

## **L2 Motivation Patterns in EFL Japan of Different Groups of Learners**

**Hajime Tsuzuki<sup>1</sup>**

*Kanda Institute of Foreign Languages*

### **ABSTRACT**

It is natural to assume that each language learner demonstrates his or her unique improvement curves. On the other hand, a clear trend was observed where four different demographic groups of learners, while presenting four respective and distinct trends of learning speed, all showed similar and overlapping patterns of improvement within his or her own group. The attempt of this research is to try to explain this phenomenon. The explanations will be made based solely on various motivational theories derived from the literature, without referring to other possible contributors such as individual aptitude factors. Through the process, the paper aims to first present what types of motivations exist in each, followed by ensuring logical connections between those existing motivations of each demographic group and their outcome pattern, particularly after more than 5 years of learning. As a consequence, it will show that while two of the four groups show only a limited amount of improvement, and a seemingly prospective group of business professionals fail to show any measurable progress, a group of younger learners consistently succeeds in their pursuit of both academic success and language mastery.

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background and Motivation of the Study**

Human beings can be proactive and engaged or, alternatively, passive and alienated, largely as a function of the social conditions in which they develop and function (Ryan & Deci, 2000). There are a great deal of individual differences that shape the L2 learning journey, which inevitably leads to varying degrees of success. Few turn out to be successful learners, while most end up less than successful. As Lamb (2016) notes, language mastery endeavors tend to be less successful, which is exactly what I've observed in over 20 years of my teaching in an EFL environment.

While ample studies have been conducted on individual differences in the field of L2 learning, fewer seem to have taken the reversed approach. That is, to explore similarities between different learners. In the field where individual differences dominate the discussion, I've

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<sup>1</sup> *Hajime Tsuzuki received his MA in TESOL from Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. He is currently a part-time lecturer at Kanda Institute of Foreign Language, while fully attending to Bellevue Eigo-no-heya, a small private language school which he co-founded in 2007. Correspondence should be sent to [bellevuees@gmail.com](mailto:bellevuees@gmail.com)*

observed through years of my teaching that students of a single demographic group follow surprisingly similar paths.

The purpose of this paper is to try to explore learning motivations that drive Japanese learners' English learning. Fortunately, the language school that I co-run is full of examples of serious EFL learners, who serve as ideal participants of this study. Not only that, but we also have students of various demographic groups, allowing us to observe students of different groups in terms of age, social status and language aptitude.

Of the two main elements generally referred to as primary antecedents of successful L2 achievements, namely motivation and aptitude, I have chosen the former as the focus of this paper, on the basis that its studies seem much more fruitful and practical. There is a tremendous gap between the number of studies done on the two fields (Boo, et al, 2015). The number of studies on motivation far exceeds that of aptitude, the trend of which just continues to magnify with time.

According to the authors, the primary reason lies in the nature of the two. The basic attitude of researchers in the educational field is that learners and their learning behaviours are regarded as central to the learning process (Boo, et. al, 2015). This is where researchers find great potential in motivational studies. On the other hand, aptitude is viewed largely as a static trait that is mostly beyond the learners' control (Boo, et. al, 2015). Accordingly, my growing interest in the field induced me to reconsider my own context of teaching from this particular perspective, which is the justification behind my choice.

First, the teaching context where my teaching is mainly done will be introduced, with specific attention to four different demographic groups that present four distinct outcome patterns of learning. Second, I will introduce various types of motivational theories, in an attempt to provide a solid basis of L2 motivation studies. Third, some relevant implications from multiple numbers of empirical studies, which may serve as evidence to justify the observed trends, will be discussed. Finally, those implications will be applied to my actual teaching so as to justify the observed trend, with analysis written for each.

### ***Introduction of the Teaching Context***

For over 13 years, I've run a small private language institution in the suburbs of Tokyo along with a partner. Our current size is about 100 students. Despite its humble capacity, we proudly cater to students of all walks of life, from secondary school students to housewives to business professionals to retired seniors. Also, we accept students of all levels of proficiency, from novices to proficient speakers. I myself serve as the main instructor in weekly 90-minute classroom instructions, with 80% of them separately taking weekly 25-minute, one-on-one online communicative lessons from a Filipino instructor, adding first-hand communicative experience in a regular manner.

Our current composition of students are roughly 30% adults, 50% secondary school students, 10% university students, and 10% elementary school students. We initially served as an exclusively adult language school, which means the current picture shows the increasing predominance of teenage learners in the area.

Of the adult students, approximately 30% are female students in their 60's, and 40% are business professional male learners in their 40's and 50's. As for the youth division, we have a balanced mixture of junior high school and senior high school students. In recent years, more and more students have chosen to stay and keep learning at the school as university students.

Overall, we are rather successful in having students persist in their learning here for an extended period of time, especially considering the fact that bigger schools in the industry seemingly manage to keep their students for only limited terms, always depending on new entrants for their business income.

During the 12 years of the school's operation, I've taught nearly 350 students in a small class setting of around 6 students, which allows for ample amount of communication to take place with students, from a close distance. For this nature of our school, my relationship with the students has been far more than serving as a mere language teacher. All communication, including initially introducing our school, daily communication of administrative issues, periodic consulting of their learning progress, and some casual interactions both at personal and private levels, take place in a direct fashion. This style makes our teacher-student relationship rather intimate.

In such a setting, I've learned that there is a clearly observable trend that students within one demographic group commonly present. Elderly women over 65 show one trend, while business professional male learners in their 40's and 50's make up another. Younger students broadly present 3 general patterns, prominently successful, moderately successful, and minimally successful, the first and the last of which I will particularly refer to in this paper.

While it is too premature to determine the trend at our small school as the overall trend that applies widely to the general population in Japan, it is also too naive to overlook the observed phenomena as merely incidental, which is why I've chosen to explore the cases. To that extent, this paper is intended to explain a general pattern widely applicable to EFL learners in Japan.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Review of Theoretical Literature

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 (Dörnyei, 2009). Of major motivational theories, variables that are relevant in assessing learning motivations of students in my own context have been picked, which will be referred to hereafter.

#### *Gardner's Theory*

***Integrative motivation.*** Gardner (2001) insists that L2 learners who are extremely successful in mastery are likely to be integratively motivated individuals. He refers to integrative motivation as the key to engagement in language learning as well as to successful outcomes. Integrativeness reflects a positive disposition to the target language community and culture (Ushioda, 2011). It implies an openness to and respect for other cultural groups and their ways of life (Dörnyei, 2003).

The validity of this theory, however, with high emphasis on identification with another language community as a precondition for optimal L2 learning motivation, eventually attracted criticism for being too narrow (Ortega, 2009). Ushioda (2011) points out that this linear view of the world in terms of easily defined linguistic and cultural groups and transitions from one group to another fails to capture the complex realities of our globalized society.

Nevertheless, Munezane (2013) points out that several scholars have referred to the danger of throwing out Gardner's integrative theory. Gardner (2009) himself argues that this variable has proven to remain applicable to both ESL and EFL contexts.

***Instrumental motivation.*** Instrumental orientation refers to learning a language because of its value as a tool or instrument for doing something else successfully, such as studying a subject in English at university (Hedge, 2000), or seeing pragmatic benefits in the L2, such as passing exams and improving one's career status (Lamb, 2016). Instrumental motivation is particularly important in those social contexts in which learners have low desire to assimilate themselves in the target-language culture (Hussain & Sultan, 2010), which particularly holds true for EFL environments.

### ***Self-determination Theory***

Around 1990, L2 motivation theory slowly shifted towards the cognitive-situated period. During this period, research moved away from its social and psychological origins to show a greater interest in concepts being developed in contemporary cognitive and educational psychology (Boo, et. al, 2015). This movement brought the study of L2 motivation down to the immediate learning situation focused on learners' experiences in an academic setting (Hayashi, 2013), indicating a high degree of applicability for EFL learners in Japan.

Self Determination Theory (SDT) argues that different types of motivation which vary according to how much a learner engages in an activity for reasons of personal choice can be divided into intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, and amotivation (Noels, et. al, 2001). Another crucial element of SDT is that it presupposes the existence of basic psychological needs: *autonomy*, *competence*, and *relatedness*. It insists that how much their needs are satisfied affect learners' motivations. The more individuals' innate needs of autonomy, competence, and fulfillment are met, the more their behaviors become intrinsic. (Agawa & Takeuchi, 2016b).

Deci and Ryan (1995) explain that needs for autonomy are defined as people's desire to determine their behaviors and take responsibility for consequential outcomes. Needs for competence refer to people's desire to feel confident in achieving and expressing one's capacity. Needs for relatedness refer to people's desire to connect with others and their community. Humans yearn to care for others, be cared for, and be respected in a community (Ryan & Deci, 2002).

***Intrinsic motivation.*** Intrinsic motivation refers to motivation which originates inside a person (Anjomshoa & Sadighi, 2015). Perhaps no single phenomenon reflects the positive potential of human nature as much as intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). They are not driven by physiological drives, and the reward is the satisfaction associated with the activity itself (Vansteenkist, et al, 2006), as the activity itself is enjoyable, challenging, interesting, and

personally satisfying, and allows one to explore and expand their own abilities (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Within the framework of L2 learning motivation, Noels, Clément, and Pelletier (2001) suggest that an individual who is motivated intrinsically learns an L2 out of inherent pleasure in learning a foreign language. It refers to speakers' inherent curiosity about learning to use a language other than their own, not focused on a specific language or culture (Shenk, 2011).

***Extrinsic motivation at 3 levels of regulations.*** Extrinsically motivated behavior, on the other hand, is defined as engaging in an activity to obtain an outcome separable from the activity itself (Vansteenkiste, et al, 2006). Similarly, Ryan and Deci (2000) refer to it as the performance of an activity in order to attain some separable outcome, and Noels, Pelletier, and Vallerand (2000) maintain that extrinsically motivated behaviors are carried out to achieve some instrumental end, such as earning a reward or avoiding a punishment.

Rather than concluding that extrinsic motivation lacks self-determination, however, it is argued that different types of extrinsic motivations can be classified along a continuum according to the extent to which they are internalized into a self-concept (Noels, et. al, 2000). External regulation occurs where a student learns an L2 because of some pressure or reward that comes from the social environment, such as career advancement or a course credit, and therefore the most vulnerable of the three with which the learner might be expected to stop putting effort into L2 learning once that pressure and reward are removed (Noels, et al, 2001). Introjected regulation is a more internalized reason for learning an L2, such as guilt or shame (Noels, et al, 2001). But like external regulation, engagement is likely to fall once the pressure is removed. Identified regulation is the third and the most self-determined type, in which the student learns an L2 because they have personally decided to do so and because that activity has the value for their chosen goal (Noels, et al, 2001). It is the least vulnerable, and the learner will likely maintain their engagement so long as that goal remains important to them.

### ***Dörnyei's L2 Motivation Self System***

Entering the new century, a major shift occurred towards a process-oriented period, reflecting increasing complexity of the world where language learning takes place. In light of the growing understanding of how complex the new world is, researchers have been focusing increasingly on the dynamic and changeable nature of the motivational process (Waninge, et al, 2014). With the dynamic approach of linking the human self with human action, the notion of "possible selves" offers one of the most powerful, and at the same time the most versatile, motivational self-mechanisms (Dörnyei, 2003) representing the individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming.

An idea reflected in this system is based on Higgins's (1987) self-discrepancy theory. According to his theory, people are motivated to reduce the discrepancy between their actual selves and ideal or ought selves (Peker, 2020). The driving factor that pushes individuals to get things done and improve themselves is their desire to reduce the gap between their current reality and ideal or ought selves.

***Ideal L2-self.*** *Ideal self* is the representation of the characteristics that someone would ideally like to possess (Dörnyei, 2009). He insists that if someone possesses a very strong degree of

ideal self, the image is likely to serve as a potent self-guide, with considerable motivational power. Dörnyei (2005) insists that *ideal L2-self* was introduced as self which concerns the L2-specific facet of one's ideal self. If the person we would like to become speaks an L2, the ideal L2 self is a powerful motivator because we would like to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves (Dörnyei, 2005). Lamb (2016), meanwhile, notes that ideal-L2 self is less influential on elderly and preadolescent learners, suggesting a likely absence of this motivational variable in some groups in our school.

***L2 learning experience.*** This relates to the motives engendered by the process of actually learning a language, recognised as important in almost all previous studies of L2 motivation and indeed, general academic motivation (Dörnyei, 2005). It concerns situation-specific motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience (Dörnyei, 2009), including positive, successful experience or the enjoyable quality of a language class.

Lamb (2016) argues that L2 learning experience and ideal L2 self are considered the most powerful influences on people's learning effort. He also expresses the likelihood of strong interaction between the two. Learners with a vivid ideal L2 self may draw satisfaction from their English classes; equally, inspiring lessons may help the learners develop ideal L2 selves (Lamb, 2016).

***Ought to L2-self.*** Dörnyei (2009) offers, as complementary self-guide to ideal-self, *ought-to self*, which refers to the attributes that one believes he or she ought to possess, and from there he drew his own definition of *Ought-to L2 Self*, which concerns the attributes that one believes he or she ought to possess to avoid possible negative outcomes. Peker (2020) explained in the article published in 2020, which tried to reconceptualize Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivation Self System to include feared L2-self as an important component that shapes this system, that avoidance concept of this motivation theory is only partially explained by offering ought to L2-self, which is based on fear coming from others outside of learners themselves, such as pressures from their family or from their superiors in office. Lamb (2016) further supports this point by suggesting that the role it plays to L2 learning motivation is more doubtful, and that many studies have proven it to have less motivational power than the other two components of the self-system.

***Feared L2-self.*** *Feared-L2 self* is a relatively new concept which has been drawing attention in the past few years as a component of the L2 self system that holds strong power. An L2 learner may expect a dreadful future state imagining a future self that may be bullied because of a lack of language proficiency (Peker, 2020). Without conceptualizing a self that reflects true fear coming from within learners, explanation of self-motivating power coming from "negative" expectations seems insufficient.

In other words, feared L2-self is consistent with ought-to self in that they both have their basis for motivation from negative pressures and from their desire to avoid certain consequences in the future. In other words, the major difference is in their degree to which it empowers learners with motivational power. While ought-to self is externally triggered, feared L2-self comes from deep within, supposedly based on their experiences.

In any case, feared L2-self within L2 Motivation Self System is a yet unestablished component, which means there is some room left for personal interpretation. Based on this, I believe ought-to self and feared self are comparable to the gap between external regulation and

introjected regulation introduced in the self-determination theory, which explains that the latter holds more power as it comes from the learner within. Similarly, I will refer to feared L2-self as a strong motivational component that deserves an established position within the L2 Motivational Self System.

## **Review of Empirical Literature**

The paper will now try to find meaningful implications from various empirical studies, which I hope will provide meaningful evidence to explain the observed trends in my own context. Different language learning motivation variables that have been introduced in the previous part will serve as the basis of these implications.

### ***Complicated Nature of L2 Motivation and Overlapping Features***

Boo, Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) argue that the three-stage model itself as well as the theories that came up in each of the three stages cannot be viewed linearly as independent, chronological phases which were simply taken over by subsequent ones. Instead, periods overlap and theories are not simply replaced in the consecutive stages but are built on and modified, causing subtle interactions (Boo, et al, 2015). This explains the complicated nature of L2 motivation theories.

Kimura, Nakata and Okumura's (2002) study demonstrates that motivational variables interact in complex ways and cannot be explained independently. Although theories explain major variables as a dichotomy, such as integrative versus instrumental, the most accurate picture in real-life situations is that different types of motivations coexist within a learner in a simultaneous fashion.

This stands true across contexts as well. Despite Gardner's dichotomy of integrative motivation standing on the opposite polar to instrumental motivation, Shenk's (2011) qualitative analysis of Puerto Rican university students' motivations for learning L2 suggests that a mixture of the two motivations was clearly observed. Where tourism is one main industry, the ability to use the English language is a strong advantage in the country in terms of getting a job in this field.

However, an interviewee's motivation for getting a job proved to be beyond this instrumental purpose. She explained the fact that her language endeavor had been largely affected by her strong desire and willingness to communicate effectively with tourists.

This illustrates how learning motivation seemingly driven by one variable is in fact often supported separately by another variable, and learner's success and achievements cannot be explained only as a consequence of a single factor. This is the complicated but realistic picture of how human beings are empowered by motivations to improve.

### ***How Meeting Innate Psychological Needs Contribute to L2 Learning Motivation***

Agawa and Takeuchi (2016a, 2016b) conducted careful, two-round studies of Japanese university students to verify the expected relationships between three innate psychological needs and L2 learners' self-determined motivations. They found that as previous studies have shown a strong relationship between competitiveness and motivation exists. In terms of relatedness, their

revised second study found that L2 learners' relatedness with their teachers play a significant role in controlling their motivations, while that with classmates depends on learners. This reconfirms that teachers' efforts to improve relatedness with each can be a possible source of motivation for learners.

A surprising finding was observed with the relationship between autonomy and motivation. It is widely accepted that highly motivated learners have a high sense of autonomy. Agawa and Takeuchi's (2016a, 2016b) studies of Japanese university students, however, resulted in clear negative relationships between the two factors. This indicates that some of the widely accepted theories have cultural limitations. This is actually in line with Noels, Clément, and Pelletier's (2001), although in the very paper their Canadian-context studies proved fulfilled autonomy needs contribute to intrinsic motivation. They mentioned as a limitation that there may be cultural factors as to the validity of their findings, with study results showing Asian American children preferring control to autonomy, which was the opposite of Anglophone children.

Therefore, in an effort to create effective settings for L2 learners, it is extremely important that teachers and curriculum designers deeply understand the nature of that particular environment. In the case of teenage students in Japan, prioritizing autonomy might not always be the proper solution, or it could even have negative consequences.

### ***Effects of Social Contexts on the Quality of Instrumental Motivations***

The example from Puerto Rico (Shenk, 2011) implies much more than just a sample case that instrumental motivation is a predominant element affecting learners in EFL environments. In their context, competence in the job market is highly related with one's proficiency in English. Increasing presence of North American companies there, which offer jobs with higher pay, means that proficiency in English is crucial both in getting and keeping stable jobs there. Furthermore, university education, which will serve as a prerequisite for access in these jobs, will require strong English literacy as textbooks used are often written in English. This feature of their university education implies that a high standard of English reading skills is required from high school students for their upcoming university education.

Coming to Japan, Kubota's (2011) study indicates that a clear gap exists between the societal expectations of language proficiency and the reality of its value. Increasing assumption and consequent discourse regarding the needs of English in professional settings, together with requirements and expectations set by the employer side, have overvalued the needs for English in Japanese society. Blended with industry's commercial intentions, the society is increasingly calling for high TOEIC scores, leading to high instrumental motivation of Japanese learners.

The problem is that unlike in Puerto Rico, the actual skills are not utilized for practical use. Moreover, the hidden reality is that many companies are not even seeking language proficient individuals. Kubota's (2011) interviews with the hiring side revealed they are far from being serious in searching such candidates. A TOEIC score, quoted as being required for better employment, is actually seen merely as a token to prove that a willing individual can generate a desired outcome, rather than as a measurement of language aptitude.

Kubota (2011) also posits that in Japan showing language aptitude doesn't guarantee employability in the first place. Instead, it serves merely as one popular variable whose value depends heavily on other individual attributes, such as age, personality, physical condition, and gender. This is proven through a real-life example of a younger individual whose company

admitted that he was dispatched overseas because of his positive personality rather than his English language skills, and that he would have been chosen regardless of his TOEIC score. Other companies admit that higher technicality of language issues in business will be filled by temporary employees hired for their language expertise at lower cost.

This shows that while companies' expectations for the language proficiency of their permanent employees are actually quite limited, English experts are being rather exploited, receiving minimal economic return (Kubota, 2011), which in turn suggests that language skills are not highly valued by Japanese companies.

These cases imply that the true value and the practicality of the acquired language skill depend largely on the attitude of each society for language skills. In Japan, language skills offer minimal return. In sum, though instrumental motivation is commonly referred to as a powerful variable in EFL, the degree to which it plays a role in shaping a learner's motivation varies.

### ***Two Different Dimensions of English Learning in EFL Japan***

When discussing L2 learning in EFL settings, it is vital to note that we are referring to two fundamentally different phenomena, often without making a clear distinction. One is a socio-cultural approach which sees L2 learning as widely social and intercultural, while the other is a cognitive-situated approach reflecting more practical classroom settings. In Japan, we are more often referring to the latter case, which can be called "formal studies." Although the recent trend is towards incorporating more from the communicative side into formal studies, this dichotomy plays a significant role in assessing language learning motivation in Japan.

Hayashi's (2013) carefully set interviews with two university students in Japan compared two motivated learners driven by two opposite orientations. One is a male student with strong orientations of the communicative aspects targeting the international community. The other is a female student who possesses a high degree of motivation for a formal study in an educational setting. The results of his study clearly show the initial superiority of the latter. The first student explicitly stated his future goal as working abroad. Meanwhile, his orientation for formal studies remained quite low for extended periods of time. Entering college, as an international economic major, his requirement for taking English courses was more modest compared to those of English majors, which was the case with the other student. The other student had worked diligently to pass the university entrance exam, on which English played a crucial part. She chose English as her major, which required her to take English-related courses. She naturally had a strong motivation to succeed in her educational environment. At the same time, however, she was a rare case as an English major to be someone with extremely modest international posture, with little interest in going abroad or communicating in English. In the end, the former student eventually realized the disparity between his reality and what was expected of him, got internally convinced, gained motivation, and took bold actions in filling such gaps, including change in his attitude towards formal studies and willingly taking the opportunities of OJT in India. On the other hand, the latter student eventually determined that her attitude towards pursuing language studies was low and that it was not her path, choosing to move on to a career where language was not an issue.

Two implications can be found in this study. First, instrumental and extrinsic motivations seem to play a bigger role in driving L2 learners to take on their initial language learning

challenge. Second, integrative motivations and ideal L2-self can have a bigger influence over time, even if they take time to come into effect.

### ***Path to Language Learning Motivation and Nurturing Ideal-L2 Self Artificially***

Munezane's (2013) study on Japanese university students also provides some meaningful implications to the field. She found that there are paths to increased motivation that starts with ought-to L2 self. The ought-to L2 self is learners' socially constructed selves to meet the expectations of their immediate social environment including expectations of their parents, friends, and people they respect (Munezane, 2013).

The ought-to selves have proven from her study to show a direct path to improved attitudes towards the L2 community, which is kind of an updated version of integrative motivation. The study shows that improved attitudes towards the L2 community in turn proved a direct path to both valuing of global English and international posture. The study showed that learners' initial interest in having a positive attitude towards the L2 community eventually gets nurtured and develops a sense of valuing the world coming together into one, the process in which English language plays an important role. The result also showed how favorable attitudes lead to appreciation of international affairs, career and people who constitute global society.

Munezane (2013) notes that these variables in turn provide favorable outcomes to language learning. Valuing Global English leads to improved motivation in language learning. As learners find value in the pragmatic function of English in today's globalized society, it is natural that their motivation to study rises. Additionally, international posture leads to a better ideal L2-self. When learners develop a higher degree of interest in international matters, more transparent visualization of the day when they actually use their English in future careers will arise. This way, ought-to self can indirectly find its way towards ideal L2 self.

Finally, ideal- L2 self itself was found to be the most powerful tool predicting a language learner's motivation that directly leads to successful achievement. The more learners imagine their future selves using English, the more motivated they feel to study (Munezane, 2013).

In the following study, she proved another meaningful implication. By offering opportunities in classrooms, in case of this study over one academic semester in a university setting, in such a way to virtually allow students to experience a professional community (in the study case, community of scientists) in which English is used as a means of communication, students were able to visualize their future career self in global community, which students later expressed as an extremely motivating factor in their decision to endeavor in language learning. This suggests that nurturing ideal-L2 self, which her own studies proved to be the most direct factor to improve language learner's motivation, can be created artificially.

### ***Lack of Professionally-successful L2-using Self in Japanese EFL Learners***

Taguchi's (2013) study tried to find out how the ideal-L2 self relates to L2 experience and motivation when they learn English. His results suggested that ideal L2-self should be further divided into two aspects: personally-agreeable L2-speaking self and professionally-successful L2-using self, with the latter leading to deeper and stronger motivations. As it turned out, many Japanese EFL students possess the first amply while little of

the second. His studies showed that many who initially disliked their former studies in high school enjoyed university English class.

Logically, it can be expected that students with personally-agreeable L2-speaking self are willing to invest their time and effort into the challenge. What is complicated about human behaviors, however, is that this does not necessarily hold true. Taguchi's (2013) qualitative analysis showed that even motivated students expressed unwillingness to invest their effort.

Behind this trend lies the fact that even if they find the class enjoyable, they do not see a link between that and their future (Taguchi, 2013). Those who find essence in their English classes that visibly connect to their future plans exert more energy. On the other hand, many who just enjoy learning English or find English classes enjoyable do not go beyond that point.

In the study, the most-often stated reason for their unwillingness to put in more effort to L2 learning was lack of time. Linearly referring to the theory, it could be attributed to lack of intrinsic motivation as intrinsically motivated learners will find time to take part in the activity that they truly enjoy. In the case of L2 learning situations in Japan, however, the picture seems much more complicated (Taguchi, 2013). Those who express their true joy in learning also neglect spending further time it takes to realize their ideal-L2 self. This may be implying some limits of the power of intrinsic motivation. It also suggests that for Japanese students to invest further effort in language learning, they need something that gives them further motivation. This is where professionally-successful L2-using self, the stronger form of ideal-L2 self, comes into play. Very few students have proven to possess this in Taguchi's survey. It was observed in a limited number of students whose competency stood at a higher level, and these learners possessed higher levels of motivation. If intrinsically-motivated learners are further fueled by the power of professionally-successful L2-using self, the extra effort required for further improvement is likely to take place (Taguchi, 2013).

Taguchi (2013) refers to another possibility why even intrinsically-motivated learners with personally-agreed L2-speaking self fail to make further executions, lack of feared-self. He suggests that simply envisaging future ideal-self does not by itself provide learners with true motivations. This point is confirmed in Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), who listed multiple conditions necessary for maximal motivational effectiveness to take place, among which "desired self is offset by feared-self" is included. A failure to keep the balance is likely to weaken the power of L2 learning motivation. A balance between positive possible-self and negative possible-self is crucial in maximizing the motivational power of L2 self (Taguchi, 2013).

For learners who possess only personally-agreed L2-speaking selves, a failure to achieve their ideal-self gives little impact to their future as their learning finds little link to their intended path. In such conditions, their feared-self does not develop. Conversely, for learners with professionally-successful L2-using selves, their achievement in language learning is of their immediate concern. For these learners, feared-self inevitably plays a major role, interacting with ideal L2-self to maximize their motivational effectiveness.

## **METHOD**

Attempts will now be made to explain the observed trend of each group of learners using the theories reviewed in the previous section. In other words, theories will be applied in such

ways that they will justify why such trend is observed from each group of learners, explained purely from motivational theory point of view.

First, participants will be introduced, with description of observed trend that a substantial number of participants have commonly presented.

Second, applications of theories will be attempted, which will provide logical background of the observed outcomes by clarifying what motivations learners in each group possess with likely assumption that learners are empowered by multiple number of motivations rather than just one. In the same section, this application will be followed by clear analysis of how those motivations have invited outcomes that are found in common.

Lastly, discussion will take place as to potential solutions, which may serve as possible target of further research and to limitation of this study that must be considered for accurate grasping of the observed phenomena.

## **Participants**

### ***Senior Female Learners over 65***

People of this demographic group are generally loyal, well-managed, punctual, enthusiastic, and obedient learners. They are generally over the age of 65, having studied English at our school for multiple number of years. They come to our school on weekday daytimes, and are nearly perfect in attendance, arrive in class early, have their homework perfectly completed, and remain extremely attentive throughout the class time. In other words, they are a group of ideal students as well as loyal customers. They are also the most active travellers abroad. The actual number of students I refer to represent this group of students is 10.

In consistency with their stable effort, this groups of learners firmly proceed and show clear improvement over their years of learning, at least to some extent. Many of them begin their learning either at A2 or B1 level (in CEFR scale), but in a span of 5 to 6 years turn more proficient, moving one step higher to either B1 or B2 level. This sounds natural considering the amount of effort, passion, and dedication they put into their studies. On the other hand, they always refuse to take proficiency tests, arguing that they'd rather not have their progress measured and simply enjoy the process of learning. Judging from their classroom performance and learning contents, however, it is perhaps safe to conclude that they make the improvement to the extent discussed previously.

### ***Business Professional Male Learners between 40's and 50's***

This group of students all have high professional profiles. They work at renowned, prestigious companies, such as Fujitsu, Sony and Asahi Breweries, all of which are companies with strong global presence, or foreign-affiliated companies like SAP and Dow Chemical. This group of students usually dedicate a few hours on Saturdays to their studies. Many of them initially regard business use of language as their motivation and direct reason for commencing their learning at our school. Most commonly, their proficiency levels stand at B1 or B2 level upon assuming their learning challenge, and they present high ambitions in improving their skills in preparation for their business usage. Most of them have continued their learning in the school

for an extended period of time, often over 7 years. The difference from the previous group is that their absences occur much more frequently, usually as many as once or twice a month. When they do attend the lessons, they usually come well-prepared and present high degree of involvement to their learning. Also, most of them choose to take proficiency tests in a periodic fashion, usually TOEIC, rather willingly. Furthermore, they are the least likely group to express their anxiety for their language proficiency as well as for their learning progress, often appearing quite confident, which seems rather rare among Japanese learners of the English language. The actual number of students I refer to represent this group of students is 7.

### ***Prominently Successful Teenaged Learners***

This group of teenagers, despite staying in EFL environment, prove exceptionally successful in their language mastery. Some of them go in the duration of just 5 to 6 years from pre-A1 level novice to B1 level proficient users, with a limited few reaching as far as B2-level. Of the ten participants in our school, only one has reached B2-level, as proven in her passing Eiken Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade level. Though the majority does not come this far, all others have reached B1-level, and continue to further improve to the next phase.

One common factor that explains this group of students is the fact that they either view English as their best or favorite subject, with many expressing both. Also, many of them have clear image of where they want to stand in the near future, both in terms of the qualification they receive and the actual usage of the skills, either for their studies or for their future professions.

### ***Minimally Successful Younger Learners***

This group, on the contrary to the previous group, only reach A2 level in their 5 to 6 years. This is despite their continuous diligence to attend class, with limited absences. This shows that they have rather high motivation to pursue their learning.

Though there is a tendency to label and stigmatize this less successful group of students as less motivated and unsuccessful in their studies, such trend is quite skeptical when our students are being observed. Some of them even express their likes for the study. The common factor, however, is that they all either call English as their weakest subject or express their general lack of competence in overall academic skills. None of them remain in A1 level, but they usually reach only as far as A1 level of English skills, though some reach A2.

## **Applications and Analysis**

The challenge now moves on to applying appropriate motivational theories to improvement patterns of each group of learners. Through the process, the observed trend in that are found improvement patterns of each of the four groups will be logically explained.

### ***Senior Female Learners over 65***

This group of learners are highly likely to have high degree of integrative and intrinsic motivations. Women in this generation have spent their youth days in Japan's rapid economic development days, around 20 years after the Pacific War ended, when admiration toward

particularly American culture was extremely high. In the postwar period, American influence has been so decisive for the development of cultural consumption in everyday life (Shunya, 2008). They initially learned English long before the language has gained its status as a global lingua franca, so to them it is the language of the Anglophone countries, which many of them admire. Additionally, high degree of intrinsic motivation is natural considering their general lack of needs to study for education and career purposes. Indeed, most of them express their deep interests and strong likes for the very activity of learning English. The fact that they continue for multiple years also indicates the likely reality that it is something they truly enjoy.

Instrumental motivation, however, also have its dimensions that is applicable to this group. Many of them express their wants to build or maintain friendship with those from Anglophone cultures. Their nature is also represented by the fact that they are frequent travellers. Through our school learning tours alone, they've visited Australia, the US, Canada, the UK, New Zealand, and the Philippines. This clearly shows their high interest in foreign cultures, particularly to aforementioned Anglophone cultures.

They also seem to have introjected regulations and identified regulations. The presence of introjected regulation is clear in that they frequently express their embarrassment for not being a fluent user of English. This may sound irrational, but this is indeed what many of them often say, which are rarely observed in other groups of students. Also, many of them refer to their English learning through our school as a meaningful part of their daily lives.

What they lack are external regulations and L2-ideal selves. Absence of external regulations is natural considering their status free from career and education. Lack of ideal-L2 self is also inevitable considering their age. Even though they are extremely optimistic, open-minded people, it is natural to think that their future is filled more with concerns for growing old than ambitions, at least compared to the younger groups. In other words, their focus is more on now and the past, not future. As L2-ideal self is forward-looking concept that looks into the future, the trend is quite logical.

These absences of external regulations and particularly ideal L2-selves are likely one clear reason that their improvements remain minimal, despite being intrinsically-motivated learners.

Finally, while their progress is almost doubtless, this improvement come at slow and modest pace. Moreover, they as well as the minimally-successful teenage learners most frequently express their lack of confidence and anxiety towards their language standard and toward their learning progress. In the end, they remain stagnant beyond their one-step improvement, with many eventually terminating their endeavor at some point, usually referring to age as their reason to quit.

### ***Business Professional Male Learners between 40's and 50's***

This group of learners present one of the biggest findings in this research, one in a negative direction. The shocking record shows that vast majority of learners in this group remain at their initial standard of language skills, without showing a clear step up to a higher level. Though they naturally gain new knowledge through years of learning, their overall language competencies remain shy of reaching the next phase, staying still at their initial B1 or B2 level. In case of 10 learners at our school that served as participants, this is the case with all ten of

them, judging both from their occasional TOEIC results and from their actual performances in the classroom.

On the whole, they show great intention and consistent effort to learn, resulting in their persistence to pursue their initial endeavor, the end results show that they remain stagnant at their initial phase.

This is a long-time mystery to be solved, which I hoped to clarify through this research. On the positive side, their strong intentions and persistent effort in the midst of their professional career is a clear sign that they have various motivations. They seem to have a lot of similar motivations that are observed with the older ladies, although their integrativeness is likely to be more globally-oriented. This is because many of them actually have exposures to Asian countries through their businesses. Having firsthand experience in practical needs to communicate with non-native business partners and clients, it is natural that they understand the practicality of English usage as a global lingua franca.

They ought naturally to possess extrinsic regulations and instrumental motivations coming from business needs, which are not found with the older ladies. Furthermore, they have a strong sense of ideal L2-self. This is evident in the fact that they are the most-able group to specifically express the purpose of their learning, what they need to improve, and how they can make use of their improved language skills. Considering their age and matured professional experiences, this is rather natural and understandable.

Why then, with most motivations in line with the older women group and additionally having extrinsic and instrumental motivations, plus ideal-L2 selves, do they show minimal improvement? There are three interrelated possible reasons that were implied in the literatures.

One is from Taguchi's (2013) study. As written, saying that ideal-L2 self is the strongest motivational power is still too vague. Ideal-L2 itself ought further to be divided personally-agreeable L2-speaking self and professionally-successful L2-using self, referred to as higher level of ideal-L2 self which must be driven by genuine pragmatic needs. To explain why business professional learners with ideal L2-self only show minimum improvement, I will apply this Taguchi's theory. That is, they essentially lack this latter phase of the ideal L2-self, although they are likely to possess the former. Unless the higher form of ideal-L2 self arises, however, it is impossible for EFL L2 learners with limited exposures to English with limited time available for studying to maintain the level of motivation required to put forth the daunting amount of work it takes to reach another level in L2 learning. Just persisting the weekly study at their own pace, even if it is done willingly and persistently, is likely insufficient.

Another and related issue can be derived from Kubota's (2011) analysis of the reality of Japanese companies, where expectations for non-English experts is actually much lower than what is being said in general. In other words, many businesspersons in Japan are not in serious need to possess English skills in their businesses, unlike the established social image. Either they have little needs to use English in their daily operations or when they do, companies provide the support of English experts by means of outsourcing. Indeed, a few of our participants have explained that when important negotiation takes place, they have professional interpreters who will speak the language on behalf of them, even when they are more than minimally fluent in English communication themselves.

Such business realities for Japanese business professionals contribute to the situation that although they always have business in mind in their eager attempts to pursue language skills, the actual degree of seriousness, whether consciously or unconsciously, is quite low. This absence of

serious consequence also leads to the third and still related reason, absence of feared-self, which will be discussed in the section of the third group of students.

In any case, the absence of their serious needs for English as a consequence of Japanese companies' attitudes towards language proficiency leads to lower quality of instrumental motivation and extrinsic regulations as well as lack of professionally-successful L2-using self and feared-self. That amply explains why their absences to weekly lessons occur quite frequently, and moreover, why they struggle to make true improvement.

### ***Prominently-successful Younger Learners***

This is the most successful group of students who, if not completely, sufficiently and satisfactorily realize their ambitions. Putting aside the fact that they have daily exposures to English learning from school, unlike their adult counterparts, why does this group of students improve as much as 3 steps in the span of just 4 to 5 years, when even motivated, willing working adults show not a single step of improvement?

As it turns out, they have all kinds of motivations that drive their willing effort. This group of students have strong intrinsic motivations as well as integrative motivations, including interests towards both Anglophone cultures and international society in general, and a strong sense of identified regulation in that they find their English studies truly meaningful for their future. That alone, however, is also found in the older female group of learners, too.

Younger students naturally have ample amount of instrumental motivation and extrinsic regulation. These variables distinguish this younger group from the older women group. As previously described, though the older women have integrative motivations, intrinsic motivations, and identified regulations, they lack instrumental motivations (when referring to getting academic gains) and external regulations. This shows that external regulations, which begins in less self-determined form, can actually have powerful effect in pushing language studies forward.

More importantly, however, they are driven by a strong sense of ideal L2-self associated with bright picture of their future. Likely factor behind their success in developing this ideal-self is at least partially attributable to the fact that they participated in one-week learning experience tours in Australia and the US in their junior high school days, along with introduction of weekly lessons with a foreign instructor. Yet, external regulations and L2-ideal selves were also observed in older, business professional male group of learners. What, then divides this group from them, explained from motivational viewpoint?

First thing I'd like to bring up is the issue of quality of instrumental motivations, discussed through Shenk (2011) and Kubota (2011). Clear evidence is seen in their attitudinal gap towards language proficiency tests. Whereas the business professional group's proficiency tests had the nature of mere seasonal events, not leading to serious consequences even if the desired outcome was not achieved, it was "live or die" situation for this teenage group. For example, our student who got into the third best private university in Japan passed the proficiency test required, Eiken Pre-1<sup>st</sup> grade, which is regarded as equivalent of CEFR B2-level, on her third and final opportunity.

This particular student had a strong willingness to get into this school as early as in her first year in high school. Requirements in terms of school grades and Eiken achievements were clear from the beginning, when getting into the university sounded a bit too ambitious. As her

ambition to get into the school was extremely high and clear, however, she went beyond everyone's expectations to show a tremendous amount of effort, struggled but positively accepted challenges, and realized rapid and dramatic improvements. Still, had it not been for her final Eiken exam, which she passed, her long-time ambition would have been denied. This is in sharp contrast to our business professional students. They admirably persist their studies for extended periods of time, but improvement is not observed in TOEIC tests, taken either biannually or annually. They always express his disappointments for failing to get monetary awards that are provided by their companies for successful scores. From motivational perspective, his gap in the seriousness and the quality of instrumental motivations has likely contributed to the division in their final achievements.

Second and a closely-related issue to the first is the presence of feared-self. Taguchi (2013) posits that the power of L2-ideal self is maximized only when it blends with feared-self. When looking into this group of students and analysing them, it is clear that they had a strong sense of feared-self, which the adult business professional group lacks. The two groups were common in that they have both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations supported by L2-ideal selves, accompanied by high degree of language aptitude and general intelligence. However, the fact that this group of students are far more serious, especially regarding entrance to universities, they clearly possessed a sense of feared-self that a failure will result in undesirable consequences. The most successful student in the group, previously mentioned, has mentioned that before the Eiken exam which she passed, she was "as serious as she had ever been in her life." This kind of "do or die" type dedication to L2 learning is not observed in the older, businesspersons' group, whose disappointment in failure to achieve their goal was described as "lost monetary award."

Therefore, putting aside the very advantage that the teenage group are clearly in a more favorable situation to dedicate themselves to learning, the superior degree of success of this group of students presents can be attributed to the motivational factors as well.

### ***Minimally-successful Younger Learners***

This group of teenaged-student learners, despite having similar amount of exposures as the previous group, show rather slow improvement at bottom of the English-proficiency ladder. This is despite their showing admirable amount of persistence to pursue language mastery, with regular attendance and completion of homework, amply proving they are not unmotivated at all. Putting aside the aptitude issue, how does their motivational pattern differ from their prominently successful counterpart?

While possessing sufficient amount of motivation that drive them to continue their language learning challenge without having to abandon it, they lack a lot of motivation variables amply seen in the other group.

Some of them even show certain degree of intrinsic motivations, and at least identified regulations as their positive postures to learning evident through their attendance cannot otherwise be justified. They approach their weekly communicative lesson with the Filipino instructor willingly, and their willingness to learn in classroom instructions are also amply observed. Behind their motivation, extrinsic regulations are clearly present, as no Japanese teenagers can escape from the pressure of English learning as a school subject.

However, this group of students do not present ideal-L2 self, although they do show the sense of ought-to L2 self as well as introjected regulations. Their failure to visualize ideal-L2 self

is perhaps the single biggest reason for their modest achievement and minimal success in L2 learning. They do have the strong sense of feared-self, but as already argued in Taguchi (2013) feared-self only generates its true value when combined and balanced with ample sense of ideal-L2 self. This is the opposite case from the professional businessmen group, who present ideal-L2 self with lack of feared-self. Either way, their L2 motivation remains far from being maximized without the presence of ideal L2-self.

## CONCLUSION

As written, it proved generally possible to explain the observed trend that learners of each distinguished group present one common pattern of improvement, highly successful to less than successful, from the perspectives of motivational theories.

First of all, the fact that all learners are at least minimally successful with their learning can be explained by the presented truth that certain kinds of motivation exist in all. There was no observation taking place in this research as to how learners with amotivation proceed with time, which may be conducted in the future to confirm whether or not unmotivated learners show any improvement at all or target particular learners who shows zero improvement over time to show whether these students really have no motivation.

Second of all, putting aside talent and aptitude issues, it also proved possible to explain the gap in achievement of language learning purely from motivational standpoint. More successful learners clearly presented more varieties in existing motivations, with some of them having stronger influences than others. In other words, while average discussion in language learning tends to say that a learner is either more motivated or less motivated, the actual pictures is quite different. That is, in addition to the extent to which a language learner is motivated, motivations actually exist in multiple forms, and discussion of “how many” and “which” motivations are present is necessary to accurately analyze a learner’s attempt.

Third of all, it was found that some motivations are further divided into certain forms, rather than just having different degrees. In other words, there is qualitative issue to motivation on top of the usual quantitative issue. Higher quality motivation is necessary for achieving true improvement. As written in this paper, even sets of generally strong motivation, such as ideal L2-self, aren’t automatically sufficient in realizing language mastery. This is particularly true in the context of EFL environment, where exposure is naturally limited. In order to improve in such challenging environment for language mastery as EFL Japan, a motivation that has exceptional power is necessary. Indeed, teenaged students who possessed “professionally-successful L2 using self,” the higher form of the L2 ideal-self which requires various conditions for it to arise, have shown accordingly outstanding outcome.

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

For elderly ladies over 65, perhaps respecting motivations that they already possess and reinforcing them might be the right course of action. Trying to nurture motivations they lack might end up an effort in vain. Developing L2-ideal self might be difficult considering their age

and creating external regulations might sacrifice better form of motivations that they naturally possess. Instead, I as their teacher ought to make their learning more fun by offering even more enjoyable class contents to consolidate their intrinsic motivations. Perhaps, an attempt to forcibly bring them to higher level will cause detrimental effects. They often mention the level of pressure they get from taking weekly classes here is just right, and anything beyond might get in a way of their daily lives, possibly damaging their willingness to persist. In sum, rather than trying to bring them up to a higher level, the focus should be given on making their existing motivations stronger, as well as improving the quality of their L2 learning experience.

For business professional group in their 40' and 50's, I must devise a way to bring them up to another level, which we haven't succeeded in achieving as of now. Considering their purpose of learning, perhaps level improvement is something that must be targeted, if not prioritized. What's important is for them to nurture yet another level of motivations, both intrinsically and extrinsically. My analysis showed what this group lacks is professionally-successful L2-using self and feared-L2 self. As their environment outside of the classroom is beyond my control, the solution naturally comes to classroom setting. Nurturing professionally-successful L2-using self sounds a bit too ambitious. On the other hand, developing feared-L2 self, might be a little more viable course of action, though still challenging. The possible action we could take is to develop a system within our school that provides them with stronger senses of instrumental motivations and extrinsic regulations by means of setting clear expectations. Considering Japanese learner's high degree of obedience, this might be a possible option. For example, by setting specific TOEIC score target that each student is to achieve after careful communication and making their progress and achievement visible, they might feel more pressured. Through that, they might be able to nurture their sense of introjected regulations and ought-to self, which may ultimately lead to higher sense of feared-self. Nevertheless, the first action we ought to take is to improve relatedness through close communication, which might also be the case with all other groups.

For the prominently-successful younger student group, their successful achievements have proven we are on the right track. For these students, my basic stance is to continue what we are doing now. Bigger concern is to nurture more of successful students like them. One is we have a list of younger teenagers who are candidates to follow the footsteps of these students. We need to offer similar environment that we've successfully provided to the students with high achievements. This includes taking them abroad and having them experience actual global society, which likely contributed to development of ideal-L2 self. The other is to bring the moderately-successful group, discussion about whom I omitted in this paper, up to this prominently-successful group. Ample implications were found through the studies. Perhaps the most important is, again, for them to develop ideal-L2 self. Munezane's (2013) study has shown that nurturing L2-ideal self through classroom contents is possible by providing with them opportunity to experience L2-using self virtually. Such plans should be added to our current program with main focus on assistance of formal studies. Also, Munezane's (2013) indicated there is an indirect path from ought-to self to ideal-self. This indirect means of developing L2-ideal self also ought to be considered separately.

These above apply directly to the minimally-successful group as well. As explained, our students in this group don't necessarily lack integrativeness or international attitudes. Our challenge is trying to nurture such positive motivations, which is clearly hidden in their mind even if they haven't come to surface. As Hayashi's (2013) study suggests, such motivations may

take time to arise, but once they come up they become powerful motivators for these students. Being less than successful in the formal studies in secondary schools doesn't always mean they are a failure. Instead, their language motivations and eventual achievement might prosper in the future. This implies that we must not label students with slow improvement as unsuccessful learners and view their progress beyond the framework of formal studies, particularly nurturing their communicative skills. As general school education still focuses on evaluating students

## LIMITATIONS

Having presented a lot of meaningful insights as to possible solutions to improving the learning outcome of each group of learners, some limitations to this particularly research must be considered.

First of all, the size may pose an issue. Although I've chosen as many as ten learners from each group as targets for analysis, which was intended to ensure consistency and reliability, and have successfully proven its validity to a certain degree, some may still argue that this low number makes the research outcomes less reliable. As the school is small and its capacity to offer resources is limited, that was the best possible setup. For the research result to have more mass appeal by adding reliability, this number issue must be addressed.

Second of all, there seems to be a limit to analysing language improvement discussions solely from motivational perspectives. More realistic picture may be that different elements, such as the types and the number of motivations, the standard of learner's aptitudes, the amount of exposure, and the quality of environment, blend together interactively and jointly lead to certain outcomes rather than influencing the overall outcome independently. When such blended reasons are only considered from one independent element, we can easily arrive at the conclusion that analysis from such limited angle is far from being accurate.

Third of all, learners' initial incentives are not being considered in this research, whereas the true reality is that each learner has different reasons to engage in language learning, rather than just aiming at improvement. In fact, older students sometimes wish to exclude improvement measurements from their learnings. They sometimes express their pure joy in pursuing the activity of learning a language itself, and would rather keep a distance from the learning activity that is based on improvement, arguing that pressure accompanied in language learning for improvement will take away the joy that they can enjoy from pure learning. As such, not everyone is studying the English language for betterment, and some may argue it is meaningless to compare such learners with those who study purely to improve and approach mastery.

Despite such limitations, I believe it was still meaningful to clarify existing motivational theories, applied them to particular demography of students, and analyzed their improvement patterns based on theoretical ground of those motivations. In the future, as an English language instructor who is dedicated to truly improve the standard of language proficiency of our own people, I wish to explore deeper into the relationships between motivational theories and outcomes.

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