

## Motivation in the English Classroom — Japanese Sport College Students

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### 英語の授業における動機付け—日本のスポーツ大学を例に

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#### Abstract

Motivation is a highly complex and challenging issue facing teachers in English second language classrooms. A multitude of motivational frameworks and theories from various fields such as motivational psychology have shaped classroom practices. Various psychological variables regarding individual learner characteristics play a major role in the success of second language acquisition and the interplay of the teacher in this process has a dominant impact on student outcomes. Content based activities which contain a physical element in the learning process and are related to their interests in an atmosphere which is supportive, non-threatening, engaging and stimulating can improve motivation. The teachers' role and understanding of the overall learning environment are highly significant in generating and sustaining motivation. By considering that students are motivated differently and are influenced by social and contextual differences the teacher is able to apply motivation-sensitive practices to foster language learning. This paper aims to address these issues associated with motivation regarding Japanese sport college students.

Key words : Motivation, Language Learning, Motivational Psychology, Learner Characteristics, Psychological Variables

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## Introduction

In the course of research on motivation, consistent links have been established among motivation, language attitudes and second language success. The strongest relationship is between motivation and achievement, and the complexity of these relationships is the result of the interaction and influence of these factors.

Motivational theories from various fields of psychology, applied linguistics, and social psychology, have shaped thinking towards second language acquisition and the language classroom. Between the 1960s and 1990s a majority of second language motivation research was predominantly centred upon how the students' perceptions of the second language, speakers and culture affect their desire to learn the language (Dornyei, 2001). These emerging studies focused more upon the sociocultural context rather than the individual and that environmental dimensions influence cognition, behaviour and achievement (Dornyei, 2001). It is further considered that we can distinguish between motivation and motivating, whereby teachers can aid the language learning process by motivating their students.

According to Ellis (1994) Motivational research was inspired by the work of Gardner (1985) in Canada, which centred on integrative and instrumental orientations. This socio-educational model prompted much research and lead to a gradual shift towards a situated approach of understanding the intricacies of how motivation effects learning processes within the classroom context. Moreover, Gardner (2001) further considered additional factors than

integrative and instrumental motivation in motivation and advocated the significance of attitude toward the teacher and course.

As a result various aspects of the learning environment were considered, such as the group, teacher, and course specific motivational components and correspondingly generated various theories from motivational psychology. This further brought to the field the need for a process oriented approach, which sought to consider the ongoing temporal changes and resulting peaks and troughs regarding motivation to learn. Ushioda (1996: 240) states 'within the context of institutionalised learning especially, the common experience would seem to be motivational flux rather than stability.'

The role of psychological variables regarding individual learner characteristics such as personality, motivation, willingness to communicate, learner styles, affect and language aptitude all influence the highly social learning process. The definition, description, measurement and interpretation of affective variables pose many difficulties for researchers. It is the individual nature of affect in the social dimension of learning that is implicated with the complexity of student motivation.

## Defining Motivation

Etymologically, motivation refers to energising and directing, and e-motion involves outward movement, action or gesture. Emotion is associated with motivation as it is the subjectively experienced component of motivational states. Crookes & Schmidt (1991) in their review regarding SLA counted some ninety-eight definitions grouped into nine major

categories. Considering the abundant meanings of an individual term, a common understanding assumes that motivation essentially involves emotions, and relates to direction, persistence and degree of activity of the target behaviour (Scovel, 2001).

According to Williams & Burden (1997), motivation is a 'state of cognitive arousal' which provokes a 'decision to act' as a result of which there is a 'sustained intellectual and/or physical effort' so that the person can achieve some 'previously set goal'. Dornyei (1998: 117) states that 'motivation has been widely accepted by both teachers and researchers as one of the key factors that influence the rate and success of second/foreign language learning. Due to the complexity and inter-relatedness of a multitude of variables it would be possible to assume that, 'motivation is, without question, the most complex and challenging issue facing teachers today' (Scheidecker and Freeman, 1999: 116).

Motivational frameworks consider a multitude of interrelated factors. By understanding the scope and interactions it is possible to assist in understanding the complexity of motivation and hence motivating procedures in the classroom.

### The Teachers Role

A majority of theories proposed in the past maintained a student centred analysis with insufficient importance placed upon the teacher. As teachers and researchers it is crucial to have at our disposal an understanding from various theoretical perspectives and disciplines. In effect a 'catch all' system appropriate to the teacher with the students in mind. Teachers can simply and unknowingly affect the lives

and personal growth of learners by what occurs in the classroom, both positive and negative (Moskowitz, 1999). They wield enormous power and influence in the classroom and aim to stimulate student motivation by promoting interest in the material taught. Motivation is increased by inclusion, ownership and choice by giving the learners control. Glassers' Choice Theory (1999) implies that when students feel controlled, they get more resentful, which ultimately detracts from learning. Unless learners have some influence in the learning process it will be forced, rote, short-lived and eventually unsatisfactory.

The role as teacher-facilitator in self-directed learning can lead to life-long learning. According to Gross (1992: 141), 'life-long learning models offer educational institutions the opportunity to shift to a new paradigm.....of teaching students how to learn rather than merely "covering" a fixed curriculum.' According to the Lozanov perspective, when learning fails the instructor must analyse their own practices instead of blaming students. The instructor has control of the environment, which includes methodological procedure (Hansen, 1999).

Upon reflection of our own past learning we can relate this to the ability of the teacher, their influence, delivery style, personality, character traits, or rapport. American psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (1997) researched the question regarding influential teachers in life, and surmised that it was the enthusiastic ones, driven by passion and dedication that were most successful.

Students can also sense the teachers' mood, feelings and intentions toward the

students. As researcher R.C. Mills (1987) states, 'learners pick up on the particular emotional state of the instructor, which either enhances or interferes with cognition'. Additionally, students sense the teachers personal emotional structure long before they sense the impact of the intellectual content offered by that teacher (Pine and Boy, 1977).

The receptivity to the teacher, their teaching style and materials, classmates and course content all have a significant bearing (Alwright and Bailey, 1991). Teachers who smile, use humour, create a relaxed alertness, have a joyful demeanour and take pleasure in their work, often have high performing learners. The teachers' own awareness of consciously balancing or being centred in the spectrum of emotions enables greater understanding of students and develops skills as a supporter of students. Waters (1998: 11) proposes that teachers can bring about improvements by developing aspects of themselves, such as the 'need to nourish and sustain themselves as a step towards more effective teaching'.

### **The Japanese Context: Sports College Students**

Predominantly, Japanese high school students have learnt English using the typical grammar-translation method and essentially, have a general reluctance to speak. Cultural norms also have a significant bearing upon the functioning of Japanese L2 classrooms. The students are described as being group-oriented, make decisions consensually, reserved, formal and cautious. Conversely, some are self-confident, outgoing, strong-minded, direct, opinionated and capable of arguing. The

latter appears to be slightly more congruent with sports students as they have gained confidence and other positive character attributes through sport.

Typically, more proficient students are reluctant to display their abilities in front of the group in fear of being 'egotistical' while the less proficient students are reluctant in fear of appearing incompetent. This potential 'loss of face' places limitations upon instruction, elicitation and can impact group dynamics. Furthermore, students rarely express their dissatisfaction regarding the teacher, teaching and associated classroom occurrences so that feedback is minimal and communication appears to be unidirectional. The concept of self is important for Japanese because it is interdependent rather than independent and therefore influences self-efficacy and goal orientation.

Sports College students are often familiar with subjects such as 'mental training' as part of sport psychology. A basic understanding of the intricacies of the mind can foster greater understanding of the self and others, and in turn learners may become more efficient and effective. For example, the human brain is a consistent pattern maker and problem solver whereby the more it exercises by discovering information the better it develops (Hansen, 1999). Other useful aspects may include, retention, repetition, mental imagery and rehearsal, NLP, visualization performance, and test/speaking anxiety, which can be associated with sports performance anxiety.

According to Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, self-reflection is the most pervasive capability in determining human behaviour. Also, through metacognition,

students are in the position to be able to self-evaluate their motivation, thought processes and behaviour. The importance of self-efficacy is 'people's judgements of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance'. In turn this relates to how people face challenges and their success in their daily lives.

As with sport the concept of 'self' is paramount. According to Murphey (1998) the analysis of passion, vision and action indicates that by focusing on the vision aspect, powerful novel motivational practices can be employed. It is assumed elite athletes possess tremendous will-power and determination which enables them to train so hard. More importantly, it is the 'vision', and powerful images which inspire passion and excitement that drives athletes.

### **Learner Styles and Individual Learner Differences**

Language learning research has lead to considerable advancements into various dimensions of individual learner differences which consider the individuals' age, aptitude, motivation, personality, cognitive style and learning strategies which also implicate affective states (Ellis, 1994). Three sets of factors have been highlighted by Ellis (1994: 473) in his framework to include: (1) Individual learner differences, (2) Learner strategies and (3) Language learning outcomes with an additional 'learning processes and mechanisms'. This complex interrelationship and processes involved for resulting outcomes indicates variances for consideration by the instructor.

Learner styles refer to individual

methods of problem-solving. These indicators are relatively stable but can be altered during particular tasks. One particular categorization is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, which incorporates four poles of functioning: introversion-extroversion; sensing-intuition; thinking-feeling; and judging-perceiving leading to a total of sixteen personality profiles (Arnold, 1999). Additionally, Arnold (1999: 300) suggested that raising students' self awareness about their learning strengths can achieve 'higher interest and motivation in the learning process, increase student responsibility for their own learning, and greater classroom community'. These learning styles include: The Seven Multiple Intelligences, Perceptual Learning, Field Independent and Field Dependent, Analytical/Global and Reflective/Impulsive. These various learner preferences and styles are highly significant in terms of information absorption, retention and regarding preferred learning modalities.

According to Reid (1987), Asian second language learners tend to be kinesthetic and tactile learners with the Japanese weaker in auditory ability. By understanding our students' various 'functioning' strengths and weaknesses and by gathering information from class surveys, results have indicated that sports college students are predominantly kinesthetic learners. According to Lightbrown and Spada (1999: 58), for kinesthetic learners, 'there is a need to add a physical action to the learning process.'

## The Social Constructivist Williams and Burden 1997 framework of L2 motivation-Table 1.

According to Dornyei (1994a) the most systematic collection of motivational strategies in second language research 'consists of 30 macrostrategies, each which are broken down to several microstrategies and techniques resulting in almost 100 concrete suggestions and recommendations'. Such an exhaustive list defeats the purpose of a plausible system for teachers to consider effectively. The value of a motivational framework is dependent upon its usefulness and simplistic application in a real-world situation. Due to the social nature of teaching, a greater understanding of students from a psychological perspec-

tive is paramount.

According to Table 1, the Williams & Burden (1997) framework of motivation in language learning is based on the social constructivism approach and consists of a comprehensive framework of relative components. A constructivist view of motivation assumes that each individual is motivated differently and is subject to social and contextual influences. Based on theories of cognitive psychology the authors integrated them into a process-oriented theory with the decision to act centrally located. This temporal focus exists as a continuum of the motivation process which includes: (1) Reasons for doing something, (2) Deciding to do something and (3) Sustaining the effort, or persistence. The two primary groups consider whether

**TABLE 1 The Williams & Burden Framework of L2 Motivation**

### INTERNAL FACTORS

Intrinsic interest of activity:  
- arousal of curiosity  
- optimal degree of challenge

Perceived value of activity:  
- personal relevance  
- anticipated value of outcomes  
- intrinsic value attributed to the activity

Sense of agency:  
- locus of causality  
- locus and control RE process and outcomes  
- ability to set appropriate goals

Mastery:  
- feelings of competence  
- awareness of developing skills and mastery in a chosen area  
- self-efficacy

Self-concept:  
- realistic awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses in skills required  
- personal definitions and judgements of success and failure  
- self-worth concern  
- learned helplessness

Attitudes:  
- to language learning in general  
- to the target language  
- to the target language community and culture

Other affective states:  
- confidence  
- anxiety, fear

Developmental age and stage  
Gender

( DECISION  
TO  
ACT )

### EXTERNAL FACTORS

Significant others:  
- parents  
- teachers  
- peers

The nature of interaction with significant others:  
- mediated learning experiences  
- the nature and amount of feedback  
- rewards  
- the nature and amount of appropriate praise  
- punishments, sanctions

The learning environment:  
- comfort  
- resources  
- time of day, week, year  
- size of class and school  
- class and school ethos

The broader context:  
- wider family networks  
- the local education system  
- conflicting interests  
- cultural norms  
- societal expectations and attitudes

(Williams & Burden, 1997)

the motivational influence is either internal or external, how they interrelate with each other and how it influences their decisions. Choice also plays an important role. Williams & Burden (1997: 137) consider this model as being ‘cognitive, constructivist, socially contextualised and dynamically interactive’. Essentially, motivation is not only creating an initial interest in the activity or task at hand, but the continual sustaining of motivation and investing time, energy and effort to achieve particular goals (Williams & Burden 1997, Dornyei 2001).

Obviously teachers require a strong command of the language and skill in language teaching methodology in order to form the basis of effective teaching. A useful starting point could be motivational psychologist Wlodkowski’s (1986: 42) 24-point Instructional Clarity Checklist, which outlines essential teaching methodological issues concerning motivational teaching. Williams & Burden (1997: 204) also provide a practical ten-point classroom ‘crucial for language teachers’ list, focusing on aspects of learning in classroom. Additionally, the ‘Ten Commandments’ for motivating language learners proposed by Dornyei and Csizer (1998: 215) is also noteworthy. Each classroom environment is essentially unique, which should prompt the instructor to act, conducive to individual situations. For example the quality as opposed to quantity of motivation-sensitive practices are important as motivating teachers often rely on only a few specific techniques (Dornyei, 2005).

## **Relating the Model to the Japanese Context**

### **External factors:**

#### **Consideration of rewards**

According to studies by Arnold & Brown (1999) adding extrinsic rewards can be detrimental and actually reduce motivation. Kohn (1990) states that in ‘experimental situations subjects have shown to exhibit reduced efficiency and pleasure in an intrinsically interesting task when an extrinsic reward was introduced’. However, this is highly dependent upon whether the reward conflicts with existing goals of the learners (Ford, 1992). Although extrinsic motivation can prove to be beneficial, intrinsic reasons foster greater learning so the impact of rewards must be carefully monitored.

#### **The Japanese student, classroom dynamics and culture**

A cultural ‘Asian’ element is to be included to the framework as there are typical implications specific to the Japanese context and unique to second language acquisition. For example, the lack of communicative English teaching due to the emphasis on university entrance tests, cultural understanding of Japanese classroom behaviour such as the willingness to communicate, unique group dynamics, and the escalator system of Japanese universities which basically guarantees students their degree upon entry.

Greater understanding of group dynamics and ‘group’ play an important role in the social system and is culturally significant in the highly group oriented Japan. For example, various face-saving

behaviours typical to the Japanese classroom context. Other considerations of group dynamics may include; the classroom environment, classroom management, cohesiveness, ability of the teacher as leader or facilitator, student roles, and dealing with difficulties (Dornyei & Murphey, 2003). According to Allwright & Bailey (1991) receptivity to peers also has pedagogical implications for classroom interactions particularly where tasks are centred upon pair and group-work activities. A lack of L2 mastery also contributes to this as with cultural differences in terms of social talk, frequency, duration, topics and participants (Allwright & Bailey, 1991).

According to Yashima et al. (2004) cited in Dornyei (2005) it is possible to hypothesize that learners who clearly visualize 'possible' or 'ideal' English-using selves are likely to make an effort to become more proficient and develop WTC and engage in interaction with others using English.

### Internal Factors:

#### Reducing anxiety in the classroom

Language anxiety can vary between learners and tasks and can be more or less debilitating. Anxiety is multifaceted and can be referred to as being high, medium and low trait anxiety and state anxiety. According to Horwitz et al. (1986) foreign language anxiety is a situation specific anxiety distinct from other anxieties. Reducing anxiety is discovering and consequently removing or reducing debilitating factors, which lead to anxiety and fear (Dornyei 2001, Allwright & Bailey 1991).

According to Kim (1998) regarding the Asian EFL context, oral communication

classes are more anxiety provoking than reading classes. Anxiety in the Japanese classroom is characteristic of the students and their culture, which can consequently make them reluctant to enter into discourse. Anxiety can be reduced in a conducive classroom atmosphere with minimal competition, clear task orientation and a supportive teacher who shows interest (Horwitz, 2001). Additionally the instructor may:

- introduce the topic of sports performance anxiety and relate it to language learning, which can then be supplemented with mental imagery and visualization techniques,
- Create non-threatening pair and group work activities, a relaxed atmosphere, instil confidence in students and avoid social comparison.

#### Willingness to Communicate

This internal factor has various implications in the language classroom as it varies widely between individuals and impacts motivation.

According to MacIntyre et al., (1998) over thirty variables were discovered to have impact on L2 willingness to communicate (WTC) which vary temporally and situationally. WTC has important variables specifically for the Japanese context and has cultural implications, as students are generally reluctant to speak up and tend to consult consensually before responding. However, some sport-oriented students are considerably outspoken despite their limited communicative competence.

MacIntyre et al. (1998: 547) propose that 'the ultimate goal of the learning process should be to engender in language students



the willingness to seek out communication opportunities and the willingness actually to communicate in them'. Additionally, the authors have conceptualised WTC in a L2 theoretical model which includes the social and individual context, affective-cognitive context, motivational propensities, situated antecedents and behavioural intentions are interrelated in affecting WTC in an L2 and in L2 use. By understanding the relationship between variables contained in such a theoretical model combined with the understanding of the target culture, group or individual it is possible to prompt students to be more willing to communicate. In addition the teacher can:

- give students 'permission' to make mistakes, as native speakers are interested more in the content of the conversation rather than 'how' it is spoken. Native speakers also make mistakes and according to Brown (1989: 55) 'you can no more learn a language without making mistakes than you can learn to play tennis without hitting the ball into the net'.
- remind students that Japanese English speakers obviously use English as their *second* language so it does not need to be perfect and that communication includes body language.

### The Students and 'Action' English

Depending upon the understanding of various 'learner style' analyses and 'needs analyses', an additional physical component may benefit the proposed sport oriented students. This would include sport related topics and outdoor/ natural context learning and perhaps dancing, 'hands-on' projects and drama activities, refer to Appendix 1. Being physical is significantly

more naturally engaging, motivating and has the potential to extend learning. Drama is also supported by the Lazonov method, which encourages self-expression via role-play in the performance (Hansen, 1999).

According to Arnold & Brown (1999) it is important to involve students with content-based activities related to their interests, which centres upon meanings and purposes rather than on verbs and prepositions. Self-Determination Theory, which gives students greater autonomy in the classroom enables them to feel as though they have control of their learning process. For example the students should be given greater choices in activities, teaching materials, topics, assignments, the format and pace of learning, due dates, positioning of furniture and choice of work partners. (Dornyei, 2001).

The students' character in terms of introversion and extroversion should be considered in activities, as some tasks are more suited to one than the other. According to Arnold (1999) the stereotypical outgoing and talkative extrovert is implied to be a better language learner. In reality, the extrovert is in fact seeking ego enhancement, self-esteem and a sense of wholeness. Conversely introverts seek from within themselves, and are likely to have greater inner strength and empathy, both virtues for language learning. There are advantages and disadvantages with both introverts and extroverts in second language success, depending on particular tasks and teaching methods (Gass & Selinker, 2001).

Additionally, Arnold (1999: 302) argues that 'teachers must become sensitive to the

differences between *typical* behaviour and preferences, and *stereotyping* students according to widely held sociocultural assumptions.' For example, the erroneous belief that sportspeople are 'unintelligent'. If we consider the fact that the brains' primary instinct is for survival and that sportspeople have a higher than average life success, they are in fact very clever.

The brain mirrors internally what it perceives (Hansen, 1999). In general communication skills, people often 'mirror and match' or copy with brain connections called mirror neurons, so when we feel good, we learn better. Instructors who obviously enjoy their work, generally have higher performing students. The empathetic ability of the teacher has the potential to understand the student's position, uplift, nurture, mentor, guide and encourage the learner. Canfield and Wells (1994: 5) suggest that 'the most important thing a teacher can do to help students emotionally and intellectually is create an environment of mutual support and care. The crucial thing is the safety and encouragement students sense in the classroom and to recognize that they are valued and will receive affection and support.'

If the atmosphere is supportive and non-threatening, engaging and stimulating, activities are relevant in terms of age and background, in addition to being culturally significant, students have a greater opportunity to experience success and effectively greater motivation. Motivational frameworks should be used as a guide for consideration and adapted to suit specific situations in the highly complex classroom. Essentially, 'where the attention goes, energy flows.'

## Appendix 1

### Sample Task:

*The students select and research a sport related topic such as an extreme or obscure sport, yoga, CPR, nutritional plan, sport for the disabled or elderly etc. The teacher acts as an academic/linguistic source and facilitates the process. They research, translate and present it to the class in simple English and peer teach a 'new vocabulary list' (this becomes a glossary of terms for the whole grade in Japanese and English). Allow students to peer assess it on pre-determined variables and work in groups to teach the content. If it is a sport, 1 group member can teach 4-6 class members.*

*This enables a strong process dimension and is notable for the end product. The participants have ownership and the project has durability. Skehan (1998) and Williams and Burden (1997) further acknowledge that learning involves social interaction influenced by the context.*

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## 要 旨

英語を外国語として指導する教員にとって動機付けとは、様々な要素が絡み合っていて複雑であるが興味深い問題である。多様な動機付けの概念枠組み、また動機付けの心理学などの分野における理論が、授業での実践を形作っている。個々の学習者の特性に関する様々な心理学的変数が、外国語の習得において重要な役割を演じており、この過程における教師との相互作用が、学生にもたらされる結果に対して、もっとも強い影響力を有している。内容重視の活動とは、学習過程において身体活動を伴い、学習者にプレッシャーを与えず、暖かい雰囲気、学習者の興味を引くような内容の参加型の活動を意味し、動機付けを向上することができうるものである。教育者の役割と、教育者が全体の学習環境を理解することは、学習者の動機を生成したり、学習意欲を維持させる上で非常に重要である。学生各自の動機付けのプロセスが異なっていること、学生が社会関係の差異やコンテキストの違いにより影響を受けることを考慮することで、教育者は語学学習の効率を高めるために、動機付け重視の実践を取り入れることができる。本論文の目的は、日本のスポーツ大学生の動機付けに関連して、これらの問題を論じることである。

(和訳は海老島均助教授に担当して頂いた。)