

# English Teacher Motivation that Focuses on Need: A Case Study of the Foreign Language School of Linyi Normal University in China

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**Abstract.** *This study explored the need factors in English teachers' motivation by comparing the needs that motivate teachers of different genders, ages and years of experience. This study used a questionnaire to collect data random sample of 95 of the population of 111 English teachers in the Foreign Language School of Linyi Normal University. It was found that the ranking of need factors for teachers, in descending order of importance, were responsibility, relationship, self-realization, esteem, life and power. There was no significant difference between male and female teachers for the six factors. One factor, the need for relationship, differed by age in that 35-44 year-old and  $\geq 45$  year-old teachers had significantly higher mean scores than 25-34 year-old teachers. There were also significant differences in relationship need based on years of experience, with teachers who held more than 15 years of experience having a higher mean score than the teachers who had have 0-5 years or 6-10 years of experience. It was concluded that, as teachers grow older and have more teaching experience, they have an in increasing need to develop relationships with their colleagues and students.*

**Keywords:** Teacher motivation, Foreign Language, English language, China

## Introduction

Education is a process of behavioral change and development that occurs continuously throughout every stage of life. Teachers are active in every stage of life (Kocabas, 2009), as they provide the basics of education. Only if teachers hold professional attitudes and put all their hearts into their education work can they train the useful talent that society really needs. Yang (2007, p. 74) pointed out that, "during the process of education management, we are not only taking care of students, but also taking care of teachers more. It is a more important point that makes teachers feel the happiness and satisfaction from work." Eble (1978) maintained that the happiness of a teacher originates from education itself and the exploration of knowledge. He also pointed out, from his academic research, that the achievement of a teacher's self value is not derived from several conferences and articles, but it originates from enthusiasm of work. And this kind of enthusiasm is the motivation for most teachers. Human behavior is mediated and controlled by motivation. Motivation is one function of human

thinking activity, it is the motive power for doing every activity, and it is different from instinctual need (Lian & Song, 2002). Motivation is a major focus of psychological research; it refers to the force and reason of human behavior, it can reflect the character of purpose and initiative of human activities. Harmer (2001) defined motivation as a kind of intrinsic transfer mode. It can stimulate and drive people to do something until they achieve success. Also, motivation can not only influence a person's working behavior, but can reduce stress, nervousness, anxiousness, and the sense of failure. William James (Pattanayak, 2005) observed that people usually operate at an average of 20 to 30 percent of their abilities, but, with enhanced motivation, this level can be increased to 80 or even 90 percent.

Phenix (1975) claimed that individual, intrinsic, and subjective forces can arouse a teacher's potential, and that this kind of force is a teacher's work motivation. Bess (1981) also said that, from the teacher who holds a high level of work motivation a student can achieve a good education—the most important point for teachers is to keep the

good work motivation. On the other hand, “low motivation levels in the teacher, who is in a critical position in the education and school process, have a negative impact on the achievement of high standards in education” (Kocabas, 2009, p.724).

In the current era of the rapid development of higher education in China, the number of enrolled students is increasing year by year. Teachers are arguably the most important group of professionals for our nation’s future (Bishay, 1996). As the medium of teaching in higher education they get more and more social attention. In order to adapt to the needs of higher education management reform and optimally arouse the enthusiasm of university teachers, all universities are coming to realize the importance of teacher motivation. Focusing on teachers’ needs, and implementing strategies to motivate teachers, will become a very important topic for the university manager (Peng, 2007).

Teacher motivation naturally has to do with teachers’ attitude to work. It has to do with teachers’ desire to participate in the pedagogical process within the school environment (Ofoegbu, 2004). Hoy and Miskel (2004) contend that the challenge for administrators is to develop highly motivated teachers who are actively engaged in teaching and learning, open to new ideas and approaches, and committed to students and change over the lifetime of their teaching careers. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, with the reform and development of education, university management is required to be people-oriented, and build the school culture of total respect for teachers. However, traditional school management emphasizes the authority for the school organization and the seriousness of behavioral norms; it ignores the humanistic care for the teacher. It always emphasizes the organizational management model; it ignores many variable factors and the particularity of teachers’ work in school management. It means some managers treat the teacher as the “robots” that can be mobilized by rule (Xin, 2007).

Teacher motivation is much related to teacher attitude to work environment and classroom climate. Teacher motivation is anything done to make teachers happy, satisfied, dedicated and committed in such a way that they bring out their best in work so that everyone including students, parents and society will greatly benefit from their services.

Teacher motivation is a very important part of human resource development in universities.

According to the *Job Burnout Index Survey Report* released by Chinahrd Net, in 15 professions, the proportion of instructors’ job burnout was found to be as high as 50%. More than 50% of teachers experienced high levels of stress from work. (<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shenghuo/1089/3042998.html>)

Given the importance of teachers’ work enthusiasm and motivation research into the need factors of teachers is very important, and is the basis of this study.

### Purpose of the Study

There were two purposes of this study:

1. To explore the need factors in English teachers’ motivation in the Foreign Language School (FLS) of Linyi Normal University; and
2. To find the differences in needs that motivate different teachers.

### Research Questions

There were two main questions to explore in this study:

1. What are the levels of teachers’ needs in the FLS of Linyi Normal University?
2. Are there any differences in the levels of need that motivate English teachers of different gender, age or years of experience to achieve one’s job goals in the FLS of Linyi Normal University?

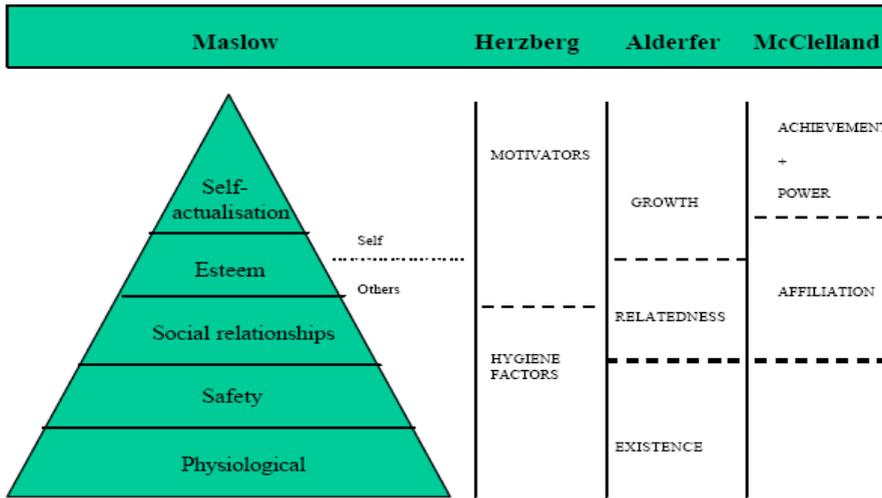
### Literature Review

Based on Kanfer’s (1990) taxonomy of theories of motivation, there are three main paradigms that regroup current theoretical approaches: the first paradigm regroups need-motive-value approaches: according to these motivation theories, what leads an individual to start a type of behavior, to direct it towards specific objectives and to support it both intensely and persistently is explained by needs, values and motives that have to be satisfied (e.g., Maslow’s need hierarchy theory, Alderfer’s ERG theory, and Herzberg’s dual-factor theory, McClelland’s achievement motivation theory).

There are four need theories: Maslow’s Hierarchy of need, Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory, Alderfer’s ERG Theory and McClelland’s Needs Theory, and these theories provide the theoretical foundation for this study.

Figure 1 Need Theories Content

Source: Adapted from Oosthuizen (2001, p. 21)



Researchers have typically divided the teacher motivation into two parts: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation (Dong & Ji, 2008). Zhong, Shen & Xin (1992), based on their empirical study, divided teacher motivation into the following three parts: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and internalization of extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation involves teacher personal subjective needs and value orientation from work. Extrinsic motivation contains social factors, interpersonal relationships and work environment. The internalization of extrinsic motivation is the relation of personal subjective needs and behavior goals. Ruan (2002) conceptualized teacher motivation as having four factors: occupational interests, the sense of teaching efficacy, external purposes, and occupational values.

O'Neil (1995) pointed out that teachers have two kinds of needs, such as intrinsic and extrinsic needs. A teacher who is intrinsically motivated may do a task for its own sake, for the satisfaction it provides or for the feeling of accomplishment and self-actualization. On the other hand, an extrinsically motivated teacher may perform the activity and duty in work in order to obtain some reward such as a salary increase. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation play a key role in a person's life. Hence, the aim of the organization should be to make and enhance the intrinsic motivation for teachers to teach effectively and, at the same time, to supply some extrinsic motivation along the way

for school improvement.

Xin (2007) reviewed the four need theories: Maslow's Hierarchy of need, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Alderfer's ERG Theory and McClelland's Achievement Motivation Theory. He pointed out that a teacher holds a special occupation, and thus the motivation should be specific to the teacher occupation. The specificity identified by research is the responsibility and the desire of power. He named the six need factors of teacher motivation more specifically. They are: life, relationship, esteem, self-realization, responsibility, and power. The researcher used the six need factors of teacher motivation, as stated by Xin (2007,) for this study.

Ma & Zhao (2007), in a survey of primary and secondary school teachers in rural areas of Gansu province, found that the main teacher motivations were as follows: belief that education is very important for the China's development; enjoyment in working with students; and the job stability of teaching. Teacher motivation was related to gender, teaching discipline, years of teaching experience, turnover intention, and degree of job involvement.

The research by Lu (2004) also demonstrated that teacher occupational stress, the shortage of intellectual challenge, uncertain personal career development, lack of self-efficacy and enough autonomy are the main factors that influence teacher motivation.

From the above research in China, it was found that gender, years of experience, professional title, education level, and years of experience influence the needs in teacher motivation, with gender, and years of experience being most influential.

## Research Design

A quantitative research approach was applied to the study of this topic. The site of this study is the Foreign Language School of Linyi Normal University located in the northeast of China, with a population of 111 English teachers. The sample of this study was 95 teachers who were randomly selected from the population.

The instrument of this study was a questionnaire. The researcher used the 30 items on teacher motivation developed by Xin (2007). During the process of constructing his questionnaire items, Xin invited some master's degree students who had many years of teaching experience to discuss and evaluate the questionnaire items. The final 30 items were chosen and checked by an expert in developmental psychology. Then, he used purposive sampling to test the questionnaire. He then did an item analysis and a reliability analysis, which showed that the 30 items questionnaire had a high Cronbach coefficient alpha of .83 (Xin, 2007, pp.60-69).

The questionnaire for this study contained two parts: part one was demographic data including three items: age, gender, and years of teaching experience. In the second part, there were 30 items about teacher motivation, and a Likert Scales format was used to measure the items. The numerical representations of the scales are as follows:

5 = strongly agree, 4 = somewhat agree, 3 = agree, 2 = somewhat disagree and 1 = strongly disagree.

The 30 items in questionnaire were grouped into the six need factors:

### 1) Life need items:

6. When I get good results in my work, I prefer to receive the objective rather than social praise.

10. Entertainment and physical exercise is very important for me.

14. I prefer to undertake more work as long as I can earn extra income.

19. If no material benefits are given on Teacher's Day or Spring Festival, I would feel

unhappy.

22. If there is one sentence to describe my work, it is "As long as I remain a monk, I will go on tolling the bell".

### 2) Power need items:

3. I don't allow student to interrupt or change my original teaching method.

9. I am assured to be a leader in FLS, and I must do my best on my job.

15. I must behave well in order to influence my colleagues during the collective activities.

23. I suggest that students' parents help the teacher with some individual difficulties.

25. I assign my students to help me with private affairs.

### 3) Relationship need items:

5. I regard my colleagues as my friends.

11. I always make efforts to build a democratic relationship between myself and my students.

17. I apply two-way communication with my colleagues and students for better understanding.

20. I get on very well with my colleagues, because we have much in common.

27. I always care about my students' lives.

### 4) Responsibility need items:

4. I always summarized my teaching experience.

8. I volunteer to help students in solving their problems.

16. I am able to adjust my negative emotion to positive emotion during my teaching.

24. I have searched for various strategies for my own teaching.

26. I always support and motivate students to have their homework done.

### 5) Esteem need items:

1. I get upset and depressed wherever my work gets unfairness or negative feedback.

7. On comparing with my colleagues, I have a good self-esteem as a valuable person.

13. I am very satisfied with my teaching.

29. My working hard inspires me for being honored.

30. I wish to share my opinion certainly in the collective activities.

**6) Self-realization need items:**

2. I am able to adjust my problem solving strategies to uncertain problems.

12. I willingly work hard, even though I have not got any encouragement from my achievements in my work.

18. If I have enough time, I'll have my assigned work done.

21. Challenging tasks motivate me to work.

28. I rarely tell other people about the challenging task that I've just completed.

questionnaires were sent back by both E-mail and traditional mail.

**Results**

The data generated by questionnaire from the sample about 95 teachers were analyzed by descriptive statistics and t-tests to explore the levels of need factors in teacher motivation and the differences in need that motivate different English teacher to achieve their goals in their job.

To interpret the data, the following scale was utilized:

4.50 – 5.00 = Strongly agree

3.50 – 4.49 = Somewhat agree

2.50 – 3.49 = Agree

1.50 – 2.49 = Somewhat disagree

1.00 – 1.49 = Strongly disagree

**Data collection**

The researcher contacted the Head of the Foreign Language School to ask for permission to collect the data. Then, the blank questionnaires were given to the teachers by hand, and the completed

Table 1 Means and Standard Deviations of Six Need Factors for English Teachers' Motivation

Six need factors	(n=95)			
	$\bar{X}$	SD	Rank	Level
Life need	3.16	0.62	5	Agree
Power need	2.60	0.83	6	Agree
Relationship need	4.05	0.59	2	Somewhat agree
Responsibility need	4.07	0.64	1	Somewhat agree
Esteem need	3.66	0.56	4	Somewhat agree
Self-realization need	3.70	0.61	3	Somewhat agree

Table 1 ranks the six need factors of English teachers. Responsibility ( $\bar{X}=4.07$ ) and relationship ( $\bar{X}=4.05$ ) were identified as the highest needs. The power need received the lowest mean score ( $\bar{X}=2.60$ ).

Table 2 Comparison of Six Need Factors between Male and Female Teachers

Six need factors	Male (n=20)			Female (n=75)			t	p
	SD	Rank	SD	Rank				
Life need	2.92	0.54	5	3.22	0.63	5	-1.97	.052
Power need	2.60	0.71	6	2.60	0.87	6	0.00	1.000
Relationship need	4.13	0.63	1	4.02	0.58	2	0.71	.477
Responsibility need	3.98	0.72	2	4.09	0.63	1	-0.68	.496
Esteem need	3.71	0.49	3	3.65	0.58	4	0.42	.678
Self-realization need	3.69	0.54	4	3.70	0.63	3	-0.07	.942

Table 2 shows that there were no significant differences in six need factors between male and female teachers. It also shows the ranking of the six need factors between male and female English teachers.

For male teachers the first three ranks were relationship need ( $\bar{X} = 4.13$ ), responsibility need ( $\bar{X} = 3.98$ ) and esteem need ( $\bar{X} = 3.71$ ). But for female teachers the first three ranks were responsibility need ( $\bar{X} = 4.09$ ), relationship need ( $\bar{X} = 4.02$ ) and self-realization need ( $\bar{X} = 4.70$ ). Comparison of six need factors between male and female teachers showed no significant differences in responses

**Table 3** Comparison of Six Need Factors among Different Ages of Teachers

Six need factors	25-34 years old (n=42)			35-44 years old (n=34)			≥ 45 years old (n=19)			F	p
	SD	Rank		SD	Rank		SD	Rank			
Life	3.25	0.58	5	3.09	0.60	5	3.07	0.73	5	0.08	.439
Power	2.46	0.78	6	2.70	0.88	6	2.73	0.86	6	1.04	.357
Relationship	3.84	0.60	2	4.24*	0.54	2	4.16*	0.52	1	5.03*	.009
Responsibility	3.94	0.58	1	4.25	0.58	1	4.03	0.82	2	2.28	.108
Esteem	3.53	0.50	4	3.82	0.50	3	3.67	0.74	4	2.47	.090
Self-realization	3.56	0.62	3	3.82	0.54	3	3.78	0.68	3	1.94	.145

\* $p < 0.05$

Table 3 shows that there were significant differences in relationship need based on age; 35-44 year-old ( $\bar{X} = 4.24$ ) and ≥ 45 year-old teachers ( $\bar{X} = 4.16$ ) had significantly higher mean scores for relationship need than 25-34 year-old teachers. It also shows the ranking of the six need factors on different age groups of English teachers. For 25-34 year-old teachers the first three ranks were responsibility need ( $\bar{X} = 3.94$ ), relationship need ( $\bar{X} = 3.83$ ) and self-realization need ( $\bar{X} = 3.56$ ). For 35-44 year-old teachers the first three ranks were responsibility need ( $\bar{X} = 4.35$ ), relationship need ( $\bar{X} = 4.24$ ) and esteem need; self-realization need ( $\bar{X} = 3.82$ ). For 45-55 year-old teachers the first three ranks were relationship need ( $\bar{X} = 4.16$ ), responsibility need ( $\bar{X} = 4.03$ ) and self-realization need ( $\bar{X} = 3.78$ ).

**Table 4** Comparison of Six Need Factors among Teachers with Different Years of Experience

Six need factors	0 - 5 years of experience (n=27)			5 - 10 years of experience (n=28)			11 - 15 years of experience (n=10)			≥15 years of experience (n=30)			F	p
	$\bar{X}$	SD	Rank	$\bar{X}$	SD	Rank	$\bar{X}$	SD	Rank	$\bar{X}$	SD	Rank		
Life	3.27	0.65	5	3.17	0.55	5	2.92	0.73	5	3.13	0.62	5	0.823	.435
Power	2.38	0.79	6	2.71	0.52	6	2.38	0.86	6	2.77	0.94	6	1.484	.224
Relationship	3.87	0.55	2	3.99	0.61	2	3.98	0.52	1	4.29*	0.54	1	2.804*	.044
Responsibility	3.88	0.56	1	4.09	0.56	1	3.96	0.82	2	4.25	0.73	2	1.680	.177
Esteem	3.49	0.48	3	3.64	0.51	4	3.66	0.74	3	3.84	0.66	4	1.911	.133
Self-realization	3.48	0.53	4	3.74	0.61	3	3.56	0.68	4	3.91	0.65	3	2.644	.054

\* $p < 0.05$

Table 4 shows that there were significant differences in relationship need, the teachers who held more than 15 years of experience had significantly higher mean score ( $\bar{X} = 4.29$ ) on relationship need than the teachers who had 0-5 years or 6-10 years of experience. It also shows the ranking of the six need factors on teachers with different years of experience.

### 1) Life Need

Table 1 includes the mean score of life need ( $\bar{X}=3.16$ ). Life need motivated teachers to achieve their job less than most other factors. Entertainment and physical experience for teachers was the most important aspect, and it received the highest mean scores ( $\bar{X}=4.19$ ) of the five life need items. Comparisons by gender, ages, and years of experience showed no significant differences in the life need factor.

### 2) Power Need

Power need has the lowest mean score ( $\bar{X}=2.60$ ) of the six need factors. From items detail analysis, the highest ranked was "I must behave well in order to influence my colleagues during the collective activities" ( $\bar{X}=3.31$ ). Teachers therefore hold a share of the power that can influence on colleagues. Comparisons by gender, ages, and years of experience showed no significant differences in the power need factor.

### 3) Relationship Need

Relationship need held the second highest mean scores ( $\bar{X}=4.05$ ). Overall, all of the teachers wanted to build a democratic relationship between themselves and students ( $\bar{X}=4.34$ ). No significant differences were found between male and female teachers for the relationship need. However, in the comparison of ages groups, teachers 35-44 year-old ( $\bar{X}=4.24$ ) and  $\geq 45$  years old teachers ( $\bar{X}=4.16$ ) had a significantly higher mean scores than 25-34 year-old teachers. Also, teachers who hold more than 15 years of experience had a significantly higher mean score ( $\bar{X}=4.29$ ) for relationship need than the teachers who had 0-5 years or 6-10 years of experience.

### 4) Responsibility Need

Responsibility need had the highest mean scores ( $\bar{X}=4.07$ ) among the six need factors. From all of the teachers' responsibility need detailed analysis, it was found that most teachers could control their negative emotions well ( $\bar{X}=4.34$ ). They often summarized their teaching experience ( $\bar{X}=4.20$ ). Comparisons of different genders, ages, and years of experience showed no significant differences in the responsibility need factor.

### 5) Esteem Need

The mean score of life need was 3.66. All of teachers had a high job satisfaction ( $\bar{X}=3.98$ ) and a high self-evaluation ( $\bar{X}=3.93$ ). Comparisons by gender, ages, and years of experience showed no

significant differences in esteem need factor.

### 6) Self-realization Need

Self-realization need was the third highest ranked of the six need factors, with a mean score of 3.70. Within the self-realization need teachers expressed most strongly the sense of continuing to work hard with no reward for achievements ( $\bar{X}=4.13$ ). Comparisons by gender, ages, and years of experience showed no significant differences in the self-realization need factor.

## Discussion

### 1) Gender

In comparing genders, female teachers ( $\bar{X}=3.12$ ) were likely to receive material reward rather than verbal praise when they had good results in their work. Xin (2007, p.81) also mentioned this. Because female teachers always play two roles, both as a teacher on the job and as a housewife in the family, it means they must give consideration to both work and home. From the findings of Karin, Roberta & Fabienne (2009), there is a difference of motivation for teachers entering and leaving teaching between male and female teachers. Female teachers are more motivated by the relational and psychological aspects of the teaching profession. Furthermore, their job applications have more frequently been stimulated by previous professional experience in teaching. And women were overrepresented among the teachers who were motivated by the wish to spend time on non-professional activities. Men, however, were overrepresented among teachers motivated by social changes and, more particularly, by the perception of a decline in pupils' competencies.

In this study comparisons of six need factors showed no significant difference in response by gender. Xin (2007, p.81), however, found that female teachers had a stronger life need than male teachers. Because female teachers always play two roles as a teacher in their job and as a housewife in the family, it means they must give consideration to both work and home. Traditionally, males have higher responsibility both in society and in the family, so that they might be more concerned with self social standing and the degree of achieving esteem (Xin, 2007, p.87).

### 2) Age

Age emerged as the single largest predictor of

the strength of motivation for Xin (2007, p.76). He found that young teachers held the highest desire on life need, because they were at the beginning of their professional life. Normally, older teachers had the highest self job satisfaction, and they also held a strongly desire for power.

However, in this study, the comparisons of six needs among age groups, revealed that there were significant differences in relationship need.

### 3) Years of Experience

According Ulvik, Smith & Helleve (2009), the novice teachers enjoy teaching and experience a certain degree of mastery in their work. They manage the job and even appreciate challenges. They set high standards for themselves, but everything does not need to be perfect. They all get some form of support, and would like more, and they have high hopes for the future. They seem to be committed subject teachers, and they also enjoy working with students. Most of them value teacher education as a foundation for their work as teachers, and they are positive about being reflective teachers and would like to find time to put the notion into practice. Lack of time and information seems to be the most common challenge. When it comes to support, there should be a variety of offers supporting individual needs, however, new teachers should also be given responsibility. Novice teachers need a place to share their problems, as part of the school's organization. They need collaboration around difficult tasks, such as assessment and exams, and want to be part of a culture for sharing. There should be possibilities for informal supervision as well as for observation of beginning colleagues in the classroom. Most important is support from those in the immediate work environment, yet an external network can offer a supplement and act as a bridge between practice and theory. Time to receive and reflect on support has to be part of the job. Finally, the novice teachers in the Ulvik, Smith & Helleve (2009) study found it important to be aware of the different stages a new teacher goes through, and that these stages were familiar to their colleagues's experiences.

In this study, there were significant differences in relationship need based on years of experience: the teachers with more than 15 years of experience have a significantly higher mean score (= 4.29) on relationship need than the teachers who had 0-5

years or 6-10 years of experience.

## Recommendations

### 1. Keep a Harmonious Interpersonal Relationship

Interpersonal relationship is an association between two or more people that may range from fleeting to enduring. This association may be based on limerence, love and liking, regular business interactions, or some other type of social commitment. Keeping a harmonious interpersonal relationship among teachers, administrators and students is the premise of maintaining mental health for teachers.

This study found that the relationship need was the most important of the six needs that motivated teachers to achieve their work. And building a democratic relationship between teachers and students was the highest desire of all of teachers.

In order to keep a harmonious interpersonal relationship for teachers, the researcher suggests that there is a pressing need build a communication stage for teachers to let them become well known by leaders, colleagues, and students.

### 2. For Further Research about Teacher Motivation

There are many researches studies on teacher motivation in the current literature, and researchers typically apply quantitative method to explore problems. For the further researches, it may be helpful to apply qualitative strategies, such as interview and observation to ascertain more detailed data about this important phenomenon.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study found that two most important human needs for a sample of 95 Chinese University teachers were responsibility and relationship need. These findings are important for university managers to be aware of and take into account when building their organization's policies on human resources, because they lead to a happy staff and more efficient and effective teaching-learning interactions with their students.

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