

EFL Motivation of Japanese Junior High School Students in a Monocultural Environment

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単一文化社会における日本人中学生の EFL モチベーション

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Abstract

This paper examines the motivational factors influencing junior high school students' desire to study English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Kochi, Japan. Kochi has one of the lowest proportions of non-Japanese residents in Japan, which may impact the motivation of students to study English as they may have very little need to speak English outside the classroom. To better understand the types of motivations for learning English in mandatory English language classes, a survey of 160 second- and third-year students at a public junior high school is analyzed. The results show high levels of both instrumental and extrinsic motivation among the students surveyed. In addition, anxiety was not a significant issue among the students surveyed. The paper concludes with general recommendations regarding how regular English teachers and foreign Assistant Language Teachers can best motivate students.

Keywords: Motivation, EFL

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抄 録

本稿では、高知県の中学生の外国語としての英語（EFL）における学習の動機づけ要因について検討する。高知県は外国人住民の割合が少数な地域の一つであり、教室外で英語を話す必要性がほとんどないため、生徒の学習に対するモチベーションに影響を与えている可能性がある。そこで、英語必修授業にて、動機づけ要因を分析するために、公立中学校の2、3年生、合計160名を対象に調査を実施した。その結果、調査協力者において、道具的動機づけと外発的動機づけの両方が高水準となり、不安感は大きな要因ではなかった。それゆえ、常勤英語教師と外国人外国語指導助手（Assistant Language Teacher）の動機づけ向上を目指した具体案を考察する。

キーワード:モチベーション、EFL

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Purpose of This Project

In teaching, few situations are more frustrating than trying to teach a group of students something they have no desire to learn, and few things can be more rewarding than teaching eager students. Thus, the question of what motivates students to learn, and how to foster that motivation is of central importance.

In order to better understand student motivation in my own teaching situation, I will examine the following questions: What are the different types of motivation for learning another language? Are some motivational factors more likely to result in successful learning than others? And finally, how can teachers positively influence student motivation?

Teaching Situation Background

My teaching situation involved teaching Japanese junior high school students in Kochi as an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) in a thrice-weekly English as a foreign language (EFL) class. It is largely acknowledged that the Japanese educational system poorly prepares people to communicate in English. Yoshida (2008) reports that Japanese who took the Internet-based TOEFL test in 2005-2006 had the lowest average score of 44 Asian countries, as well as the lowest average speaking score of the 147 countries where the test was administered. Yoshida also reports that Japan had the lowest average TOEIC score of all the countries and areas that took the test in 2002-2003. However, a survey of English language ability in adults conducted by EF (2011), found that Japan placed 14th out of 44 countries surveyed. This result places Japan behind many northern European countries, but ahead of most Latin American ones. However, this study was based on written tests with no speaking component (like Japanese entrance exams), and so may not reflect true communication ability. One of the reasons for this particularly poor result (considering the amount of money spent on English education in Japan) could be because Japan is an island nation and an almost complete monoculture. In fact, only 1.6% of Japanese residents are non-Japanese (Yoshida, 2008), and of those the vast majority come from non-English speaking countries such as China. In the case of Kochi, the situation is even more pronounced. According to Statistics Japan (2019a), Kochi was ranked 43rd of 47 prefectures in Japan in terms of the percentage of foreign residents, with 0.65 per 100 people. Furthermore, there are only 2.24 Americans per 10,000 people, compared to 14.25 in Tokyo (Statistics Japan, 2019b), indicating that there are many fewer opportunities to encounter native English speakers in Kochi than in more urbanized areas of Japan. Unlike Europe where movement between countries is relatively quick and easy, a typical

Japanese person will only see non-Japanese while traveling. This is readily apparent to any traveler who has visited Japan, as the vast majority of residents, despite a minimum of six years of English instruction in junior and senior high school, cannot have even a simple conversation in English. This perceived failure has also spawned a massive industry of cram schools (*juku*) and conversation schools (*eikaiwa*) that seek to improve students' exam scores and ability to communicate (Ribble, 1997).

The conventional wisdom says that Japanese English language class is taught solely for the purpose of passing entrance exams, using the grammar translation method by teachers whose own command of English cannot be considered much better than that of their students. To address these shortcomings, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT, 2008) has introduced a more communicative approach to teaching, expanded the number of English classes to include upper elementary, and hired native speaker Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) to assist non-native Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) in the classroom (Ribble, 1997; Yoshida, 2003). In fact, the current (2008) MEXT guidelines require a highly communicative approach, although many teachers trained under the previous paradigm continue to use variations on the grammar-translation method.

Motivation

Gardner and MacIntyre (1993, cited in Mitchell and Myles 2001, p. 24), define a motivated person as "one who wants to achieve a particular goal, devotes considerable effort to achieve this goal, and experiences satisfaction in the activities associated with achieving this goal". Motivation is a complex topic, with great variation between individuals. Thus, there is a corresponding large number of theories regarding motivation that have been proposed over the years (see Brown, 2007), many more than can be surveyed in detail in a single paper. Therefore, I have chosen to concentrate on only a few aspects of motivation which I feel are most relevant to my teaching situation, such as the differences between learning in an ESL or EFL context, instrumental and integrative motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and anxiety.

ESL and EFL

One major factor to consider when dealing with motivation is the context in which the subject is studied. For instance, a recent immigrant taking an English as a second language (ESL) course is typically immersed in the target community where they have a direct and daily need to acquire the target language as a means of aiding their survival in the new environment. Thus, the ESL student will likely have many opportunities

(and need) to use the target language with a wide variety of people and in a variety of situations.

Now compare this to the situation of EFL students learning in their home country. As Leung (2006, p. 14) states:

“In this EFL setting, not only are opportunities to speak to native speakers very limited, there is also a cultural detachment or distance between the social context in which the learner lives and the social context from which English comes, i.e., an English-speaking country. These two factors may produce feelings of doubt, for example, as to the value of the study of English, which occurs in a setting where there may be few immediate rewards for the language study being done.”

Thus, for teachers of EFL students (and Japanese students in particular), the question of maintaining motivation without the constant survival needs and immediately visible rewards is particularly challenging.

Instrumental and Integrative Motivation

Gardner and Lambert (1972, cited in Brown, 2007, p. 170) proposed that motivation falls into integrative and instrumental orientation types. Integrative motivation refers to a desire to become part of the target language community and is influenced by attitudes towards that community. Instrumental on the other hand, focuses on the practical benefits that learning a language can bring, such as career advancement. Gardner and Lambert found that students with integrative orientations were more successful in language learning than those with instrumental orientations. However, Brown (2007) and Leung (2006) both note other studies that do not support this conclusion. It is also important to note that integrative orientation likely applies more to ESL than EFL contexts (Skehan, 1989). Thus, in a monolingual country such as Japan, which lacks an English speaking community in which to integrate, fostering integrative motivation is a particular challenge.

Also, the intensity of the motivation can be more important than its orientation (Brown, 2007), meaning that a student possessing strong instrumental motivation may learn a language more effectively than a student with weak integrative motivation. This may be because success is often measured (and thus rewarded) by passing a test rather than successfully communicating with the target group.

It has also been noted by Benson's (1991) study of Japanese university freshmen that not all reasons for learning a language can be neatly divided into integrative and instrumental categories, leading him to propose a third category, personal motivation.

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation

Another lens, perhaps more useful for EFL purposes, through which to examine motivation is intrinsic and extrinsic. These two designations can be seen to address some of the gaps in the integrative/instrumental dichotomy that Benson (1991) sought to address with his personal motivation category.

In its most basic sense, intrinsic motivation is that which comes from the student himself while extrinsic comes from outside factors. Examples of intrinsic motivation include studying English because it is interesting, challenging, or leads to a feeling of accomplishment. This can also include an interest in foreign culture related to integrative motivation. Intrinsic motivation is thought to be particularly useful as students will learn for their own sake and thus continue the long ongoing process of language learning even after completing their initial language goals.

On the other hand, Brown (2007, p. 172) defines extrinsic motivation as “...fueled by the anticipation of a reward from outside and beyond the self.” Examples of these extrinsic factors can include having to pass entrance tests to university, employment requirements, or parental and teacher expectations. One would expect that students displaying solely extrinsic motivation will be more likely to display behavior such as cramming for an exam and then forgetting the material once the goal has been achieved, as there is no longer a need to progress beyond the minimum required.

It is worth noting however that there is not always a clear divide between the two forms of motivation. An example of this would be a student taking a mandatory test (extrinsic) but who sees it as a personal challenge to get a high score (intrinsic). It is also important to realize that while there can be some overlap between intrinsic and integrative factors, as well as extrinsic and instrumental factors, they are in fact distinct.

Anxiety

Anxiety in students can be a general personality factor (trait anxiety), related to a situation (state anxiety), or a particular task (situation-specific anxiety) (Brown, 2007). Horwitz *et al.* (1986, cited in Brown, 2007) also identified different types of anxiety that correspond to different aspects of language learning such as test anxiety. These types of anxiety were found to negatively affect language performance. Thus, creating an environment that will lower student anxiety is important. However individual students can handle anxiety differently. Anxiety that would be debilitating for one student (debilitative anxiety) can be motivating for others (facilitative anxiety). For example, one student faced with anxiety concerning a test the next day may lose sleep or procrastinate, while another student may redouble their studying efforts. Thus, a balance must be struck whereby tasks can be made challenging without also being overwhelming.

Initial Theories Regarding Japanese Student Motivation

Before teachers can improve student motivation they need to know which aspects of motivation are strong and weak in their students. Thus I conducted an action research project in my own school (a junior high school in Kochi, Japan) to investigate this question.

My initial theory was that the students have little intrinsic or instrumental motivation to learn English because my school is in a relatively rural area of Japan without many opportunities or necessity to use English (Ribble, 1997). Also, because Japanese students often have a poor command of English, they are likely generally unmotivated and do not use English outside the classroom. In addition, what motivation students do possess to learn English is likely due to extrinsic factors such as the need to pass mandatory entrance examinations for high school and university. Furthermore, students are generally anxious as evidenced by the small number that answer questions in class. Finally, because of the lack of opportunities to interact with English speakers outside of class, the presence of an ALT is an important source of motivation to speak English. These ideas were simply based on casual observations of students, so applying more rigorous examination of their validity is necessary before attempting to improve student motivation.

Methods

Survey

The most direct way to find out how students feel is a survey. A modified Likert scale was selected for its speed and the ease of tabulating the results. The survey was anonymous to encourage honest answers and no neutral option was included so that students would have to commit to an opinion. Many of the questions deal with the same type of motivation to check for consistent results.

The survey was administered to two third grade and three second grade junior high school English classes (N=160) by the Japanese Teacher of English (JTE), with permission of the school principal. Hopefully the large sample size of multiple classes and grade levels will help mitigate variance related to individual classroom and teacher dynamics. The questions were written in both Japanese and English and checked by Japanese native speakers. I excluded any surveys that were obviously not completed thoughtfully, for example those with only one response type circled.

Reasoning Behind the Survey Questions

The questions relate to intrinsic motivation (I enjoy studying English; I enjoy English songs and movies/TV; I use English outside of school) along with related integrative

orientation (People who can speak English are cool; I want to visit English-speaking countries; I want to understand foreign culture; I want to communicate with foreigners). Extrinsic motivation was also examined (I only study English to pass exams; My parents think learning English is important), as well as instrumental orientation (English is important for my future; Speaking English is a useful skill). Levels of anxiety (I feel anxious in class) were also examined to determine demotivation. Finally, the effect of ALTs as potential triggers of integrative motivation was examined (the presence of the ALT makes me want to speak English).

Results

The survey questions and the responses from students to them are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Survey of 160 Japanese second-and third-year junior high school students

Questions	% Strongly Agree	% Slightly Agree	% Slightly Disagree	% Strongly Disagree
1) I enjoy studying English	22.5	36.2	29.4	11.9
2) I Enjoy English songs and movies/T.V.	22.6	28.9	30.2	11.9
3) I use English outside of school	5.7	19.5	47.8	27.0
4) People who can speak English are cool	62.9	22.6	10.7	3.8
5) I want to visit English-speaking countries	28.9	28.9	30.2	11.9
6) I want to understand foreign culture	26.4	36.5	31.4	5.7
7) I want to communicate with foreigners	30.8	32.7	24.5	11.9
8) I only study English to pass exams	8.8	28.8	46.9	15.6
9) My parents think learning English is important	42.1	35.2	18.2	4.4
10) English is important for my future	56.9	30.6	10.6	1.9
11) Speaking English is a useful skill	82.5	13.8	3.1	0.6
12) I feel anxious in class	6.9	15.0	40.6	37.5
13) The presence of the ALT makes me want to speak English	25.2	37.1	26.4	11.3

As shown in Table 1, responses to question 1 indicate that a slight majority (58.7%) of students surveyed enjoy studying English. This is consistent with results obtained by Yoshida (2008), who found that 60% of first year and 50% of second and third year Japanese junior high school students liked studying English. Also, the responses to question 2 show a slight majority (54.7%) of students engage with cultural products of the target language. Both questions 1 and 2 indicate positive (though not strong) intrinsic motivation in students. That the majority (74.8%) of students disagreed with question 3

is expected, due to the near complete lack of opportunities to speak English outside of the classroom in this region of Japan, and so may not in fact indicate a lack of intrinsic motivation. Also, there may have been confusion on the part of the students as to whether after-school *juku* lessons are considered “outside of class”, which may have increased the numbers agreeing with the statement. The large number of students (85.5%) agreeing with question 4 shows a very favorable view of English speakers, and thus integrative motivation. It is puzzling that while such a high respect for the ability to speak English exists, so few manage to speak it. This could be a result of the perceived difficulty in learning a foreign language resulting in great respect for those who do manage to. A slight majority of students agreed with questions 5, 6, and 7, (57.8%, 62.9%, and 63.5% respectively) which indicates the presence of integrative motivation (although somewhat weak). The relatively strong negative result for question 8 (62.5%) and strong positive result for question 9 (77.3%) both indicate strong extrinsic motivation. It is interesting to note that while question 9 had a strong positive result, a survey of Japanese parents by Yoshida (2008) found that 80% thought that the English they learned in school has not been useful. Questions 10 and 11 both give very strong positive responses (87.5% and 96.3% respectively), indicating a high degree of instrumental motivation. It is interesting to note that although English is almost universally believed to be useful (question 11), the belief that it is useful for the student personally (question 10) is not quite as strong, indicating a slight gap between societal expectations and personal ones. In terms of anxiety, the large number of students who disagree with question 12 (78.1%) shows that the students do not feel very anxious, which implies a positive classroom atmosphere. Finally, the presence of a native-English speaker in the classroom appears to generally inspire attempts at English conversation, but not universally, as indicated by the modest majority of students (62.3%) who agree with question 13.

Discussion

The results of the investigation point to high levels of instrumental and extrinsic motivation in the students surveyed. This is consistent with results obtained by Leung (2006) in his examination of Japanese junior high schools. The survey also indicates the presence of intrinsic and integrative motivation, although not to the same degree as the two other forms. This disagrees with the results obtained by Benson (1991) who found that instrumental motivation was less important among university freshmen. This difference may be due to the greater examination pressure faced by junior high school students. Finally, there is generally a low level of anxiety present in the classroom.

Teachers traditionally have many means of increasing extrinsic motivation through methods such as examinations and feedback. This survey indicates that students already have strong extrinsic motivation to study English through parental expectations and exam pressure. Students also appear highly aware of the instrumental value that studying English can provide. The question then is how to improve the integrative and intrinsic factors.

Motivation is a complex process, subject to the psychological state of the individual concerned. Thus, it is difficult to separate types of motivation into neat categories as the same task could be seen as a personal challenge by one student (intrinsic) or as something to be completed simply to satisfy the teacher (extrinsic) by the other. One student faced with a setback will redouble their efforts to succeed, while another will simply give up. Furthermore, there is a chicken and egg question of whether student motivation leads to language success, or whether success in learning leads to motivation. That said, there are a number of practical steps that teachers can take to inspire students.

Integrative and intrinsic factors are often considered to be of greater importance than extrinsic ones for language learning success. Lightbown and Spada (2006, p. 185) state that, "Teachers have no influence over learners' intrinsic motivation for learning a second language" although teachers can influence motivation through creating a positive and stimulating classroom environment. While obviously teachers have no control over the intrinsic motivation that students first bring to the class, intrinsic motivation doesn't remain static. For instance, Berwick and Ross (1989, cited in Kelly, 2005) found that Japanese university students' motivation increased during their course of studies. Also, Guilleaumeaux and Dörnyei (2008) found that motivational teacher behavior had a strong correlation with student motivation among South Korean junior high school students. Thus, by opening students' minds to the possibilities that language learning offers, and instilling a joy of learning in their students, effective teachers can inspire intrinsic motivational changes.

Guilleaumeaux and Dörnyei (2008) and Brown (2007) provide many examples (25 and 10 respectively) of motivational teacher behavior. These can be considered examples of general good teaching methods (such as providing feedback, creating intellectually challenging tasks, and establishing relevance), which should be used regardless of the subject being taught. Dörnyei (2001) offers a more general motivational prescription and divides it into four steps: creating basic motivational conditions; generating initial motivation; maintaining and protecting motivation; and encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation.

First, let's examine creating basic motivational conditions. As a student who is generally unmotivated to learn will likely also be unmotivated to learn a second language,

the whole school environment must be taken into consideration. This brings into play inter-teacher as well as teacher-student factors in student motivation and achievement. Indeed, a report by the National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment (1999) states that “Collegial management of student and teacher interactions in Japanese schools creates a positive environment that builds student motivation.” While individual language teachers have less control over the classes they themselves don’t teach, by having strong administrative cooperation teachers can improve students’ general motivation to learn, which will then hopefully positively influence language learning.

Another factor to bear in mind, particularly for non-Japanese teachers such as myself, is cultural differences. Remarks by non-Japanese teachers may inadvertently lead to demotivation of Japanese students (Kobayashi & Viswat, 2007). For example, a foreign teacher may get frustrated by students seemingly not participating in class, while the students think that listening silently is showing respect. Thus, it is important to maintain good communication between teachers and students to address any misunderstandings quickly, before they lead to frustration on the part of the students. Foreign teachers should also take any opportunities to discuss issues together with Japanese staff members (or have them observe a class) to increase their awareness of any inadvertent faux pas.

Despite these potential pitfalls, having foreign teachers in the classroom can be a method of generating initial motivation. The fact that ALTs are typically closer in age to their students than the regular JTEs and come from “exotic” environments can pique the curiosity of students and bring English away from the somewhat unnatural textbook examples towards genuine conversations on topics of interest to the students. While my survey found only a small majority felt the presence of the ALT increased their desire to speak English, (appearing to bear out Dornyei’s assertion that such periodic visits to EFL classes are too infrequent and artificial to create integrational motivation (1994, cited in Kelly, 2005)), anecdotal evidence suggests that their presence does make a positive impact, particularly outside the classroom. As Ribble (1997, p. 17-18) states, “...there is little doubt that the influx of so many foreign teachers into every public secondary school in Japan (at least for a few times each year) must be having some effect on Japanese students and teachers, even if the influence may be more cultural than linguistic.” In fact, it is not uncommon for the students who sleep through classes to then try to ask ALTs questions in the hallways. In fact, it is often the “bad” students who are most likely to speak with the ALT, possibly due to greater self-confidence.

Next, there is the question of maintaining and protecting motivation. One method is to show students what they can hope to achieve in their studies. Language learning is a slow, continual process and it can often be difficult to see progress being made. However, having

students from upper grades demonstrate their abilities can show students how much it is possible to achieve. Likewise, assigning a test or a task at the beginning of the term and again at the end of a term can (hopefully) allow students to see their improvements over the year, allowing for positive self-evaluation.

Also, planning English tasks that will be presented to other classes could form an incentive for students to try hard, as well as inspire other students through seeing what their classmates have achieved. Group projects can add a social dimension to learning whereby the students will try hard so as not to let down their friends (particularly important in a consensus society like Japan). Examples of group projects include planning and producing a video explaining the students' hometown to foreign students. This is particularly useful, as students are left with a concrete product at the end and performing a task for an audience can be motivating.

On a related note, establishing connections with members of the target language community can increase integrative motivation. Classic examples of this include pen-pal exchanges with foreign students (Bourques, 2006), or even student exchanges or school trips to other countries (although obviously there are financial considerations for the latter).

Teachers can also attempt to foster a social setting for students to experience English outside of formal classroom education, a factor considered important for intrinsic motivation. As Yoshida (2003, p. 63) notes "...the ability to use English in foreign contexts—the ultimate practical target—correlated highly with the ability to use English outside the school in Japan." Examples include English clubs where students can communicate in a more relaxed atmosphere and choose activities that may be more entertaining than those geared towards passing exams. English clubs can also involve activities such as speech contests and debate tournaments for added external motivation. Related to this are English camps where students can interact with native English-speakers and other students in an all-English, non-classroom setting.

Finally, there is the question of anxiety. While anxiety was not a major concern for most students at the school surveyed for this report, it is still an important aspect that teachers must strive to minimize. Lightbown and Spada (2006) offer the useful suggestion that teachers be aware of students needs regarding feedback, so as not to cause anxiety and demotivation through excessive negative feedback and thus public embarrassment. Anxiety is a natural personality trait that will differ between individual students, but by creating a positive atmosphere in which mistakes are acceptable and participation praised, teachers can have a great deal of control over the degree to which students are debilitated by their natural anxiety. However, it is impossible to eliminate anxiety in all students, and in fact anxiety can sometimes have a facilitating influence on performance

by having a motivational effect. While some students will not try something for fear of failure, others will not try something if there are no consequences for not trying. The task then for teachers is to minimize debilitating anxiety while maintaining facilitating anxiety. One example would be for teachers to give a large number of small tests, rather than a few large ones, so that the consequences of failing one particular test are diminished. This maintains the motivating principle of anxiety, while hopefully reducing its debilitating nature. Unfortunately, in Japan, it is difficult for individual teachers to overcome the current emphasis on passing important entrance examinations (Fukuzawa, 1994) and corresponding lack of importance for passing school-level exams.

Conclusion

Motivation is a complex topic, but one of central importance to language learning, particularly in an EFL context. I have found that in my personal teaching situation (Japanese junior high school EFL classes), that students already possess both extrinsic and instrumental motivation. However, the students' intrinsic and integrative motivation is not as strong, so teachers need to apply various techniques to inspire a thirst for knowledge in their students.

Hopefully teachers can make use of the techniques outlined in this paper to investigate student motivation in their own teaching situations and apply appropriate solutions. They will be doing both their students and themselves a favor.

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Appendix

Appendix: Survey

I enjoy Studying English.

英語を勉強するのが好き

I enjoy English songs and movies/T.V.

英語の歌・ドラマ・映画などが好き

I want to visit English-speaking countries.

英語が話される国に行ってみたい

I want to understand foreign culture.

異文化を理解したい

I want to communicate with foreigners.

外国人と話したい

The presence of the ALT makes me want to speak English.

ALTがいると英語を話したくなる

Speaking English is a useful skill.

英語が話せたら便利だ

English is important for my future.

将来には英語が大事だ

I use English outside of school.

学校以外で英語を話す

I only study English to pass exams.

試験に合格するためにしか英語を勉強しない

People who can speak English are cool.

英語がしゃべれる人はかっこいい

My parents think learning English is important.

自分の両親は英語を勉強することは大事だと思っている。

I feel anxious in class.

英語の授業は不安でドキドキする。

- 1 そう思う 2 ややそう思う 3 あまり思わない 4 思わない

