

## **Motivational Orientation of College Students Who Self-select to Study English**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined the motivational orientation of Japanese college students who self-selected to study English. Self-determination theory (SDT) was used as the theoretical base. Semi-structured retrospective interviews were conducted with 35 EFL college students in order to identify their motivation at the beginning of their college English courses and motivation changes that occurred over the semester. A qualitative analysis of audio-recorded interviews demonstrated that a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is important when starting college English courses. In some cases, however, a strong single motivation type also played a prominent role. For continuing foreign language learning, maintaining the combination of self-determined motivation (both extrinsic and intrinsic) is crucial, but the effect of a strong single type of motivation disappears. The analysis also suggested the possibility that intrinsic motivation can be enhanced by course contents and teaching approach; however, no clear method for enhancing the “internalization” of extrinsic regulation was found. Moreover, our findings pose the possibility of the developmental nature of motivation, which SDT does not support.

**Key Words:** motivation, orientation, self-determination theory, English as a foreign language (EFL), selective courses

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

In Japanese secondary schools, foreign language (FL) classes are mandatory and English is the most dominant foreign language. After graduating from secondary schools, students are not required to study English as intensively as they were at the secondary level; nevertheless, most universities and colleges require a few English courses to complete the curriculum. Some students, however, choose English as a primary focus. At the college the authors are engaged in English language teaching, English learning is totally selective. Students can complete the curriculum without taking any English courses, but more than half elect to take one or more English courses per semester and 10 to 15% take more than five English courses, even though the department does not specialize in English studies.

To understand why these students choose to study English as their primary interest, we used L2 motivation theories that focus on orientation or learning goals. Since L2 motivation



motivation also plays a role if extrinsic regulation is seen as personally important to the student. Koiso's (2005) survey on Japanese adult learners suggested that distinct intrinsic motivation, occurring simultaneously with the enjoyment of learning and distinct extrinsic motivation, driven by the perception of usefulness of learning, were necessary for continuing and resuming the study of English. Ueda (2004) found that Japanese university freshmen lost interest in learning English when they did not see the necessity for learning. This suggests that maintenance of extrinsic motivation may lead to continuous volition for learning. Hayashi (2005, 2009) traced motivational changes of university and high school students and demonstrated that self-determined extrinsic motivation in "tandem" with intrinsic motivation enhanced the English learning. Thus, a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation plays an important role in optimal learning conditions.

The present study was inspired by college students who chose to extensively study English and continue their learning despite the fact that English was not required to complete the curriculum. What is the difference between those who continue to study English and those who quit or reduce their number of English courses? Do intrinsic and extrinsic motives distinctively or collectively influence learning? Are there any social influences that enhance learning? The purpose of this study is to examine:

- 1) college students' motivational orientation for learning English when the decision to continue to study was self-imposed;
- 2) changes in motivational orientation during the first semester and how these changes affected learning.

### **III. METHOD**

#### **1. Participants**

A total of 35 students in their second year in the department of liberal studies at a private junior college participated in the study. They were all female, and 31 initially focused their college studies on English; 4 focused on business studies, but took many English courses during the first semester of the first year at college.

The 35 students were categorized into two groups: 29 students whose motivation was strong enough to take as many as eight or nine English courses in the first semester; and 6 students whose motivation was not as strong as the other group and who ended up taking only a limited number of English courses. The data of those 29 students were used for the main analyses. The data from the 6 students were used as the comparison group (Group 3).

The 29 students used for the analyses were further categorized into two groups: 19 students maintained their motivation and focus all through the second semester; and 10 students reduced or lost their motivation and took half as many or fewer English courses in the second semester. The former group is referred to as Group 1 and the latter is Group 2 in this study.

#### **2. Interview**

Semi-structured retrospective interviews were conducted with the students to collect data. The interview was designed to identify the students' orientation towards learning English during the first semester at college and how this orientation changed over the first half of the

academic year.

During the interview, each student was asked questions adopted from the scales used by Noels, Pelletier, Clement and Vallerand (2000). The questions were designed to assess amotivation; three types of extrinsic motivation (external, introjected, and identified regulation); and three types of intrinsic motivation (knowledge, accomplishment, and stimulation)<sup>1</sup>. Three questions were designed for each motivation type and were used during the interview. The Japanese version of the interview questions was prepared based on work done by Tanaka and Maeda (2004) (see Appendix).

Each student was also asked to give information about her personal study history, experiences abroad, and social contexts such as influence of friends, instructors, course contents, and teaching approach over her course selection. These social contexts were included to determine how these factors affected the students' motivation.

### **3. Procedure**

Each student was interviewed by one of three interviewers (instructors) during extracurricular time. Each interview was thoroughly conducted in Japanese and took approximately 20–30 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded and later qualitatively analyzed. A sample interview video was used to establish a consensus among the interviewers about how to conduct the interviews.

### **4. Analysis**

Each interviewer completed an information sheet for each interviewee. Responses to the questions and other information or comments were organized on the individual information sheet, in which the strength of each motivation subtype was rated as “strong”, “moderate”, “slight” or “none” according to the participant's own ratings during the interview and other comments were written with the rating. All information sheets were then examined by each of the three interviewers and qualitative analyses were conducted.

The results were further examined to see:

- 1) if there were any particular motivation types or other factors that enhanced the students' focus or interest in studying English;
- 2) if there were any significant changes in motivation types or other factors over the semester.

## **IV. RESULTS**

### **1. Overall Tendency**

The interview results suggested that the 29 students who registered many courses for the first semester mostly shared a tendency that they had moderate or higher intrinsic motivation, especially for accomplishment or stimulation, and strong external regulation and/or strong identified regulation. The tendency shown in Table 1 was typical. Student 6, for example, stated that she felt a strong sense of accomplishment while studying English (IM-accomplishment) and felt her parents or teachers had high expectations (EM-external regulation). Student 14 stated that she had a strong desire to be fluent in English (EM-identified regulation) and she reported that being in an English-speaking environment

was very stimulating (IM-stimulation).

**Table 1. Students with typical overall tendency**

Student	Extrinsic Motivation			Intrinsic Motivation		
	External Regulation	Introjected Regulation	Identified Regulation	Knowledge	Accomplishment	Stimulation
6	◎	△	○	○	◎	○
14	△	○	◎	△	○	◎

◎ : strong ○ : moderate △ : slight × : none

On the other hand, a few students had weaker intrinsic motivation than other students. It was assumed that these students had one particular motivation that was strong enough to encourage participation in many English courses. Student 21, for example, as seen in Table 2, had strong EM-external regulation. She wanted to pass an English exam that would facilitate her transfer to a 4-year-university after graduating from junior college. Student 23, meanwhile, had a strong desire to be fluent in English (EM-identified regulation), which influenced her decision to take many English courses.

**Table 2. Students with weaker intrinsic motivation**

Student	Extrinsic Motivation			Intrinsic Motivation		
	External Regulation	Introjected Regulation	Identified Regulation	Knowledge	Accomplishment	Stimulation
21	◎	○	△	△	×	△
23	△	○	◎	△	×	×

The students in Group 3, in comparison, shared a tendency that they had slight EM-identified regulation, moderate IM-accomplishment, and hardly any IM-stimulation. Although they had some intrinsic motivation, they didn't have enough amount of external motivation to encourage participation in many English courses.

It was widely observed that the status seen in April was well maintained or reinforced over the semester in Group 1. The reinforcement is mostly seen with identified regulation or intrinsic motivation, and less often with external regulation. As seen in Table 3, Student 8 increased EM-identified regulation during the first semester. Five of 19 students in Group 1 reduced EM-external regulation during the first semester, yet they continued to take as many courses in the second semester as in the first semester. It was observed that all those students maintained or improved the rest of the motivations over the semester.

**Table 3. Students with maintained/reinforced motivation**

Student	Extrinsic Motivation			Intrinsic Motivation		
	External Regulation	Introjected Regulation	Identified Regulation	Knowledge	Accomplishment	Stimulation
8	× → ×	○ → △	○ → ◎	◎ → ◎	◎ → ○	◎ → ◎
9	○ → △	△ → △	○ → ○	△ → △	○ → ○	△ → △
13	△ → ×	× → △	○ → ◎	○ → ◎	○ → ◎	○ → ◎

April → September

Two distinct patterns were observed among the students in Group 2 over the semester. First, as shown in Table 4, EM-external regulation was lost for some students when the original purpose for studying English disappeared. This resulted in amotivation or a decrease in overall motivation. For example, Student 20, who started studying at college, hoped to join a homestay program (external regulation). When she decided not to join the program during the first semester, she totally lost her motivation to study English. This strong amotivation further caused her to reduce the number of English courses for the second semester. The career plans of Student 26, meanwhile, completely changed and were no longer English-related, resulting in amotivation.

**Table 4. Students with amotivation**

Student	Amotivation	Extrinsic Motivation			Intrinsic Motivation		
		External Regulation	Introjected Regulation	Identified Regulation	Knowledge	Accomplishment	Stimulation
20	× → ◎	◎ → ×	× → ×	○ → △	△ → △	△ → ×	◎ → ○
26	× → ○	◎ → △	△ → ×	○ → △	△ → ×	○ → ×	△ → ×

Second, some students developed interests in areas other than English during the first semester and then prioritized these new interests during the second semester. However, this shift in interest did not result in any significant decrease of motivation as shown in Table 5. Presumably, these students reduced the number of English courses during the second semester because they took other courses, not because they lost motivation.

**Table 5. Students who changed their study interests**

Student	Amotivation	Extrinsic Motivation			Intrinsic Motivation		
		External Regulation	Introjected Regulation	Identified Regulation	Knowledge	Accomplishment	Stimulation
23	× → ×	△ → △	○ → ◎	◎ → ◎	△ → △	× → △	× → ×
27	× → ×	× → ×	○ → ○	△ → ○	○ → ○	◎ → ◎	○ → ◎

## 2. Results for Each Motivation Type

We examined each motivation type in the first semester and the changes that occurred over the semester in Groups 1 and 2. The data of Group 3 were used for comparison with the

former two groups. Table 6 shows the degree of motivation seen in Groups 1 and 2 in April and in September and also describes how they changed over the time period.

**Table 6. Profile of students' motivation in each regulation type**

**Group 1**

Student	Amotivation		EM-External Regulation		EM-Introjected Regulation		EM-Identified Regulation		IM-Knowledge		IM-Accomplishment		IM-Stimulation	
	Apr.	Sept.	Apr.	Sept.	Apr.	Sept.	Apr.	Sept.	Apr.	Sept.	Apr.	Sept.	Apr.	Sept.
1	×	×	×	△	△	△	○	◎	○	◎	◎	△	◎	◎
2	×	×	×	×	×	×	○	○	△	△	○	○	○	○
3	×	×	△	○	×	×	○	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎
4	×	×	×	×	△	△	△	△	○	○	○	○	◎	◎
5	×	×	◎	×	○	○	○	◎	○	◎	○	◎	○	◎
6	×	×	◎	◎	△	△	○	○	○	◎	◎	◎	○	○
7	×	×	△	△	△	△	◎	◎	△	△	◎	◎	○	○
8	×	×	×	×	○	△	○	◎	◎	◎	◎	○	◎	◎
9	×	×	○	△	△	△	○	○	△	△	○	○	△	△
10	×	×	×	×	△	△	◎	◎	○	○	◎	◎	◎	◎
11	×	×	○	○	○	○	○	○	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎	◎
12	×	×	○	△	○	○	◎	◎	△	◎	△	○	○	◎
13	×	×	△	×	×	△	○	◎	○	◎	○	◎	○	◎
14	×	×	△	△	○	○	◎	◎	△	△	○	○	◎	◎
15	×	×	△	△	×	×	○	○	○	○	○	○	◎	◎
16	×	×	△	×	×	×	○	○	○	○	◎	◎	○	○
17	×	×	×	×	×	×	○	○	◎	◎	◎	◎	×	△
18	×	×	×	×	△	△	△	△	△	△	○	◎	×	×
19	×	×	×	×	×	×	○	○	×	×	△	◎	×	○

**Group 2**

Student	Amotivation		EM-External Regulation		EM-Introjected Regulation		EM-Identified Regulation		IM-Knowledge		IM-Accomplishment		IM-Stimulation	
	Apr.	Sept.	Apr.	Sept.	Apr.	Sept.	Apr.	Sept.	Apr.	Sept.	Apr.	Sept.	Apr.	Sept.
20	×	◎	◎	×	×	×	○	△	△	△	△	×	◎	○
21	×	×	◎	○	○	○	△	△	△	△	×	×	△	△
22	×	◎	×	△	×	×	△	×	◎	○	△	△	○	○
23	×	×	△	△	○	◎	◎	◎	△	△	×	△	×	×
24	×	○	△	○	△	△	○	×	◎	◎	○	○	×	×
25	×	×	△	×	△	△	◎	◎	×	△	△	×	◎	△
26	×	○	◎	△	△	×	○	△	△	×	○	×	△	×
27	×	×	×	×	○	○	△	○	○	○	◎	◎	○	◎
28	×	×	○	○	○	○	△	○	△	△	△	△	○	○
29	×	△	×	×	×	×	○	△	○	○	○	×	×	×

◎Strong ○Moderate △Slight ×None

*Amotivation*

While no amotivation was found in either Group 1 or Group 2 at the beginning of the semester, amotivation was seen in half of the students in Group 2 after the first semester. The majority of those with amotivation stated that they had lost their interest in participating in the homestay program, which required a large number of English courses. Some replied that they were unable to achieve the results they had expected. Losing either strong EM-external regulation or a sense of achievement resulted in amotivation.

*Extrinsic Motivation*

EM-external regulation was found in more than half of the students in both Groups 1 and 2 at the beginning of the semester. Besides the pressure from their family and/or teachers, these students perceived learning English as a means for acquisition of qualification and some anticipated it would provide them better job opportunities. After the first semester, as stated in

the *Overall Tendency* section, some decreases were found in Group 1, which was the most notable decrement in this group. In Group 2, decrease was found in 4 of 10 students. Any improvement of the rest of motivations seen in the students with decreased EM-external regulation in Group 1 was not observed among those 4 students in Group 2.

EM-introjected regulation was found in more than half of the students at minimal to moderate levels. These students maintained this type of motivation after the end of the semester and no prominent changes were observed.

EM-identified regulation was found in all the students in both Groups 1 and 2 at the beginning of the semester. These students hoped “to be the kind of person who can speak more than one language” and “to be the kind of person who can speak English.” Intriguingly, this type of motivation, although much weaker, was also found in all of the students in Group 3. The differences between Groups 1 and 2 were remarkable by the end of the semester. Decrease in this type of motivation was found in half of Group 2, whereas no decrease was found in Group 1. As a whole, Group 1 increased in EM-identified regulation over the semester.

### *Intrinsic Motivation*

IM-knowledge was found in most of the students in both Groups 1 and 2 at the beginning of the semester, and the overall degree of this motivation in Group 1 was stronger than Group 2 after the semester. In the first semester, Group 1 placed value on “developing knowledge of culture and people” and “exploring new ideas.” On the other hand, Group 2 thought the former was more important and had less interest in the latter. After the semester, slight increases and decreases were found in Group 2, while Group 1 maintained or increased in this type of motivation and showed no decrease.

IM-accomplishment was strongly felt by all except two students in Group 1 at the beginning of the semester, while only four students in Group 2 had such feelings. As a whole, Group 1 possessed IM-accomplishment at the highest levels, followed by Group 3. After the end of the semester, the overall difference in the degree of this motivation was more significant between Group 1 and Group 2. In general, Group 1 maintained this type of motivation at fairly high levels. Student 1 and Student 8 with decreased IM-accomplishment gained internalized external motivation; for example, Student 1 remarked “because I am not satisfied with my progress, I study English harder to achieve my goals.” These students retained a positive attitude toward studying English. Group 2 reduced or did not improve this type of motivation. Some of the students expressed dissatisfaction with course contents, which contributed to the reduction in IM-accomplishment.

IM-stimulation was found among more than half of the students in Groups 1 and 2 at the beginning of the semester. Overall, the former group’s motivation was much stronger than the latter’s. About 80% of those with this motivation stated that they were excited to hear English spoken especially by native speakers, and showed a desire to have a comparable command of the language. After the semester, increases and decreases were found among some of the students in both groups, but it was not a critical change.

### 3. Influence of Social Contexts

The factors with the greatest impact on the students' motivation were course contents and teaching approach. The effectiveness of specific contents and approaches cannot be determined, since each student had a personal preference. Nevertheless, for some students, particular course contents and/or teaching approach affect IM-accomplishment and/or IM-stimulation. Thirty percent of the students thought friends influenced their motivation and 60% thought instructors were influential.

## V. DISCUSSION

The present study has shown that the combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation plays an important role in a student's decision to self-select English in college. Students who chose to extensively study English had stronger overall motivation, compared with those who took much fewer English courses. Intrinsic motivation should not be necessarily high in this circumstance, but the support of extrinsic motivation is essential. The students in Group 3 who had registered for a small number of English courses had as high IM-accomplishment as the participants in Group 1, but this type of motivation alone was not strong enough to encourage these students to take as many courses as those in the other two groups.

Another pattern of strong motivation as a single extrinsic regulation had a positive impact on students' English course selection. Although students with this characteristic represent only a small portion of the entire participant group, this pattern points to the significance of a single extrinsic regulation. A strong sense of one particular goal can be a general motivating force for starting extensive learning (see Table 2). The power of one particular type of extrinsic regulation could compensate for the lack of the other types of motivation.

The difference between the continuing group (Group 1) and the discontinuing group (Group 2) in the second semester was substantial in terms of the maintenance of intrinsic motivation, particularly accomplishment, and EM-identified regulation. Many students in the continuing group maintained or reinforced moderate or higher intrinsic motivation and EM-identified regulation, indicating that students who are inclined to higher self-determined regulations at the beginning of the program will continue their learning if they can sustain or reinforce both the excitement of learning and the internalized reasons to learn.

We saw a perplexing result for the independency of external regulation and more self-determined regulation types (i.e., identified regulation and intrinsic motivation). There was a noticeable difference between the continuing and discontinuing groups in terms of the loss of external regulation. If more self-determined regulation, such as identified regulation and intrinsic regulation, are sustained, as seen in Group 1, change in EM-external regulation does not affect the overall passion for continued learning. Highly self-determined motivation and external regulation are independent in this regard.

On the other hand, if the student cannot maintain or increase self-determined motivation, the loss of external regulation drastically affects the magnitude of overall enthusiasm for learning in a negative direction, as seen for Group 2. In particular, the decrease in intrinsic motivation was prominent. In most cases, amotivation occurs along with the decrease of external regulation and other self-determined regulations. This may be evidence that the two types of motivation—self-determined and non-self-determined—are correlated.

These conflicting influences of the loss of external regulation may be due to the fact that IM-accomplishment was stronger in the continuing group than in the discontinuing group even at the beginning of the first semester. There were no other regulation types in which the students showed such a clear difference between the groups. Focusing on those who decreased EM-external regulation across the two periods, we see a more marked tendency that students in the continuing group maintained relatively high IM-accomplishment or increased it, whereas those in the discontinuing group decreased IM-accomplishment or did not have it across the year.

The fact that the continuing group in the present study sustained or increased IM-accomplishment begins to clarify the question of how teachers or other social factors can enhance the intrinsic motivation of students. Many of the students in the continuing group felt that their sense of accomplishment and stimulation was enhanced by the course contents and teaching approach (a communicative approach is practiced in most English courses at the college).

As Deci and Ryan (1985) stated, one can be more self-determined if one has the opportunity to experience a sense of *autonomy* (being the origin of one's own behavior), *competence* (having a sense of accomplishment) and *relatedness* (feeling connected with others) as the fundamental needs for self-determination. The students in the continuing group were satisfied with the feelings of competence during the semester and expected to have similar feelings during the next semester. Thus, course contents and teaching approach can influence intrinsic motivation. There is no clear evidence that Group 1 felt a sense of autonomy or relatedness together with competence. Yet, we could infer that they experienced the fulfillment of the two needs. The students were already autonomous in the selection of the courses because all English courses were optional. They also may have felt relatedness since some students mentioned the positive influence of friends (connectedness to others).

The perplexity of the relationship between external regulation and self-determined regulation discussed above could give inspiration to the argument that the motivation construct represented by the continuum of regulations may have a developmental nature. SDT does not suggest that one can develop toward a more self-determined level of motivation on the continuum. However, quoting several empirical studies and his own research data, Hayashi (2006) discusses the interplay (bidirectional causation) between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Most of the continuing students with decreased EM-external regulation did not show decreases in other types of self-determined motivation, suggesting that external regulation was internalized into the self and developed into identified regulation, which did not happen for discontinuing students.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Some of the findings of the present study correspond with previous studies on EFL motivation. The combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is crucial for establishing a level of motivation sufficient for starting and continuing to learn English. External regulation can be beneficial at the beginning of learning, but the effect decreases as learning progresses. If loss of external regulation occurs during learning, continued learning is jeopardized.

Research issues should be considered in future studies. First, course content and teaching

approach may play key roles in changing motivation. We could find no evidence to suggest how EM-identified regulation is increased or maintained. This leads to the question of how students can internalize their goals or needs in order to become more self-determined in L2 learning.

Second, the reason for the observed difference in the change in IM-knowledge between the continuing and discontinuing students is not clear. The inclination of the continuing group toward linguistic knowledge and that of the discontinuing group toward cultural knowledge may indicate that developing interest in improving linguistic competence can help the student to sustain volition for FL, but we could not determine the reason for this phenomenon.

Finally, the argument that the motivation construct may have developmental characteristics should be further developed. The SDT conception of the non-developmental nature of motivation can be challenged. We need further studies with a design that can identify how students' less self-determined motivation disappears and more self-determined motivation is constructed instead.

## NOTE

1. There are four subtypes of extrinsic motivation in Ryan and Deci's (2002) original form of the self-determination continuum. Based on earlier studies of motivation in education, Noels et al. (2000) suggests that integrated regulation is difficult to distinguish from identified regulation. We omitted the last subtype, integrated regulation, from our analysis.

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## Appendix

### Interview questions: Reasons to study English

#### **Amotivation**

1. 英語学習をする理由が、自分には思い当たらないから、(英語学習をしない)
2. 英語を学習しても、時間の無駄のように思えるから、(英語学習をしない)
3. 英語はがんばっても成果が出ないから、(英語学習をしない)

#### **外発的動機づけ・外的調整 (EM-external regulation)**

4. 英語を勉強することが期待されていると思うから
5. 将来、いい仕事に就きたいから
6. 仕事に就いた後も、給料などでよい待遇を得たいから

#### **外発的動機づけ・取り入れ調整 (EM-introjected regulation)**

7. 自分にとっては、優秀な人というのは英語が話せるものだから
8. 英語圏から来た友人と英語で話せないと恥ずかしいから
9. 英語ぐらい知っている方が、まともだと思うから

#### **外発的動機づけ・同一視調整 (EM-identified regulation)**

10. 外国語を少なくとも1つは話せるようになりたいから
11. 外国語の学習が自身の成長につながるから
12. 英語を使えるような人になりたいから

#### **内発的動機づけ・知識 (IM-knowledge)**

13. 英語の文学についてより多くを知るのが楽しいから
14. 初めて気づくことがあると、満足するから
15. 英語圏の人々や、彼らの生活様式について知るのが楽しいから

#### **内発的動機づけ・達成 (IM-accomplishment)**

16. 英語ができるようになっていくと楽しいから
17. 今までわからなかった単語や言葉がわかるようになってくるのが嬉しいから
18. 英語の難しい課題ができたときの満足感を得たいから

#### **内発的動機づけ・刺激 (IM-stimulation)**

19. 英語が話されているのを聞くと、ワクワクしてくるから
20. 英語で会話をしていると、楽しくてドキドキするから
21. ネイティブの人が英語を話しているのを聞くと楽しくなるから