

Promoting research and best practices to improve the use of English in the emerging global knowledge economy of the 21st century

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## Interview with 2010 TIRF DDG Recipient Dr. Tomohisa Machida



Dr. Tomohisa Machida

**Editor's note:** In this interview, 2010 TIRF DDG recipient Dr. Tomohisa Machida talks about his dissertation, current work, and research interests.

### 1. What were the main findings of your doctoral study in a few sentences?

My dissertation research focused on English anxiety among Japanese elementary school teachers, who had just begun to teach students English after a curriculum change. There were three main findings in my study.

First, most teachers were anxious about English. The data showed that 77.4% of teachers were anxious about their own English proficiency, and 90.2% of them were anxious about teaching English. The sources of anxiety included the teachers' lack of confidence in English communication and their lack of experience and training for teaching English. Furthermore, most elementary school teachers reported themselves as being at a beginning level of English proficiency.

Second, teachers experienced two phases of anxiety. Their first-phase anxiety stemmed from their unfamiliarity with English language education. Their second-phase anxiety stemmed from their struggles with English communication with assistant native English-speaking teachers.

Third, no universal strategies for coping with anxiety were found among these Japanese elementary school teachers. Although some teachers started to deal with their anxiety, it seemed to be impossible for all teachers to create their own coping strategies because they were very busy. Thus, my recommendation is that each city's board of education should take the lead in helping teachers develop such strategies.

### 2. Where are you currently working and what does your position involve?

I am currently working as an Assistant Professor in the English for Academic Purposes Program at Akita International University, which is a public university located in northeastern Japan. I am mainly teaching Academic Writing courses for freshmen and seniors. In addition, in collaboration with the Akita Prefectural Board of Education, I plan and teach in-service training courses for local English teachers from elementary to high school levels. This is a great opportunity for me to implement what I have learned from my dissertation research. I am currently planning an intensive summer training course for elementary school teachers to decrease their foreign language anxiety.

### 3. What plans do you have for future research and how did your dissertation influence them?

I have several plans for my future research. I would like to investigate co-teaching between a nonnative English teacher and a native English-speaking teacher. A quest for an effective teaching style and the roles of teachers would be possible topics for my future studies. Co-teaching has been widely adopted in most schools from elementary through high school in Japan. However, co-teaching between native and nonnative teachers does not seem to work well due to a lack of mutual communication.

Understanding Japanese teachers' anxiety might help to answer some questions about the miscommunication between native- and non-native-speaking teaching partners. Thus, providing nonnative teachers with professional development opportunities is very important to help them lessen their anxiety. I also think that nonnative teachers need to learn how to effectively work with native English teachers through diminishing their English anxiety from a practical point of view. I will continue to explore English anxiety as my lifelong research theme.

### 4. What did receiving the TIRF Doctoral Dissertation Grant mean to you?

Receiving the TIRF Doctoral Dissertation Grant meant a great deal to me. It gave me confidence about my research and helped me complete my investigation in Japan without any financial worries. Due to the competitiveness of TIRF's DDG program, I did not think that I would receive the grant. Thus, I had confidence in myself because the TIRF reviewers thought that my research was worth supporting. My advisor, Dr. Walsh, encouraged me to complete my doctoral program with his full support when I got the TIRF DGG. And of course, TIRF's financial support was extremely important. I needed to travel to Japan to visit many elementary schools to collect data. The TIRF grant enabled me to complete my six weeks of data collection in Japan. Without the grant, I would not have been able to finish my whole research plan.

### 5. What advice would you give people who are just beginning their doctoral research?

Patience and preparation are keys for successful completion of your doctoral research. Unlike writing research papers, conducting doctoral research involves collaboration and cooperation with other people, such as interviewees, office clerks, and professors. You cannot control their work. In my case, I waited for three months to get research permission from my university and two months to get the "go-ahead" from gatekeepers for interviews.

Typically it takes substantial time to do your research. However, during the waiting time, you should prepare yourself to better conduct your study. While I was waiting, I revised my research questionnaire and practiced how to conduct interviews, all of which paid off. Sometimes you may be nervous about the delay of your research, but you should be patient and prepare yourself for your next step to complete your doctoral research successfully.

### 6. What would you say to someone who is considering donating to TIRF?

Your gift will make a tremendous difference. I really appreciate the people who supported me in completing my dissertation. Without your donations to TIRF, I could not have finished my PhD program. There are many young researchers like me who want to solve the problems of teaching and learning English in ESL/EFL contexts. With the TIRF DDG, I investigated English anxiety among Japanese elementary school teachers. Having completed my PhD program, I am currently helping local Japanese teachers who teach English to students. Thus your contributions will help children learn English in the future. Although you may not see a direct connection between your gift to TIRF and its benefits, your support will be very valuable for years to come.

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Kathleen Bailey,  
Chair of TIRF

## Conference Opportunities in Tel Aviv & Phnom Penh

### IAEA 2013 Conference in Tel Aviv

The [National Institute for Testing and Evaluation](#) (NITE) will be hosting the 39th Annual International Association for Educational Assessment (IAEA) Conference in Tel Aviv, Israel from October 20-25, 2013. The program will include workshops and invited presentations, as well as presentations from international and Israeli experts.

The conference will bring together experts in assessment and education, policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and providers of examinations, to share ideas and insights regarding the use and applications of technological developments in educational assessment. Thus the theme of the conference is "Educational Assessment 2.0: Technology in Educational Assessment." For additional information on the conference theme, please [click here](#).

Information regarding accommodations, optional tours, and other issues of interest will be posted on the conference website in the near future. Online registration is now open. For further information, please send your inquiry to [laea2013@nite.org.il](mailto:laea2013@nite.org.il). You may also contact Tamar Orkabi at [torkabi@paragon-conventions.com](mailto:torkabi@paragon-conventions.com) for additional information.

### Chair's Report — Meeting TIRF's Challenges of ELT Workforce Research

TIRF's current focus is on promoting research and best practices to improve the use of English in the emerging global knowledge economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I see three macro-challenges for TIRF related to research in this area. I refer to these issues as "macro challenges" because they are not the kinds of specific challenges one faces in carrying out a particular research project (e.g., determining the validity of a questionnaire, establishing inter-coder agreement, etc.).

The first macro challenge is how to generate research in a wide range of international contexts that is valuable (valid, reliable, trustworthy, helpful, etc.) to various types of stakeholders. TIRF is addressing this challenge in two ways. First, the Foundation provides Doctoral Dissertation Grants (DDG) in an annual competition. Forty-one such grants have been awarded since 2002, and we expect to award five more grants in September, after the 2013 applications have been adjudicated. The DDG proposals must address [TIRF's research priorities](#) and the applicants must be "advanced to candidacy" in their own doctoral program. However, they need not be US or UK citizens, IATEFL or TESOL members, etc.

In addition, TIRF has published three "Key Questions" papers. These research projects are com-



missioned by TIRF, and address important, unanswered questions regarding policies and practices in English language education worldwide. Thus far the Foundation has published three such reports: (1) [The Impact of English and Plurilingualism in Global Corporations](#); (2) [English at Work: An Analysis of Case Reports about English Language Training for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Workforce](#); and (3) [A Case for Online English Language Teacher Education](#).

A second main macro challenge is how to create research reports that are user-friendly for a broad audience – not just language teachers and applied linguists. TIRF is addressing this challenge by providing executive summaries of the commissioned studies noted above. In addition, we published [an article in BizEd magazine](#) (click the link and advance to page seventy), an online magazine for business educators. [Mandarin translations of two of the commissioned studies](#) have been published by *English Career* magazine in Taiwan.

The third macro challenge is how to disseminate research findings to those broad audiences conveniently and cheaply and to engage those audiences in discussions of research needs and research findings. To address this challenge, TIRF has held dissemination events and invited people from beyond the language teaching profession. For example, in [2012 at a TIRF event in São Paulo, Brazil](#), there were ten pan-

### CamTESOL's Regional Research Symposium

The [CamTESOL](#) Secretariat invites all researchers to submit an abstract for the Regional Research Symposium of the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual CamTESOL Conference on English Language Teaching. Set to take place in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, the conference entitled "English for Regional and International Integration" will be held February 22-23, 2014. The Regional Research Symposium will be held on Friday, February 21, 2014.

For the Regional Research Symposium, all sessions should relate to language assessment, language and ideology, language policy, second and foreign language pedagogy, language acquisition, sociolinguistics, language and technology, and/or language and globalization. The deadline for abstract submission is September 14, 2013. Abstracts for the symposium can be submitted by [clicking here](#).

For those interested in submitting a paper for the general conference, more information can be found by [clicking here](#). All inquiries can be directed to Ngov Sophearith at [sophearith.ngov@idp.com](mailto:sophearith.ngov@idp.com).



elists and over 200 participants from business, industry, language teaching, publishing, law, and the Ministry of Education at a presentation hosted by the *Cultura Inglesa*. TIRF is also engaging individuals via online platforms such as Facebook, ResearchGate, and SlideShare. And in a few months on our website, we will host a discussion of several forthcoming papers on mobile language learning. TIRF's website also provides the findings of the Doctoral Dissertation Grant recipients' studies.

By sharing the Foundation's resources and publishing in non-academic or non-traditional publications (e.g., *BizEd*, *English Career* magazine, *The Guardian*), we intend to move beyond "preaching to the choir." We are eager to reach out to individuals and organizations alike.

I have a strong conviction that there are thousands of individuals around the world who are facing research issues similar to TIRF's macro challenges. For many of these people, I have no doubt that the work of the Foundation would help to answer some of their own, individual key questions. But that can only happen if someone like you helps to make the connection between them and TIRF. Would you please contact me if you know of anyone outside the language teaching and research profession who is interested in language issues? Thank you very much!

*Kathi Bailey*