

## 【Articles】

# How does gender identity affect teaching, research, and administrative leadership?: Narratives of three female EFL tenured faculty members in Japanese universities

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## Abstract

This research explored the relationships between gender identity and teaching, research, and administrative leadership, and the ideological and institutional issues that directly and indirectly affected their experiences, by analyzing interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and email communications with three female Japanese tenured instructors of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Japanese universities. The methodology chosen in this study was feminist narrative research. By analyzing their narrative data from a feminist standpoint theory, some commonalities among them were found. First, the findings suggested that the instructors' perceptions and institutional constraints had an impact on their teaching choices. Gender identity somewhat influenced their teaching, but it does not always come to the fore. Second, my participants' research interests had a strong relationship with their teaching contexts, but not with their gender identities. Third, the findings revealed that my participants felt undervalued, marginalized, and excluded in their universities because of being EFL professionals, rather than their gender identities. Although the relationship between gender identity and teaching, research, and administrative leadership seemed to be weak, social realities around my participants might indirectly influence their narratives. They overrode their gender identities in complex ways. It is hoped that this study furthers research on teacher identity issues in language education.

**Keywords:** *gender identity, EFL profession, professional lives, feminist standpoint theory, narrative research*

## Introduction

There have been numerous studies about women language teacher identity and professional development in both English as a second language (ESL) contexts (e.g., Amin, 1999; Lin et al, 2004; Park, 2015; Sanchez-Martin & Khor, 2024; Vandrick, 2009; Vitanova, 2016) and Japanese EFL contexts (e.g., Jang & Rakhshandehroo, 2025; Nagatomo, 2016; Simon-Maeda, 2004; Yoshihara, 2018). These researchers uncovered systemic problems, such as sexism and racism in the field of Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Although gender identity is one of many diverse identities, it can have a direct and indirect influence over their professional lives.

As for the professional lives and development among women language teachers in Japan, there have been two important studies examining how gender influenced the construction of their teacher identity. Two decades ago, Simon-Maeda (2004) explored how EFL women university instructors, including women of various ethnic, racial, religious, national, socioeconomic, cultural, and family backgrounds in Japan, discursively constructed their

professional identities as educators. She also revealed that her participants experienced marginalization in EFL workplaces and exclusion in hiring practices in Japanese higher education because of their gender, race, and ethnic origins. Twelve years later, Nagatomo (2016) examined the personal and professional identity development of 10 Western women, all with Japanese spouses, who taught English in different educational settings in Japan. Her participants' narratives uncovered gendered constraints, attitudes, and stereotypes that limited their potential in Japanese higher education as well as struggles with work-family balance. Both studies analyzed the complex relationships between teacher identity, gender, and race of foreign women EFL teachers in Japan.

However, there have been very few studies about Japanese female EFL instructors in Japanese higher education. Under these circumstances, Yoshihara (2018) investigated the professional development of six Japanese women who gave up a corporate job, turned to higher education, and became English language university instructors in Japan, mainly adjunct instructors, and highlighted their identity formation process. Their narratives suggested that Japanese gendered society led them to leave private corporations and enter the university teaching profession not only to actualize the self but also to seek a women-friendly working environment. They also used their former work experiences, including gender issues, to aid their teaching and student consultations. This study also uncovered that hidden issues, involving a sense of unfairness, the burden of gender-differentiated expectations, and a work-family balance, made it difficult for my participants to obtain tenure.

Nevertheless, previous studies have not scrutinized the relationship between gender and administrative leadership in Japanese universities. Therefore, in this study, I explored how being a woman affects not only teaching and research but also administrative leadership in male-dominated universities in Japan. In this regard, Japanese female tenured faculty members in Japanese universities were selected because they are unavoidably involved in administrative work. I had interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and email communications with three Japanese women who taught EFL as tenured faculty members in Japanese universities. By analyzing their narratives and social realities around them, I also explored the underlying ideological and institutional issues that directly and indirectly might have had an influence on their narratives. I hope this study contributes to research on gender issues of teacher identities in the field of language education.

## Gender and the EFL Profession in Japanese Higher Education

Japanese women's status and situations are notably reflected in the Global Gender Gap Report (2024). Japan ranks 118th out of 146 countries on the gender gap index scale. Regarding tenured faculty in Japanese universities, women remain underrepresented although the number of female tenured faculty members is slightly increasing. According to

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the annual survey conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology in Japan (MEXT) in 2024, women accounted for 27.8 percent of tenured faculty members at the tertiary level, including 19.7 percent of professors, 27.5 percent of associate professors, and 34.6 percent of tenured lecturers (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, 2024). Female presidents in Japanese universities comprised just 13.9 percent and female vice presidents 17.5 percent (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, 2024). These statistics regarding employment and leadership positions indicate that generally speaking, Japanese universities are male-dominated organizations.

Other studies have also shown that women faculty in Japan—both tenured professors and part-time instructors—are severely underrepresented in higher education (Ohri, Kurita, Ono, and Mizuki, 2014; Yamamoto, 2023). Some women instructors, including tenured and non-tenured faculty, report having been victims of sexual and/or academic harassment in Japanese universities, having difficulty balancing family and professional life, and facing inappropriate treatment based on gender differences in workplaces, research environments, and hiring and promotion procedures (Nagatomo & Cook, 2019). In other words, women academics in Japan are often confronted with and have to deal with gender inequality and injustice in higher education.

In terms of English language education in Japanese universities, English is taught in every university in Japan because it is a general education requirement. However, teaching English in non-English departments, such as science, technology, and business, differs from teaching English in English departments. As English is not a major area of study in non-English departments, English is undervalued compared to specialized course subjects in which students major (Adamson, 2009). Accordingly, the status of English language instructors in non-English departments is often undervalued (Adamson, 2009). And English language instructors suffers second-class status issues echoed in the United States and the United Kingdom (Nunan, 2001; Pennington, 1991).

These professional environments have positioned female EFL instructors in Japanese universities to occupy the lower level of the institutional hierarchy because of gender and their classification as EFL professionals. These situations might directly or indirectly influence my participants' lived experiences and narratives. The deeper understanding of the situations regarding female EFL instructors in Japanese universities helps analyze how and why my participants' narratives were told or not told.

## **Theoretical Framework: Feminist Standpoint Theory**

A feminist standpoint theory as a theoretical framework is significant for this study to explore Japanese female EFL tenured instructors' actual lived experiences and social realities around them. In a feminist standpoint theory, women are placed at the center of the research pro-

cess and women's everyday experiences are offered as a lens through which to examine society as whole (Brooks, 2007). A feminist standpoint theorist, Nancy Hartsock (2004), stated:

Feminist theorists must demand that feminist theorizing be grounded in women's material activity and must as well be a part of the political struggle necessary to develop areas of social life modeled on this activity. The outcome could be the development of political economy which included women's activity as well as men's, and could as well be a step toward the redefining and restructuring of society as a whole on the basis of women's activity. (p. 49)

Thus, a feminist standpoint theory highlights women's experiences as the building of knowledge, examines women's experiences of oppressions, and uncovers inequalities and injustices in society (Harding, 1987; Hartsock, 2004; Smith, 2004). The examination of women's experiences uncovers how women are oppressed as well as how the dominant group (men) oppresses women. A feminist standpoint theory teaches us that women's experiences also lead to the restructuring of society for bettering women's situations.

Following a feminist standpoint theory, I explore the experiences of three Japanese female EFL tenured faculty members and investigate how their gendered subject positions influence their teaching, research, and administrative leadership. I also look at social realities around my participants and uncover the underlying ideological and institutional issues that directly and indirectly have an impact on their experiences. The experiences of my participants could be the beginning of a restructuring of Japanese higher education for the betterment of women.

## The Study

### Research questions

1. How do gender identities of three Japanese female EFL tenured instructors influence their teaching, research, and administrative leadership?
2. What are the underlying ideological and institutional issues that directly and indirectly affect their experiences?

### Feminist narrative research

Feminist narrative research is significant because this study treats women's experiences as essential primary resources and examines social realities that affect women's experiences. Woodiwiss, Smith, and Lockwood (2017) noted that "in doing feminist narrative research, researchers need to look, not only at the stories being told, but also at the contexts within which women make sense of and narrate their lives and the resources available to them to do that" (p. 5). In this regard, feminist narrative researchers interrogate how and why particular

stories are being told and not being told, and draw attention to women's experiences as well as to the contexts in which women's narratives are produced or not produced. Feminist narrative research explores not only stories that narrators tell but also the social, cultural, and political world that directly and indirectly oppresses women.

Feminist narrative research also highlights the challenge of gendered structures and ideologies and calls for social and political change. Brooks and Hesse-Biber (2007) stated that "by documenting women's lives, experience, and concerns, illuminating gender-based stereotypes and biases, and unearthing women's subjugated knowledge, feminist research challenges the basic structures and ideologies that oppress women" (p. 4). Fraser and MacDougall (2016) also stressed the link between personal issues and political issues, by noting that doing feminist narrative research means "taking care to link the personal with the political while understanding the effects of social problems in ways that do not hyperindividualize, denigrate, and pathologize the people who experience them (Fraser, 2004, 2009)" (p. 244). Consequently, feminist narrative researchers foreground a personal-and-political principle and seek social transformation to improve women's situations.

By following feminist narrative research, I focus on my participants' lived experiences as vital resources to explore the relationships between gender and teaching, research, and administrative leadership and uncover the underlying ideological and institutional issues that are being told or not being told by my participants.

## Methods

### *Research Participants*

Three Japanese female EFL tenured instructors in Japanese universities participated in this study. Japanese female EFL university instructors in tenured positions were chosen because my interest was not only in the relationship between gender and teaching and research, but also in the relationship between gender and administrative leadership. Tenured faculty members in Japanese universities are unavoidably involved in administrative work and management duties. They were also selected because they taught English as a general requirement in non-English departments in Japanese universities. The experience of teaching English as a general education subject in non-English departments is quite different from that of teaching English as a main subject in English departments in Japanese universities (see the section of Gender and the EFL Profession in Japanese Higher Education). Taking ethical issues into account, all the participants signed an informed consent agreement to clarify the purpose of the interviews, their rights to the data, privacy protection, and data security. I also confirmed that the data that they provided were to be used for research purposes only. In addition to a description of the three women provided in Table 1, I give a brief description of each participant here. My participants' names are pseudonyms.

Table 1

*The Participants*

Pseudonym	Keiko	Rika	Akiko
Degree	EdD	PhD	MA
Specialty	TESOL*	TESOL*	TESOL*
University Type	Single-Department University	University	Single-Department University
Department	Art	Science & Engineering	Nutritional Science
Age	60s	40s	30s
Rank	Professor	Professor	Associate Professor

\*Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages

Keiko had been an EFL tenured professor in the art department for over 15 years when I first interviewed her and had a good understanding of her department and the university. She was an experienced teacher and had taught EFL in different institutions as a full-time and part-time instructor before she attained a tenured position. Since she became a tenured faculty member, she had served as a chair for several committees at her university. She strongly believed that neither men nor women should have restrictions on their lifestyles or occupations due to gender expectations or pressures. She defined herself as a feminist.

Rika had been an EFL tenured professor at the department of science and engineering for approximately 10 years when I first interviewed her and understood the atmosphere of her department and the university. Before she attained a tenured position, she had taught EFL in several universities as an adjunct lecturer for a total of six years. Although she served on several committees at her university, she had no experience as a committee chair. She hesitated to identify herself as a feminist because she did not commit to actions for gender equality. However, she respected gender equality and feminist values.

Akiko had been an EFL tenured instructor at the department of nutritional science for two years when I first interviewed her. Although she was a novice tenured faculty members in the university, she understood the atmosphere of her department's and the university. She believed in gender equality and feminist values and defined herself as a feminist. However, she did not publicly avow herself to be a feminist because she thought people associate negative images with feminists in Japan.

*Researcher Positionality*

A subjective principle of research was employed in this study. My familiarity with women's situations in Japanese universities helps me move along more smoothly and allows for more

in-depth analysis. Like the participants in this study, I have been working for a Japanese university as a Japanese female tenured faculty member who teaches EFL as a general requirement in a non-English department (College of Commerce). Since I became a tenured faculty member, I have been involved in several administrative duties and experienced managerial positions both at the department level and at the university level. My participants and I share some commonalities and respect gender equality and feminist values. Even though these are partial commonalities among us, such commonalities enable me to better understand the complexity and subtlety of the stories being told and not being told and the ideological and institutional issues in Japanese higher education and to be a qualified interpreter of those stories (see Kitamura, 2009).

### *Data Collection*

For this study, I collected my participants' data, including a background survey, open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews including face-to-face interviews and Zoom interviews, and email communications. All the data were collected in Japanese. I also wrote a research journal and field notes for this study. The multiple types of data were collected from July 2019 to February 2024.

At the beginning of the study, a background survey was administered to ascertain my participants' professional and academic backgrounds. Open-ended questionnaires were used to discern their teaching beliefs and practices, research projects, and administrative work. To explore how gender identity affected their professional lives in more depth, I conducted two to four audiotaped interviews per person. A single interview typically took between one to two hours. The interview data were initially transcribed by a third-party professional agent. I also collected email communications with participants, all of which I have preserved as records. The email exchanges between interviews comprised 60 single-spaced A4 text pages in total. For this article, I translated quoted extracts of the interview and email communication data from Japanese to English. To avoid misunderstanding and over-interpretation, I asked each participant to check my transcriptions and translations of the quoted data, to the extent permitted by their linguistic competence, to review and verify my translations.

### *Data Analysis*

In this study I employ narrative analysis (Barkhuizen, et al. 2014; Riessman, 2008). Riessman (2008) noted that in narrative analysis the researcher should preserve "the sequences, rather than thematic coding segments" (p. 74) and highlighted the importance of telling stories and details for interpretive purposes. By agreeing with Riessman, I foregrounded a sequence of narratives and retold a story of each participant. Data analysis involved five steps. First, as a researcher I read and re-read the data including open-ended questionnaires, interview transcripts, and email communications. Preliminary analytical memos were gener-

ated at this point and were noted in my research journal. Second, I labelled passages within the data which expressed a particular idea and referred to an event. I attached initial code words such as teaching, research, and administrative work to the data. Third, I configured a brief, draft narrative story of each participant along with research questions. Fourth, I identified commonalities and differences across cases while comparing and contrasting with their narratives. Descriptive codes and phrases were noted in the margin of each story. Fifth, I did the iterative and cyclical process of analysis until the underlying meanings of stories emerged. The analysis was applied to identify themes across cases.

## Findings

### Keiko's case

Keiko taught EFL in different institutions as a full-time and part-time university instructor before she attained a tenured position in an art department. Although she identified as a feminist, she hardly ever incorporated her gender perspective into her classes because she had to use assigned textbooks. However, not only the restrictions but also her teaching beliefs influenced the exclusion of gender perspectives from her language classroom practices. For Keiko, motivating students was the most important element in her teaching beliefs. To motivate students, she chose topics that students were interested in and created supplementary materials that were related to students' majors:

As some of my students are interested in only their major, I created my own materials to motivate students. I also taught English phonetics in class because my students are interested in English pronunciation. They wanted to improve English pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm. (email communication, 10 January 2022)

Keiko highlighted students' interests and motivation. She repeatedly said that her students were interested in something related to their majors. Therefore, she taught English relevant to her students' major. As a follow-up to this, I asked her if she would teach gender topics if her students majored in sociology or gender studies. She quickly responded, "Of course. I would choose the (gender-related) topics that students were interested in, because it raises their motivation" (email communication, 24 October 2022). This evidenced that she did not mean she avoided teaching gender-related topics. She chose teaching topics and supplementary materials in conjunction with students' majors, interests, and motivations.

Keiko's teaching beliefs, including learner motivation and interests, are relevant to her research themes. When she became a tenured faculty member, she struggled to motivate her students to learn English. In her teaching situation, her students were art majors and were busy with practical training. They did not have a lot of time to spend studying English. When she interacted with her students and understood her students' situations, Keiko became more interested in learner motivation. Keiko explained how her research interests

had changed.

When I taught English reading in X University (my previous university), I was interested in the cognitive processes and psychological aspects of English learners. And I wanted to explore them as research themes. However, I left X university (because I got a tenured position in this university) and changed my research theme. What made learners interested in English is kind of a psychological matter. I was getting interested in learner motivation. In my case, while teaching, I connect my interest to a research theme. (email communication, 12 January 2022)

Her account indicated that deep understanding of students and teaching environments influenced university instructors' research.

When I asked Keiko about her administrative leadership, she said she had chaired several committees at her university. Although she did not feel she was undervalued because of her own gender, she felt undervalued and unrecognized because her field was TESOL. She explained the teacher hierarchy inside the university. Tenured faculty members who taught art-related subjects held high-level leadership positions and tenured faculty members who taught foreign languages were at the bottom. She described how English language teaching was less important in her university and how powerless she felt in faculty meetings.

English language, which I'm teaching in this university, is not a major subject. Even though I participate in the university administration, I feel I belong to a lower, less important section of the university. I feel small. Although I'm listening to other faculty who teach major subjects, I don't understand what they are talking about because it is too technical. I can't speak actively (in faculty meetings). (Interview, 27 January 2020)

She felt she had difficulty in understanding some of the administrative work because the job had nothing to do with English and was too far from her expertise.

Although Keiko experienced several committee chairs, she did not enjoy it at all. However, for her, the experience of being a global education project leader differed from that of being other administrative leaders. The global education project included international exchange programs, events for international students, and consultation for students who wanted to study abroad. She explained as follows:

What's exciting now is that our university has launched a global project. As a leader, I planned various things and went to other universities for the project. Although I have participated in several other committees, this project is exciting because it's new and creative. (Interview, 27 January 2020)

Keiko concluded the conversation by saying, "They (university leaders) entrusted this job to me, which is very rewarding." She enjoyed being the project leader. She felt a sense of accomplishment and found it to be a rewarding experience.

I then asked Keiko if she wanted to take up a high-level leadership position. She responded that she did not want to be an administrative leader because most of the adminis-

trative work at her university was too far removed from her area of expertise.

### Rika's case

Rika was a tenured professor of the department of science and engineering. Because she studied feminist theories in her graduate school, she had some knowledge about feminism. I asked her if her beliefs and perspectives toward gender equality affected her teaching. She responded that she had difficulty in incorporating her gender perspectives into her classes, in particular, using materials about gender topics because she had to use assigned textbooks and follow a unified syllabus. I continued to ask her what she would like to do if permitted to use supplementary materials. Rika responded, "If I were allowed to use supplementary materials, I'd use topics about science and engineering because my students might be interested in their major (science and engineering)" (email communication, 27 October 2022). Her first priority was to use supplementary materials about science and engineering over gender-related topics because she believed that her students would be more interested in their own field.

On the other hand, when I asked Rika what she would do if she had freedom to choose a textbook and make her own syllabus, Rika responded as follows:

There is no class related to gender issues in my department (science and engineering). So, most of my students might not know about gender issues. Therefore, I would like to introduce gender topics in my classroom if I had a chance. If I could, I'd like to use gender topics which are familiar to Japanese university students, such as gender wage gaps, sexual harassment in workplaces, and solo parenting in Japan. (email communication, 27 October 2022)

She recognized the importance of teaching gender-related topics to her students because her students rarely had a chance to learn these issues both in general education classes and in language classes.

Even though Rika did not teach gender topics in a straightforward way, she gave special attention to female students. In her department, there was a small population of female students. Therefore, there were only six or seven female students out of 30 students in her class. She was cautious about creating groups in which female students felt more comfortable and less anxious. For example, she made a group of two male students and two female students and avoided putting only one female student in a male students' group. Thus, she showed great consideration to female students in her classroom.

When I asked Rika about her research theme, she made a similar comment to that of Keiko. After she became a tenured faculty member, her research interests changed. In her own research, Rika found that most of the students who majored in science and engineering did not like English, which surprised her. She explained as follows:

When I got a tenured position in the department of science and engineering, I found

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that most of the students didn't like English and had low motivation to learn English. As I interviewed them, they often said, "Although I don't like English, it's better to study English because I might use English in a future job." and "I have no choice but to study English because I need English for job hunting." Like this, I often heard instrumental reasons for learning English. I noticed that their motivations to learn English differ from mine as a former liberal arts student. In this regard, I was interested in and started to research the English learning motivation of science majors. (Open-ended questionnaires, 15 August 2021)

Rika became very interested in learner motivation, in particular, STEM<sup>1)</sup> students' motivation toward English learning. She said that her research themes had very little to do with her being female.

When I asked Rika about administrative work, Rika felt she was an outsider in her department because most of the faculty members were science and engineering specialists. She rarely spoke out in faculty meetings unless she was asked about the English program or the English curriculum. She hardly had any communication with the science and engineering professors. She explained the atmosphere of her workplace:

There are far more male faculty members than female faculty members (because of the science and engineering department), so I would say my workplace is male-dominated.

Female faculty members are chairing small committees, but there is no atmosphere of actively appointing women as upper-level leaders in my department. (Interview, 26 July 2019)

However, she did not feel that she was discriminated against and excluded because of her own gender. Rather, Rika felt that her classification as an EFL professional affects leadership career paths. By pointing out the marginalization and exclusion of EFL instructors in leadership positions, she explained that although EFL professors have often served as an international exchange committee chair, no EFL professors have become an upper-level leader. In short, EFL tenured faculty members were excluded from many areas of power within her department and limited to some positions related to English education and international exchange programs in her department.

I asked Rika if she wanted to take up a committee chair position and a higher position, she responded:

I guess it's a bit tedious. If I have that kind of time, I'd rather prepare for classes or do my own research. I am not really interested in power politics in university management. (Interview, 26 July 2019)

Instead of being a committee chair and an upper-level leader, she wanted to spend more time on the preparation of classes and her own research. She wanted to spend more of that energy on writing and publishing her research articles in international journals. For her, making achievements and accomplishments in research was much more valuable than becoming an

administrative leader, which is in a line with the Japanese women faculty in Higuma's and Kawano's study (2024).

### Akiko's case

Akiko had been working for the university as a tenured faculty member for two years when I first interviewed her. She believed in gender equality and feminist values and defined herself as a feminist, but she said that she did not call herself a feminist in public. One reason why she avoided declaring herself a feminist was the negative images people associated with feminists. She thought that feminists are often assumed to be assertive, angry, and man-hating, stereotypes spread by social media in Japan.

When I asked Akiko if her being female influenced her teaching, she said that her gender somewhat influenced her teaching. Akiko explained,

I think that being a woman somehow influences my teaching. [...] I sense that women are not paid attention to and are undervalued in everyday life. Although I say that I give equal opportunities to both male and female students, I give more attention to and call on female students more than male students. (Interview, 24 September 2022)

Because Akiko felt women are undervalued in Japanese society, she believed that teachers should give more attention to female students than to male students. Also, she consciously introduced questions and made comments from a feminist perspective in class. She explained what happened in one of her classrooms. All of the students in her EFL writing class were women.

In an EFL writing class, I asked my students to choose a famous person who they like and write about the person. Although I told my students to choose whoever they like, all the female students chose famous male figures. I was very shocked. I said to them, "Let's think of the question again. Why only male figures? There are many famous female figures in the world. You might not see many famous female figures on TV, but I wonder if you might unconsciously think men are superior to women." (Interview, 24 September 2022)

Although she noticed that her students have some kind of gendered stereotypes, she did not expect that all her female students chose male figures as famous persons. Through the interaction with students, Akiko realized that her students still, and perhaps unconsciously, have gender biases and stereotypes. Therefore, she tried to make students aware of their own biases and stereotypes by making comments in the classroom from her feminist perspective. She also responded that to make students aware of gender-related issues, she introduced gender studies classes in her university and encouraged students to take these classes.

On the other hand, Akiko was reluctant to use gender-related topics in an explicit way in her classroom. One of the reasons she experienced difficulty incorporating gender-related topics into her classroom was the requirement to use an assigned textbook. She also told me

that teaching something about nutrition and diet would benefit her students because her students' major was nutritional science. This was the same approach as that of Keiko and Rika. She further informed me that she was not confident about teaching gender topics because she did not have enough knowledge about gender issues. Like the participants in Yoshihara's 2017 study, insufficient knowledge and information about teaching topics affected her decision-making process regarding teaching gender topics.

As for her research interests, Akiko used to be interested in the effectiveness of group work and the improvement of English reading skills, but she became interested in researching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) since becoming a tenured instructor.

As my students' major is nutritional science, I try to teach English along with their major. I'd like to teach the English which my students can use for their future work. This led me to research ESP. I've been interested in how to teach ESP in my context, so I'm reading articles about ESP for my research project. (Interview, 16 April 2022)

Thus, Akiko's students and teaching contexts altered her prior research interests. Like Keiko and Rika, Akiko's teaching topics and research interests shifted because her research targets and teaching environments had changed.

When I asked her about the relationship between gender and administrative work, she first explained how male tenured faculty were more valued than female tenured faculty, as follows:

In my university, the opinions of male faculty members are more easily taken up than those of female faculty members, even though there are more female faculty members than male faculty members. There is an atmosphere in which the opinions of male faculty members are listened to with respect. I sense the opinions of male faculty members are more valuable than those of female faculty members in my university. (Interview, 16 April 2022)

In the second interview, she also illustrated the hierarchy of tenured faculty in her university because the hierarchy was linked directly with administrative work and leadership positions. Akiko described the teacher hierarchy: Professors who graduated from that university and taught major subjects held the highest positions regardless of gender. Male professors who did not graduate from that university but taught major subjects were next in line, and non-major faculty members, including language instructors, occupied the lowest positions. Because she was not an alumna of the university where she was working and did not teach nutritional science, she felt she was the lowest of the low in her university hierarchy. She also told me of an episode in which she felt EFL tenured instructors' voices were not listened to and EFL tenured faculty members were excluded from the process of decision-making.

I felt that our opinions are not heard. For example, under the COVID-19 pandemic, each faculty member, including EFL instructors, was asked whether to conduct classes face-to-face or online. However, the final decision was made by top people and those who

teach major subjects. Even though they asked us what we wanted to do, they totally ignored our opinions. (Interview, 24 September 2022)

At the end of this conversation, she sadly said, "I feel like I'm secondary." She felt EFL tenured instructors were excluded from the decision-making process and the EFL profession was undervalued in her institution. Like Keiko and Rika, Akiko felt that she was marginalized and excluded because of her EFL profession.

## Discussion

By analyzing their narratives and social realities around them, I discuss three themes along with my research questions: gender identity and teaching choices, gender identity and research interests, and gender identity and administrative leadership. In each section, the underlying ideological and institutional issues that directly and indirectly affect my participants' experiences are also addressed.

### Gender identity and teaching choices

The findings suggested that for my participants, one reason for not including gender-related topics in their classroom was that such topics may not appeal to their students. My participants noted that their students were interested in learning their studies in English. They believed that they as tenured language instructors should provide the topics that students were interested in and motivated to study. They also sensed that providing the topics related to students' majors would be what their departments and universities expected them to do. In short, not belonging to departments specializing in gender-related fields had the potential influence on my participants' teaching topic selections.

Another reason for not including gender-related topics in their classrooms is the existence of a unified syllabus or assigned textbooks. Such institutional constraints had a great impact on teaching choices. My participants expressed difficulty teaching gender-related topics in their classrooms in a straightforward way because of their restricted teaching contexts. However, feminist teaching practices are not only teaching about gender-related topics in an explicit way but also including teacher talk from a gender perspective, special attention to female students, and introduction of feminist events (see Vandrick, 1995; Yoshihara, 2017). Even though my participants made comments in class from their gender perspectives, gave special attention to female students, and introduced feminist events, they did not recognize that these are part of feminist teaching. If my participants had a chance to learn and understand feminist pedagogy, they might use a greater variety of feminist teaching practices such as incorporating women's stories into writing techniques, bringing in videos about women, and reclaiming local women's issues in connection with their teaching contexts (see Yoshihara, 2017).

In addition, the institutional constraints on teaching choices reminded us of the discussions of Japanese educational policies guided by MEXT (see Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology). The guidelines of MEXT have a great influence on Japanese universities. Generally speaking, tenured faculty members engage with university curriculum and program reforms, which is required to maintain academic standards and ensure the quality of education in accordance with the guidelines of MEXT. EFL tenured faculty members are committed to improving EFL curriculums and programs by following the guidelines of MEXT. In many cases, EFL tenured faculty members prepare unified syllabi and select assigned textbooks. Each syllabus is required to describe in detail the objectives and goals with university diploma and curriculum policies, lesson plans, course materials, and evaluation methods of the classes and is published on the university's website. My participants were not exceptional. They were creating unified syllabi and choosing assigned textbooks. In this regard, it was very difficult for them to teach topics that deviated from the assigned textbook and to do different practices other than those specified in the unified syllabus.

Thus, factors that prevented EFL university instructors from teaching gender-related topics are not only personal choices and beliefs but also institutional influences including a unified syllabus, assigned textbooks, and Japanese educational policies guided by MEXT. Simply being a woman is not enough to engage with feminist teaching practices.

### **Gender identity and research interests**

From my participants' accounts, I found that there was a strong relationship between research interests and teaching contexts. After my participants became tenured faculty members, their research interests shifted because of their research targets and teaching contexts. My participants prioritized their teacher beliefs and teaching contexts over gender identity. Tenured instructors have more interactions with their students, know them individually and culturally, and come to understand their university expectations toward English instructors and English programs. Therefore, it seems natural and understandable that they choose their own students as research participants and conduct research in their teaching contexts.

According to my participants' accounts, there seems to be little relationship between research interests and gender identity. However, the potential impact of the negative image of feminism on researchers' choice of research themes should be considered. Akiko's account concerning feminism exemplifies this. Although Akiko believed in gender equality and feminist values and defined herself as a feminist, she avoided declaring herself a feminist because feminists are often labelled as assertive, angry, and men-hating women. These negative images of feminists often come from social media in Japan (Zhao, 2022). Female faculty in Japanese academia might be concerned with the image of feminism and how they are perceived by their male colleagues. Public perceptions of feminism may influence female EFL

academics' choices of research topics. Although gendered subject positions do not directly impact on women academics' research themes, it can affect their positionality and research careers, but not necessarily in ways that they recognized.

In addition to this, the TESOL research culture might have an impact on researchers' decisions to choose research themes, regardless gender. TESOL, with its foundations in the scientific traditions of applied linguistics, has historically emphasized linguistic goals and pedagogical strategies over teacher identity issues (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005; see also Barkhuizen, 2017). Female EFL faculty in Japan might be more cautious about choosing research themes than male EFL faculty in Japan. They usually spend years precariously employed as adjuncts before landing their current tenured positions. The choice of research focus might be necessary to become legitimated and accrue capital within the male-dominated fields and the research environments. Such TESOL research cultures and environments may be influential on female EFL researchers' decisions to choose research topics in Japan.

### **Gender identity and administrative leadership**

The findings also uncovered the marginalization and exclusion of women EFL faculty in Japanese universities. My participants expressed that they were marginalized and excluded in their university contexts because of EFL professions, rather than gender identity. As my participants expressed, EFL tenured instructors in non-English departments maintain a second-class status within their institutions (see Adamson, 2009; Nunan, 2001; Pennington, 1991) and suffer a lack of recognition within their institution (Adamson, 2009). As can be seen from my participants' accounts, EFL tenured faculty members in non-English departments are often excluded from the upper-level leadership positions and limited to positions related to English education and international exchange programs.

However, I think that female EFL tenured instructors in non-English departments of Japanese universities are excluded from leadership positions not only because of EFL professions but also because of their own gender. Like Rika's case, there were far more male faculty members than female faculty members because of the features of the department. In these circumstances, the upper-level leadership positions were occupied by male tenured faculty members. As she noted, there was no atmosphere in which women faculty members were appointed to upper-level leadership positions. On the other hand, like Akiko's case, even though there were more female faculty members than male faculty members in her university, male faculty members occupied the high-ranking positions. And the opinions of male faculty members were more valued and respected than that of female faculty members. As she explained, what happened to this was a professional hierarchy in her institution. Although the professional hierachal classification is different in each institution in Japan, male tenured faculty members are overrepresented in the upper-level positions in Japanese

universities. The professional hierarchy is an unwritten rule and historical tradition that favors men for promotion to the high-ranking positions. In other words, the prevailing hierachal structure within the institution precludes female tenured faculty members from attaining upper-level leadership positions.

The statistics regarding employment and leadership positions also evidence that women faculty are still underrepresented in Japanese universities (Gender Equality Bureau Office, 2024). In such male-dominated institutions, male faculty members naturally take advantages and high-level leadership positions (see Pool, 2010). This is how gender inequality in Japanese higher education can remain as a mechanism of control monopolized by men to dominate women for capitalist gains. These environments have positioned female EFL tenured faculty members to occupy the lower level of the institutional hierarchy (see Kubota, 2020; Lin et al., 2004).

Relatedly, there is social reality that makes the issues of gender inequality less visible. Female tenured faculty members as well as male tenured faculty members are recognized as a group of educated, elite, and privileged people with job security, bonuses, a retirement allowance, research funds, health insurance, a pension, welfare benefits, sabbatical opportunities, and their own office, compared to part-time university instructors. In terms of employment and career promotion, female tenured instructors have the same opportunities and treatment as male tenured instructors. Additionally, recent hiring trends in Japanese universities suggest that some institutions are actively recruiting more women to correct the gender imbalance (Yamamoto, 2023). These circumstances may make women tenured faculty feel no difference between men and women and even advantages on women. My participants also commented that in terms of employment and promotion, they did not feel gender difference in their workplace. Even though gender imbalance exists in Japanese academia, the issues of gender difference and inequality are less visible due to the privileged position of tenured faculty members.

## Conclusion

This study explored the relationships between gender identities of three Japanese female EFL tenured instructors and teaching, research, and administrative leadership and uncovered the underlying ideological and institutional issues that directly and indirectly affected their experiences. Contrary to my initial expectations, my participants did not express the direct relationships between gender identity and teaching choices, between gender identity and research interests, and between gender identity and administrative leadership. However, social realities around my participants, such as students' wants and needs, departments' features, male-dominated and hierachal university structures, TESOL research cultures, Japanese educational policies, public perceptions of feminism, and their privileged positional-

ity had an influence on their experience and overrode their gender identities in more complex ways, and even in ways that they did not recognize.

Lastly, in proceeding with this project, I often share my experience with my participants during the interview process and disclosed myself as a teacher, a researcher, and an administrative leader. The practices of sharing experiences and self-disclosure gave me an opportunity to regularly and reflexively compare and contrast my experience with my participants' experiences. Such self-reflexivity made me critically think of my own power and privilege. Women in powerful and privileged positions, including my participants and myself, can define our roles and practices much more easily than women from less privileged positions. We have power to influence, constitute, and reproduce discourses and contexts that promote gender equity and justice through our activities. In order to make the invisible visible, make the personal political, and transform silence into voice, conducting and collecting research on the lived experiences of women language teachers is imperative, particularly in male-dominated societies and cultures.

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## Notes

- 1) STEM is an acronym for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

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## 要旨

本研究は、日本の大学に在職する外国語としての英語（EFL）教員である日本人女性3名とのインタビュー、自由記述式質問紙、電子メールによるやりとりを分析することによって、ジェンダー・アイデンティティと教育・研究・大学行政の仕事との関係、および、イデオロギー的・制度的問題が彼女たちの経験に直接的・間接的にどのような影響を与えているかを探究した。本研究では、フェミニスト・ナラティブ研究を方法論として使用し、彼女たちのナラティブをフェミニストスタンドポイント理論から分析することで、いくつかの共通点を見出した。第一に、制度的な制約が彼女たちの教育選択に影響を与えている

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ことがわかった。ジェンダー・アイデンティティは彼女らの指導にいくらか影響を与えたが、それが常に前面に出てくるわけではないこともわかった。第二に、被験者の研究の興味は、彼女たちの教える教育環境と強い関係があったが、ジェンダー・アイデンティティとは関係がなかった。第三に、被験者は、ジェンダー・アイデンティティよりもむしろ、EFL という職業のために、大学において過小評価され、疎外され、排除されていると感じていることが明らかになった。被験者のナラティブだけを分析すれば、ジェンダー・アイデンティティと教育、研究、大学行政の仕事との関係性は弱いように思われる。しかし、被験者を取り巻く社会的現実を鑑みれば、イデオロギー的・制度的問題が彼女たちのナラティブに間接的に影響を与えていていることは明らかである。ナラティブ研究は語られことだけではなく、語られないことにも目を向ける研究である。被験者が語らない・語れない現実にも目を向けたい。この研究が、言語教育における教師のアイデンティティ研究に貢献することを願っている。