic identity. Instructional identity relates to the actual classroom roles that teachers play, disciplinary identity relates to the teacher’s academic background and interests, professional identity refers to the teacher’s connection to professional organizations, vocational identity includes the teacher’s commitment to the job, and economic identity addresses evaluation and rewards. The contextual frame consists of global, local, and sociocultural identities. Global identity relates to awareness of worldwide trends regarding English; local identity is the teacher’s position as an English teacher at the national, community, and institutional levels; and sociocultural identity refers to teacher identity in relation to students, co-workers, employers, and colleagues. This framework thus

provides eight perspectives for investigating teacher identity, with Farrell’s (2011) role identity corresponding to instructional identity, which is the most directly related to teaching.

Although these scholars use terms such as role identity and instructional identity, the current study specifically utilizes the term “role perceptions,” which is defined synonymously with Farrell’s (2011) professional role identity. As mentioned earlier, identity is a complex multidimensional construct (Barkhuizen, 2017; Pennington, 2015), and it has been studied in various academic disciplines. To avoid misconception, this paper uses role perceptions to mean how individual teachers interpret their role as an English teacher from an educational perspective. The interpretations made by individual teachers are likely to be influenced by sociocultural and sociopolitical identities and the development of such identities. However, it is not the purpose of this paper to investigate teacher identity holistically. Instead, the study focuses on teachers’ mindsets regarding their multiple roles as English teachers. As Richards and Rodgers (1986) explained, the roles of teachers and their beliefs regarding teaching are interrelated; the current study thus explores both the multiple roles that university English teachers subjectively perceive and the teachers’ internal factors that contribute to such perceptions in order to better understand teachers’ minds in this context.

## 2.2 Language teacher cognition

Studying teachers’ minds demands an examination of “the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching—what teachers know, believe, and think” (Borg, 2003, p. 81), which is collectively called language teacher cognition

(LTC). The study of this area has gained considerable attention over the last two decades because LTC greatly influences the behavior of teachers in the classroom, and classroom practices directly or indirectly determine students' learning outcomes.

Some of the earlier studies on LTC focused on teachers' decision-making processes and the interrelationships between teachers' thinking and their actual classroom practices (e.g., Borg, 2003, 2006; Burns, 1992; Woods, 1996). For example, Woods (1996) investigated the lesson planning and decision-making processes of six Canadian ESL teachers. He gave detailed descriptions of such processes and pointed out a number of factors that influenced them. He further divided these factors into two categories: external factors and internal factors. External factors such as class size and students' prior experiences are typically situational factors. Internal factors include teachers' pedagogical knowledge and their understanding of the course books. Burns (1992) conducted observations and subsequent semi-structured interviews in a beginner level EFL class to explore the relationship between instructional practices and the factors underpinning such practices. She described teachers' beliefs regarding the instruction of written language at this level and its influence on their classroom practices.

According to Birello (2012), studies on English teachers' beliefs have been growing rapidly. Teachers' beliefs are considered to be a core part of teacher cognition, with Borg (2011) asserting that they "have a strong evaluative and affective component, provide a basis for action, and are resistant to change" (p. 370). Because of the importance of beliefs in language teaching, revealing how these beliefs can be established is

one of the main interests of LTC research. One well known factor is "the apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975). Before teachers become teachers, they have long general experience as students at school and university, and have observed their former teachers' classroom practices. This experience can instill certain beliefs in teachers. Previous studies have shown the strong influence of the apprenticeship of observation on language teachers (e.g., Bailey et al., 1996; Farrell, 1999; Numrich, 1996; Peacock, 2001), and Borg (2003) concluded that "teachers' prior language learning experiences establish cognitions about learning and language learning which form the basis of their initial conceptualizations of L2 [second language] teaching during teacher education, and which may continue to be influential throughout their professional lives" (p. 88). The influence of pre- and in-service teacher training on belief formation has also been widely researched, but the impact of such teacher education programs on the transformation of beliefs is inconclusive. Some studies concluded that such programs had a limited impact on teachers' belief systems (Borg, 2011). Since LTC, including beliefs, is such a central concept for understanding teacher behavior, this study explores LTC factors, including past experience, that influence teachers' role perceptions—in other words, the roles that teachers believe they are playing in the classroom. In addition, this paper uses the term *perception* as one dimension that constitutes the cognition of language teachers.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Research objectives

The objectives of this study are to explore the role perceptions of experienced university

EFL teachers in Japan and to identify LTC factors that result in their unique role perceptions. In addition to their unique set of experiences and personality, individual teachers are also working within their own unique context. Thus, it is not appropriate to approach this study with the aim of identifying objective truths. Instead, this study seeks to explore the participants' subjective realities and lived experiences.

### 3.2 Methodology

A qualitative research approach is an effective methodology for studies that aim to explore participants' subjective realities and lived experiences (Croker, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The present study takes such an approach because role perceptions are highly subjective and need to be investigated from a more emic view that focuses on how teachers "make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world" (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). Qualitative methods are also useful when complicated and multifaceted concepts and phenomena, such as the role perceptions and LTC considered in this study, are explored in rich detail (Brown, 2014; Holliday, 2015).

Since this study included three participants, it may be said to be a multiple case study. Its primary interest is individual teachers' perceptions, which are "bounded" (Merriam, 1988) to each participant's teaching context; additionally, the study seeks variations among the three participants who are all "bounded" to university English education in Japan. A multiple case study can be used to illustrate different perspectives (Creswell, 2013). The main source of data for this study was in-person interviews with the participants, who are detailed below.

### 3.3 Participants

The participants of this study were three experienced university EFL teachers: one Japanese and two non-Japanese. Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants. To increase the probability of the authors capturing the variations in teacher roles, participants were selected from three different universities. They were introduced by three of the authors' colleagues and were contacted via e-mail to explain the research objectives. Before the interviews, the participants filled out a pre-interview questionnaire about their background. All of them had sufficient length of teaching experience as EFL teachers at Japanese universities to participate. The length of teaching was one of the criteria because the study intended to explore changes in their role perceptions over the course of their career. The participants' biographical data is presented below. Pseudonyms are used and any personally identifiable information has been removed.

#### Luke (Non-Japanese)

Luke is in his 50s and has been teaching English in Japan for nearly 30 years. Before arriving in Japan, he participated in a one-month teacher training program. For the last 20 years, he has been teaching at private universities. He is a tenured faculty member at his current workplace. He has an MA in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). He teaches English communication at his university.

#### Grace (Non-Japanese)

Grace is in her 50s and has been teaching English at Japanese universities for 25 years. As a result of her Certificate in English Language

Teaching to Adults (CELTA), she started teaching part-time at universities. She currently teaches as a full-time contract teacher at a national university. She recently obtained an MA in Applied Linguistics. She teaches skills-based courses at her university.

#### Kyosuke (Japanese)

Kyosuke is in his 40s and has been teaching English at Japanese universities for 19 years. He is a tenured faculty member at a private university, where he teaches compulsory English courses. He has an MA in Linguistics. He had no experience of any kind of teacher training program prior to becoming a university English teacher.

### **3.4 Research materials**

Three kinds of paper-based research material, worksheets, were created based on the administration and the results of a preliminary study. The preliminary study was conducted with three non-Japanese EFL teachers approximately six months prior to the current study and aimed to grasp how effectively the authors could elicit teachers' perceptions of their multiple roles (see Moritani [2018] for a full description of this process). As Farrell (2011) claims, participants' reflections are crucial to exploring teachers' thoughts on their roles. Worksheets were thus used to help participants reflect on their roles in a limited period of time. During the interviews, the participants wrote down their thoughts and ideas on these materials to reflect on their roles, while they used their own written reflections as prompts to themselves for the elicitation of oral data (see Moritani [in press] for full discussion of the use of prompts). The details of the materi-

als are as follows:

#### (1) List of teacher roles

A list of teacher roles was created and used as a prompt in the interviews. The list was created based on the findings of the pilot study, which identified 12 major teacher roles. For the current study, some of these 12 roles were separated into two roles by consulting a previous study by Farrell (2011) and the methodology literature (e.g., Harmer, 2001). The final list comprised 18 roles, and two additional write-in columns were placed at the end to encourage participants to add more roles (see Appendix 1).

#### (2) Mind map sheet

A mind map sheet was used to enable participants to visualize their own perceptions of the complex structures of their roles. Participants were asked to draw images that described the relationship between perceived roles. A holistic teacher role (worded as "Your role as an English teacher") was placed at the center of the sheet, which was connected to the main roles and sub-roles perceived by the participants (see Appendix 2 for an example of a completed mind map sheet).

#### (3) Time series sheet

On the time series sheet, the participants were asked to depict changes in their role perceptions in terms of importance from the beginning of their career up to the time of the interview. The vertical axis indicates the perceived importance of roles: the top signifies high importance and the bottom lesser importance. The horizontal axis indicates the time sequence: the far left signifies the beginning of their university teaching career, and the far right signifies the present. The participants chose certain roles and depicted the associated changes over time (see Appendix 3 for a completed time series sheet).

### 3.5 Data collection procedures

Interviews were conducted in August, 2017. Meetings for interviews were arranged once the participants had agreed to take part in the study. One of the authors visited each participant at their university, where he/she would feel most at ease. Each in-depth interview was conducted by the author in the participant's first language: English with Luke and Grace and Japanese with Kyosuke. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes. All interviews were recorded in audio form and later transcribed for analysis.

At the beginning of the interviews, the definitions in the list of teacher roles were reviewed. Each participant was then asked if he or she would like to add any other roles. Following this discussion, the participants were instructed to circle the roles that they felt applied to them and then to rank the circled items from most important to least important. Using a mind map sheet, the participants were asked to draw images to describe the relationship between perceived roles. After completing the mind map, the participants were asked to explain their map. Lastly, participants reflected on the development of their role perceptions using a time series sheet and were asked to explore the reasons for the changes identified.

### 3.6 Data analysis

After transcribing the data, a thematic analysis was conducted. Thematic analysis involves repeated reading, coding, and categorizing (Barkhuizen et al., 2013). The authors performed this using two approaches to maintain the credibility of the analysis. First, the codes and categories generated by one of the authors were reviewed by the other author. Second, member

checking, where the participants check the researchers' interpretation of the data, was conducted. In addition, Kyosuke's original data were in Japanese. The data were analyzed in Japanese first, and the results were translated into English for reporting.

## 4. Findings

As a result of the thematic analysis, various teacher roles and LTC factors behind participants' perceptions emerged. In this section, the findings that were unique for individual participants will be presented. The LTC-related themes that were expressed and emerged as influential factors are indicated in italics in this section. Square brackets are occasionally used to show additions to the excerpts when clarification seemed to be helpful for understanding.

### 4.1 Luke

Luke considered himself a facilitator, designer, and expert in English skills. In the interview, he placed emphasis on the facilitator role. He explained his primary role as follows:

"I am assuming facilitator is someone who kind of mediates the language for the students, basically creating the environment in which the students can study and learn productively. So I have never ever thought of myself as being like a teacher. This one [lecturer] is about imparting knowledge, [being a] transmitter of knowledge. I am just creating the right environment for the students to be able to learn."

What he does as a teacher clearly relates to his beliefs regarding language learning. He does not think English ability is something teachers

can give to students. His comment “I have never ever thought of myself as being like a teacher” indicates that his sense of being a facilitator has stayed with him from the very beginning of his teaching career. He further explained his beliefs, which he referred to as a “philosophy,” in the interview. He emphasized his *beliefs on student-centeredness* as follows:

“My basic philosophy is, ‘don’t be a barrier to the students learning. Set them up with something and get out of the way, and let them take control of how much or how well they want to do.’ ... My role is to guide them and support them, create the environment, create the mindset, so that they can do it by themselves.”

Later in the interview, he expressed two kinds of possible influence on his teaching beliefs: *past language learning experience* and *pre-service teacher training*. He remembered his past language learning experience as negative, saying: “I didn’t respond very well to the very one-way, didactic methods of the teacher.” Along with this experience, he also commented, “They say that most teachers teach how they learned or, if that teacher’s learning experience was a bad one, maybe they are seeking to do something the way they wanted to learn.” In his case, the reality was the latter. Luke’s current role perception thus seems to be a response to the way he wanted to learn a foreign language when he was a student.

His ideal teacher role image was also reinforced during his pre-service teacher training, and what he learned is imprinted in his mind. He explained:

“I had a one-month preparatory certificate in English language teaching, and I think

that was also very instructive, and I think their message was: it is not just about teaching the rules of the language and teaching how to manipulate the language, but it’s about using the methodological aspects of language teaching to get students to learn, almost without realizing that they are learning. So again, that comes down to how you manage your class, how you create activities. That’s again designing.”

As illustrated here, Luke’s *past language learning experience* and *pre-service teacher training* established his beliefs regarding teaching—namely, *student-centeredness*. The literature on teacher beliefs reported the strong influence of prior learning experience and claimed that teachers teach in the way that they were taught (e.g., Bailey et al., 1996; Farrell, 1999; Numrich, 1996; Peacock, 2001); the literature also reported that the impact of teacher training on teachers’ beliefs is limited (Borg, 2011). In contrast, Luke’s former teachers have functioned as a model that he has avoided becoming, and his negative learning experiences resulted in his receptiveness to teacher training.

## 4.2 Grace

During the first stage of the interview process, Grace used a write-in column and described her primary role as a communication role model. This seemed to be a reaction to the fact that many Japanese university students regards English as merely a school subject with no intention of the actual use as a communication tool. She explained her role as follows: “Hopefully changing their [students’] mindset to that of English not being a subject. It’s a tool of communication, not just



talking but communicating with someone.” Later in the interview, she made a similar comment: “I think that part of my role is to provide English not just as a subject but in a different way. It is a kind of appeal.” This represents her *beliefs regarding the importance of communication* and *English as a communication tool*. According to Grace, a discrepancy in the mindsets between students and herself is evident. Her strong emphasis on the communicative aspect of languages is rooted not only in the position of English as an international language but also in her life experience. She thinks that human-to-human communication is the most important aspect of life:

“The basics of human-to-human communication is the most important thing. I just happen to be teaching English, but if I was in another life, I would still be doing the same thing ... thinking how to deal with people on a human level with language only being one part of that.”

Such beliefs regarding the importance of communication seem to be fostered by her *personal experience* of growing up in a multilingual society. She talks about her experience with her students, who have studied English as a subject and are overly sensitive to accuracy. She gave an example of what she says to her students:

“I said, ‘Well, in Australia, [there are places] where English isn’t the first language, and we grow up with that in schools and everywhere. So we are not expecting perfect English all the time’... ‘I have lived here [Japan] for a long time; I did not speak any Japanese when I came here, but in daily life, I could manage.’ Those kind of experiences. It is about dealing with the other person.”

Grace also uses her *personal experience* as a foreigner living in Japan as an example to transform her students’ attitudes toward English. At the same time, this excerpt indicates that what she teaches students is how to deal with the other person, as this is what she has experienced in her life. Her *personal experience* interrelates with her *beliefs on the importance of communication*.

Grace also gave an example of how an *awareness of student characteristics* influenced her roles. When she moved to her current university, she needed to become more of a motivator. She explained:

“When I first began teaching, I didn’t have to think about motivation much. In my first job, the students were always motivated and they studied hard, so I did not have to say anything. Now, I have to be, I had to become more of a motivator for my classes here.”

In fact, *awareness of student characteristics* becomes an important factor when investigating teachers’ role perceptions because teachers have to adjust their teaching style to students’ levels and characteristics, and the roles teachers play change accordingly. Grace acts as a communication role model because her students do not see English as a tool for communication, and she plays a motivator role because her students are not very motivated. She has adjusted her roles to her *students’ characteristics*.

In sum, Grace perceived her primary role as a communication role model. Themes such as *beliefs on the importance of communication*, *beliefs on English as a communication tool*, *personal experience*, and *awareness of student characteristics* emerged as influential factors shaping her role perceptions. From the perspective of the socio-

cultural dimension in the contextual frames that Pennington (2015) proposed, Grace adapts to the teaching context and adjusts her roles in relation to her students. This is an example that shows how sociocultural factors influence role perceptions, with Grace's beliefs maintained or rather reinforced by such sociocultural factors.

### 4.3 Kyosuke

Kyosuke perceived himself as a facilitator, motivator, and language model. He explained that his teacher roles had been reshaped a great deal over the last few years. He explained his situation as follows:

“My university received government subsidies on active learning and we are implementing it diligently. I am a member of the committee, and I have been attending workshops outside the university, on-campus workshops, and lectures on the topic outside the university.”

His time series sheet illustrates how the importance of the three roles mentioned above sharply increased due to the *environmental change* and *professional development* that he explained. In contrast, his perception of the importance of his role as an expert in English knowledge decreased. He initially believed that he had to play this role, and this idea had been ingrained in him by the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975), which is how he learned English at university. He commented on his *past learning experience* as follows:

“[When I started teaching English] the teaching model was the education that I had as a student in my university. Grammar translation method. There was a textbook.

We translated it from the beginning. That's the only type of English education that I had at university.”

Since his English learning successfully utilized this traditional approach, he initially did not see any need to change his approach as a teacher from the approach he was familiar with: to be an expert in English knowledge. He also commented, “I had confidence in this [being an expert in English]. That's why I became an English teacher.” Since he did not have any pre-service teacher training, his *disciplinary background* and *past learning experience* greatly affected his initial role perceptions.

Kyosuke expressed the struggle he experienced when he adopted new roles as follows: “I think you can't do this role [facilitator] without experience.” Although the development of his role perceptions was brought on by *environmental change*, it also brought him an opportunity for *professional development*, which helped him transform what he does in the classroom. He commented on professional development for university teachers: “I think university teachers generally don't go to workshops and seminars on teaching [unless they are told to do so by the university]. They go to conferences in their academic field, though.” His role perceptions would never have transformed if *environmental change* had not occurred.

However, he also commented that he had vaguely thought that he needed to change before the actual change occurred to him. The following excerpt indicates that micro *environmental change* in his university only functioned as a trigger. He consequently mentioned macro *environmental change*:

“I used to view myself more as an expert in English and a representative of a culture, but, nowadays, such information is available on the Internet. Students can get it by themselves. In recent years, I started thinking seriously that there should be other roles that present era English teachers can play.”

His uncertainty regarding his roles as an English teacher caused by macro *environmental changes* was resolved by micro *environmental change*. As a facilitator, Kyosuke commented on the goals of his teaching as follows: “It’s not learning English. It’s learning something else with English, and I want to improve students’ thinking skills, too.” In order to do so, he focuses on motivating his students and providing a language model.

## 5. Discussion

The objectives of this multiple case study were to identify the role perceptions of three experienced university EFL teachers in Japan and to delve into the LTC factors that result in their unique role perceptions. Thematic analysis highlighted several core teacher roles perceived by these participants, such as facilitator, motivator, designer, communication role model, language model, and expert in English skills, as well as contributing factors to such perceptions. This section discusses three of the themes that emerged in the findings as contributing factors—these three factors are, in fact, issues that are frequently discussed in LTC research: prior learning experience, teacher education programs, and beliefs.

### 5.1 Prior learning experience

When Luke and Kyosuke were students, they both had teachers who were more of a lecturer who transmits knowledge about a foreign language to students; however, they have subsequently had contrasting responses to this. Luke thought of his learning experiences as negative and avoided following the methods that his former teachers had used to teach him and sought an alternative approach. In other words, prior learning experience functioned as anti-apprenticeship of observation.

Kyosuke followed the method he was taught when he started teaching. This is due to the fact that he responded well to the traditional way by which he was taught, and he gained confidence in his knowledge of English. Clearly, Kyosuke’s case illustrates that positive prior learning experiences can create an exemplar in the mind, and his case corroborates previous findings that showed that prior learning experience had a strong influence on teachers’ conceptualizations of teaching and that the influence of this could have an effect for a long time (Borg, 2003). Moreover, Kyosuke did not have pre-service teacher training, so he had to rely on his prior learning experience as a student. His disciplinary background—an MA in linguistics—might also have intensified his role perceptions as an English expert.

These findings illuminate how prior learning experience can work in different ways. However, it may be too simplistic to conclude that positive prior learning experience forms an exemplar and negative experience creates an anti-model. One reason for this is the epistemological standpoint of this study. This study is a case study in which there were only three participants, and the aim

of the study is to obtain subjective realities and lived experiences rather than objective truths. In addition, as the findings showed, role perceptions cannot be explained by a simple cause and effect linear model, and the construction and development of role perceptions should be described and explained as more complex processes (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) involving various factors that complicate one another, including teacher training, which is discussed next.

## 5.2 Teacher education program

Although the impact of teacher educational programs on LTC is inconclusive, the impact of prior learning experience on beliefs is generally thought to override the impact of such programs (Borg, 2011). However, this was not the case for Luke. He remembered his pre-service teacher training course as being instructive, and he understood the methodological messages that the program provided him. Since then, he has remained engaged in creating optimal learning environments and enticing materials for his students. Unlike previous studies, Luke's case demonstrates the strong influence of pre-service teacher training on his LTC regarding his role perceptions. However, caution should be exercised, as pre-service teacher training did not solely contribute to the formation of his role perceptions. Without negative learning experiences, he would not have been so receptive to the methodological messages that the program offered. His past negative learning experiences, pre-service teacher training, and other factors shaped his role perceptions. This is a process of considerable complexity.

Kyosuke did not undertake pre-service teacher training, but he has been involved in

professional development in recent years, and his role perceptions have transformed significantly. Since he had been aware of the rapidly changing environment of English language education and had understood the necessity of a change for himself, professional development activities were influential to him and greatly contributed to the transformation of his role perceptions. In this sense, this transformation came about through complex factors rather than solely through professional development. Even so, professional development activities—an in-service teacher education program—played a certain role in changing Kyosuke's role perceptions.

## 5.3 Beliefs

The findings of this study illustrated that teachers' beliefs are likely to contribute to the shaping of their role perceptions. In Luke's case, his beliefs regarding student centeredness are interrelated with his role perceptions as a facilitator and a material designer. Grace's beliefs about English as a communication tool and her beliefs regarding the importance of communication shaped her role perceptions as a communication role model. As Borg (2011) asserts, beliefs "have a strong evaluative and affective component, provide a basis for action" (p. 370); a similarly strong influence was observed in the findings of this study.

Although prior learning experience has been discussed as primary factor that establishes and develops teacher beliefs (e.g., Peacock, 2001), Grace's beliefs were rather established based on her personal experiences. Her stated beliefs are clearly interconnected, and both beliefs are related to communication. Her life experience living in a multilingual society and her experience

as a foreigner living in Japan contributed to the establishment of her beliefs that communication is important. As evidenced here, role perceptions can be shaped by teacher beliefs that are derived from personal experience. This belief was reinforced when she became aware of the characteristics of Japanese students, which again indicates the complex nature of the formation of role perceptions.

## 6. Conclusion

This multiple case study described three experienced EFL teachers at Japanese universities. It explored their role perceptions and the contributing LTC factors that shaped and reshaped their perceptions. The findings revealed that each participant had unique teacher role perceptions, and various factors contributed to the construction and development of their role perceptions. The findings also illuminated the complex process of such development and demonstrated that simple cause and effect linear models of explanation are inadequate.

As mentioned above, each teacher works in his or her particular context, and teacher role perceptions are not limited to those described in this paper. Future studies need to interview more participants in order to identify a variety of role perceptions among university English teachers; the same can be said for influential factors. Role perception can be a complex process with multiple interrelated factors. Future studies need to account for the complexity of the role perceptions of university EFL teachers and the factors underpinning such perceptions, and they need to depict a more holistic portrait of the interplay between such factors.

The conceptualization of professional teacher

roles is the foundation of teacher cognition (Farrell, 2011). In order to understand university English education, it is important to understand these teachers with particular regard to their emic view. The authors believe this line of inquiry greatly enhances the understanding of current English education at Japanese universities and can make an important contribution to improving the English ability of Japanese university students.

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**Appendix 1. *List of teacher roles***

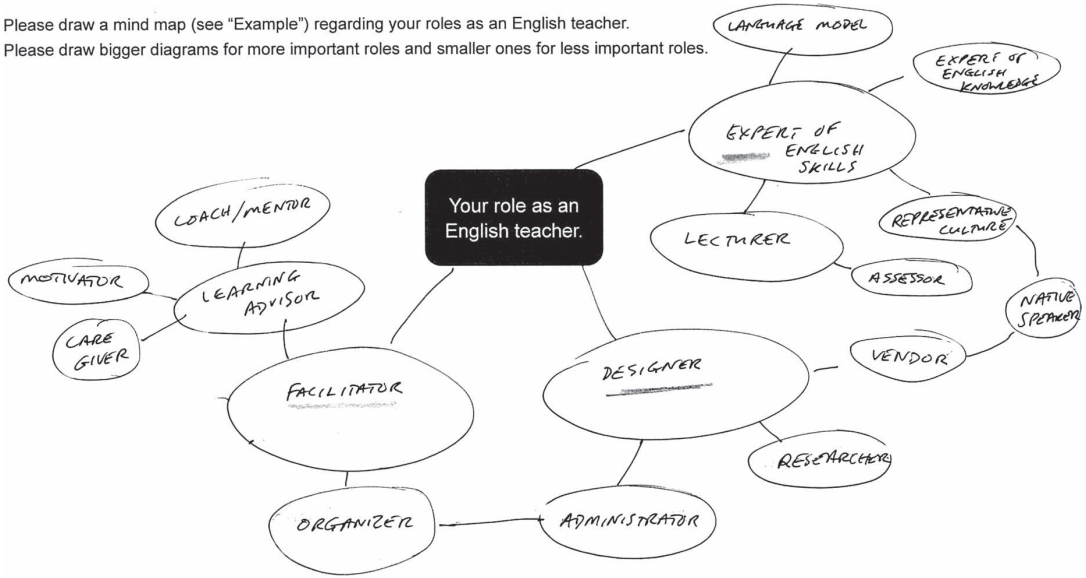
The purpose of this study is to explore how English teachers perceive their roles in English education at Japanese universities.

Examples of roles:

- ◇ Expert of English (Linguistic knowledge)
- ◇ Expert of English (Linguistic skills)
- ◇ Representative of a culture
- ◇ Lecturer (transmitter of knowledge)
- ◇ Native speaker
- ◇ Language model
- ◇ Entertainer
- ◇ Motivator
- ◇ Caregiver (parental role)
- ◇ Facilitator (guide and assist students)
- ◇ Organizer (organize students to do activities)
- ◇ Assessor (giving feedback etc.)
- ◇ Researcher (research things to improve teaching/ materials)
- ◇ Designer(course design/material design)
- ◇ Administrator (outside the class)
- ◇ Vendor (to sell good English education)
- ◇ Socializer (school party etc.)
- ◇ Learning advisor
- ◇ Other (specify: )
- ◇ Other (specify: )

### Appendix 2. Completed mind map

Please draw a mind map (see "Example") regarding your roles as an English teacher.  
Please draw bigger diagrams for more important roles and smaller ones for less important roles.



### Appendix 3. Completed time-series sheet

