

# **KUIS students' development and changes of foreign language motivation, aptitude, and proficiency**

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## **I. Introduction**

Motivation is a construct widely used to study one's psychological drive to achieve his/her goal in everyday life. If people are motivated to do something, accomplishing tasks and achieving their goals are likely to become more effortless. If not motivated, they may feel stress and psychological fatigue to accomplish the tasks, and in the worst case, they would give up on achieving goals by not being able to complete the tasks. There may be some exceptional cases, but many of us have experienced the processes of motivation and demotivation in our everyday life to some extent.

As a college teacher, we all know that, for the first year students who are studying at a college of their first choices, their motivation level is likely to be much higher than those who had to go to their second or third choices. We also know well that students who register elective courses or early morning/late evening courses are generally motivated than others, because they do it at their own wills or commitment to take such courses brings about some risks. To the contrary, we sometimes have once highly motivated students who suddenly lose their motivation toward learning English, making us to get confused with how to teach such students.

In addition to the contextual motivation factors, learners must face their own motivational issues and overcome demotivation to learn English as a second language (Trang & Baldauf, 2007). In motivation studies, learning a second language

is considered one of the areas that draw attention from scholars (Wang, 2011). Motivation has been paid close attention by SLA scholars to create proper learning environment through analyzing, predicting, and controlling students' attitudes and behaviors toward L2 learning. It has provided a wide range of conceptual references based upon previous research results about how motivation correlates learning effectiveness and quality outcome. In communication studies in general and intercultural communication in particular, having the reasonably high motivation is necessary to make meaningful friendship across different cultures (Kassing, 1997). Thus, motivation is regarded as underlying impetus for students to learn and apply the communicative language skills to social interactions.

More recently, research efforts in motivation studies have shifted its attention from cognitive and linear model of motivation to contextual and soci-cultural model of motivation (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011), motivation to demotivation factors particularly in L2 learning in Japan (Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Agawa & Ueda, 2013), and from person measures using the traditional questionnaire survey to event measures using more diversified research methods (Zimmerman, 2011).

With respect to demotivation, every construct can be approached in both positive and negative ways. We can approach the issue by taking a positive look at motivation. Otherwise, we can study the students' motivation from the dark side: demotivation or amotivation. As for the dark side of motivation, Dornyei (1998) come up with nine demotivation factors (the teacher; inadequate school facilities; reduced self-confidence; negative attitude toward the L2; compulsory nature of L2 study; interference of another foreign language being studied; negative attitude towards L2 community; attitudes of group members; coursebook) in the study, and that encouraged scholars to investigate L2 learners' demotivation factors in

different countries (Trang & Baldauf, 2007; Kim, 2011; Soureshjani & Riahipour, 2012; Meshkat & Hassani, 2012; Bahramy & Araghi, 2013) as well as Japanese educational settings.

With regard to Japanese EFL education and motivation, Kikuchi and Sakai (2009) conducted meta-analysis of existing literature on motivation to create their own questionnaire to investigate Japanese students' motivation about L2 learning. The result showed five demotivation factors: (1) Learning Contents and Materials; (2) Teachers' Competence and Teaching Styles; (3) Inadequate School Facilities; (4) Lack of Intrinsic Motivation; (5) Test Scores. Among these factors, Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) have conducted a follow-up study to conclude that Learning Contents and Materials & Test Scores are the most influential demotivation factors for Japanese L2 learners, despite the previous research result of Teachers' Competence and Teaching Styles having been the most influential. Agawa and Ueda (2013) investigated triggers for students' demotivation toward English learning using both quantitative and qualitative research method. The result showed that the degree and point of the initial encounter with difficulty in learning English and learners' L2 self are the most influential demotivation factors.

Existing studies on demotivation mainly aim to identify the most influential motivation and demotivation factors that relate to attitudes toward L2 learning, i. e., "describing participants' motivational patterns" (Babae, 2012, 4). That brings us a question not just about attitudes toward L2 learning and their changes, but a question concerning interactions among and the changes in attitudes, competence, and performance. In other words, existing studies on Japanese students' demotivation only discuss the research results by cross-sectional studies. In the general motivation studies, Anderman and Dawson (2011) points out that the developmental studies are strongly called for to identify significant factors that correlate to students' learning,

because the level of motivation changes as students go through different life events at different life stages.

Based upon the premise that motivation plays an important role in L2 learning and more empirical research must be carried out, we have been conducting our longitudinal study that aims to examine the development in English proficiency and changes in language learning motivation and aptitude of Japanese students at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS). More specifically, this longitudinal study aims to investigate into 1) how much growth and particularly in what aspects of English proficiency students make while studying for three to four years in the university, 2) whether their motivational orientation goes through changes, and if so, how, and 3) to what extent the growth and the motivational orientation is affected by the students' aptitude for foreign language learning.

In this paper, we will share the result of our preliminary findings of the part of this longitudinal study with a group of students who have been with us for a year since their entry to the university. Followed by a quick review of the research method, we will report the changes of their motivational orientations towards English learning, their growth in terms of English proficiency measured by TOEFL ITP tests, the level of students' language aptitude measured by PLAB, and finally their interactions with each other.

## **II. Method**

### **1. Participants**

In the first phase of the study, the purpose of which was to develop a sound questionnaire, 382 students (300 women and 82 men) responded to the survey that we administered. All of the students were incoming freshmen. Using listwise

deletion, only complete responses from 345 students (266 women and 79 men) were entered into the factor analysis.

In the second phase, in total of 119 students (98 women and 21 men) agreed to take the PLAB test and also answered our survey questions. Among the 119 sets of students' responses, only 84 sets from 69 female and 15 male students were used for the analyses, as not all sets were complete. All of the students in the second phase were sophomores.

## **2. Materials and Procedure**

**The motivation questionnaire.** The motivation questionnaire we used comes originally from Taguchi et al. (2009). We translated their English version of the questionnaire into Japanese and had it go through a number of review processes. We asked three Japanese college teachers to review each of the items in terms of their clarity and suitability for our research purpose. We also asked several students to check if they find all the items in the questionnaire easy to understand. Based on the input from the teachers and the students, we revised the original form of the questionnaire, the final form of which included 67 items in 12 sections.

Table 1 provides information about the final version of the questionnaire showing the number of items for each section and what aspects of motivation it was to assess. Each item in the questionnaire was accompanied with a 6-point Likert scale which ranges from "strongly disagree (---)" to "strongly agree (+++)".

**Table 1** The final version of the questionnaire

Section	Section descriptions	# of items
1	Ideal L2 self	4
2	Parental encouragement /family influence	8
3	Instrumentality - promotion	4
4	Instrumentality – prevention	5
5	Linguistic self-confidence	4
6	Attitude toward learning English	4
7	Travel orientation	3
8	Fear of assimilation	5
9	Ethnocentrism	5
10	Interest in English language	3
11	English anxiety	4
12	Cultural interest	7

**Foreign language aptitude.** In order to assess the level of students' foreign language aptitude, we employed the Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery (PLAB). The Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery has been known dependable as a foreign language aptitude test for adult L2 learners. The battery is structured into six parts, but for the current research, only the last three parts were administered to the participants. Table 2 below gives a quick reference to each part of the test regarding what aspects of language aptitude it is supposed to measure.

**Table 2** Parts of PLAB used in the study and their descriptions

Section	Descriptions
Part 4:	Language analysis: ability to reason logically in terms of a foreign language
Part 5:	Sound discrimination: ability to learn new phonetic distinctions and to recognize them in different contexts
Part 6:	Sound-symbol association: an association of sounds with their written symbols

**English proficiency.** In order to assess students' English proficiency development, we used the scores of TOEFL ITP tests that the students took at the entry to the university and at the exit of the first year English curriculum. The TOEFL ITP consists of three sections – listening, grammar, and reading.

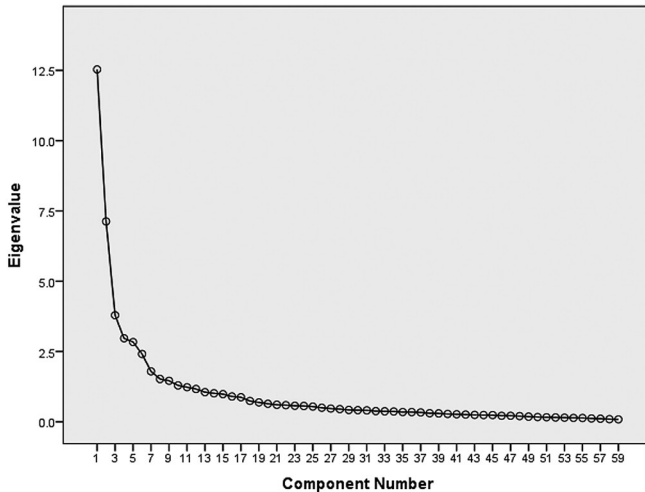
For data collection in the first phase, we asked all incoming freshmen to fill in the consent form and then to answer the questions in the questionnaire. In the second phase of the study, which was conducted a year later, only those students who completed the first phase were chosen to participate. They were asked to complete the consent form and a questionnaire, and also to take a foreign language aptitude test, PLAB.

### III. Results

#### 1. Survey study

For the first phase of our study, we ran a principle component analysis (PCA) on the 67 items with orthogonal rotation (Varimax with Kaiser Normalization). Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) of 0.87 verified the sampling adequacy for the analyses. Also, Bartlett's test of sphericity resulted in at  $\chi^2(1711) = 13655.506, p < .001$ , indicating

that the correlations between items were large enough for the use of PCA. The rotation converged only in 13 iterations also confirming the appropriate use of the rotation method. As the scree plot indicates below, there was a single component that verifies the existence of a unitary factor, i. e., motivation.



**Figure 1.** Scree plot

The PCA analysis identified 14 components, and we decided to exclude 2 of them, Sections 9 and 10, as shown in Table 3, from the subsequent analyses because their section reliabilities were undesirably low. The reliabilities of all the other sections fell between 0.81 and 0.91, and the reliability of the entire questionnaire was 0.93, indicating the adequacy of the questionnaire as an instrument to assess learner motivation as a whole.



**Table 3** Section reliabilities

Section	Section description	# of items	<i>r</i>
1	Ideal L2 self	4	0.81
2	Parental encouragement /family influence	8	0.90
3	Instrumentality - promotion	4	0.84
4	Instrumentality – prevention	5	0.85
5	Linguistic self-confidence	4	0.87
6	Attitude toward learning English	4	0.89
7	Travel orientation	3	0.82
8	Fear of assimilation	5	0.88
<b>9</b>	<b>Ethnocentrism</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0.61</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Interest in English language</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0.49</b>
11	English anxiety	4	0.91
12	Cultural interest	7	0.91
All	Motivation	67	0.93

The first phase of PCA analyses examined the adequacy of the questionnaire as a research instrument. Based on the analyses, we decided to use the information resulted from the 59 items for 10 sections in the subsequent analyses.

In the second phase of analysis, we first examined if and how students' motivational orientations had changed by observing their responses to each item in the motivation questionnaire between the two administrations: at the entry to the English curriculum in March, 2012 and when they are sophomores in May, 2013. The changes of students' motivational orientations in terms of mean difference between the two administrations of Year 2012 and Year 2013 are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4** Paired samples statistics of survey data

<i>n</i> = 84		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	M.diff ( <i>SD</i> )
1	2013	4.06	0.84	
Ideal L2 self	2012	4.10	0.82	-0.04 (0.77)
2	2013	2.60	1.17	
<b>Parental encouragement/family influence</b>	2012	2.40	1.00	<b>0.20 (0.88)*</b>
3	2013	4.90	0.88	
<b>Instrumentality - promotion</b>	2012	5.12	0.82	<b>-0.22 (0.90)*</b>
4	2013	4.12	0.91	
Instrumentality – prevention	2012	4.10	1.04	0.02 (0.89)
5	2013	4.68	0.89	
Linguistic self-confidence	2012	4.69	0.88	-0.01 (0.96)
6	2013	4.85	0.80	
Attitude toward learning English	2012	4.98	0.84	-0.13 (0.84)
7	2013	4.76	0.83	
Travel orientation	2012	4.87	0.89	-0.12 (1.06)
8 (n)	2013	3.05	0.89	
Fear of assimilation	2012	3.22	1.02	-0.17 (1.05)
11 (n)	2013	4.29	1.26	
English anxiety	2012	4.30	1.16	-0.01 (0.88)
12	2013	5.23	0.69	
Cultural interest	2012	5.12	0.71	0.11 (0.63)

(n) = negative item

\* significant at  $p < .05$

As Table 4 presents, only two section pairs of Section 2 and Section 3 resulted with a statistically meaningful difference at  $t(83)=2.08$ ,  $p < .05$  and  $t(83)=-2.22$ ,  $p < .05$ , respectively. The significant and positive mean difference with Section 2 indicates that as the students were promoted to the second year, they tended to receive more parental encouragement (or family influence) for studying English. The significant, yet negative mean difference between the two administrations of Section 3 shows that the students' instrumental motivation of English learning somehow became weaker as they entered the second year. There were no statistically noticeable changes with other sections between Year 2012 and Year 2013.

## 2. Language aptitude study

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics of PLAB test results. The distributions of all three part scores were negatively skewed, indicating that the students in this study overall demonstrated relatively high aptitude in language analysis, sound discrimination, and sound-symbol association. Among the three, however, more score variability was noticeable with Part 4, which spreads students out further on the ability continuum.

**Table 5** Descriptive statistics of PLAB

<i>n</i> = 84	<i>M</i>	Hi-low	<i>SD</i>
Part 4 (15)	8.99	15-1	3.76
Part 5 (30)	21.45	28-9	5.11
Part 6 (24)	17.10	23-9	2.95
Total (69)	47.54	64-22	9.31

Table 6 shows the correlation coefficients across different test sections of PLAB and TOEFL and their totals. The coefficients were calculated between the PLAB part scores and the TOEFL gain scores after a year of study in the program.

As the non-significant values in bold indicates, no meaningful relationships were found between three traits of language aptitude and the three English skills represented by the TOEFL gain. Although there was a significant correlation ( $r=-.23$ ,  $p<.05$ ) between Part 5 of PLAB and the TOEFL grammar section, we consider its effect size too small to assign any meaningful interpretation to it.

**Table 6** Correlation coefficients across test sections

<i>n</i> = 84	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Aptitude	1. Part 4	1						
	2. Part 5	0.46**	1					
	3. Part 6	0.30**	0.45**	1				
	4. Aptitude Total	0.75**	0.88**	0.69**	1			
TOEFL	5. Listening	<b>-0.02</b>	<b>0.18</b>	<b>0.07</b>	<b>0.11</b>	1		
	6. Grammar	<b>0.11</b>	<b>0.01</b>	<b>0.08</b>	<b>0.07</b>	0.21	1	
	7. Reading	<b>-0.16</b>	<b>-0.23*</b>	<b>0.01</b>	<b>-0.18</b>	0.31**	0.08	1
	8. TOEFL Total	-0.05	-0.06	0.08	-0.03	0.67**	0.62**	0.74**

*Note.* In the case of TOEFL scores, gain scores from 2012 to 2013 were used for the analyses.

\*\* significant at  $p < .01$

\* significant at  $p < .05$

Next, we examined if there were any systematic relations between students' motivational orientations and their English proficiency assessed in Year 2012 and also in Year 2013, respectively. Table 7 first shows the result of the analyses with the 2012 data. As the table indicates, four relationships were found with statistical significance. Among the four, three of them were resulted between the TOEFL grammar section and the three motivation sections: parental encouragement/family influence, instrumentality-promotion, and instrumentality-prevention. Interestingly, these three coefficients were all negative, indicating that there were adverse relationships between students' grammar ability and their motivational orientations.

**Table 7** Correlation coefficients across test and motivation sections from the 2012 admirations

n = 84	1	2	3	4	5	
TOEFL	1. LC	1				
	2. Gram	.21	1			
	3. RC	.31**	.08	1		
	4. Total	.67**	.62**	.74**	1	
Motivation	6. Motiv_1	.01	.14	-.12	.00	-.06
	7. Motiv_2	-.03	<b>-.30**</b>	.06	-.13	-.13
	8. Motiv_3	-.01	<b>-.31**</b>	-.06	-.19	.17
	9. Motiv_4	-.11	<b>-.33**</b>	-.09	<b>-.26*</b>	.14
	10. Motiv_5	.10	.18	.09	.18	.14
	11. Motiv_6	.16	-.13	-.15	-.09	.04
	12. Motiv_7	.15	-.14	-.02	-.02	.01
	13. Motiv_8	.10	.08	.00	.08	.04
	14. Motiv_11	-.06	-.17	-.15	-.20	.10
	15. Motiv_12	-.04	-.13	-.16	-.17	.06

\*\* significant at  $p < .01$

\* significant at  $p < .05$

Motiv\_2. Parental encouragement/family influence

Motiv\_3. Instrumentality – promotion

Motiv\_4. Instrumentality – prevention

Table 8 presents the result of the analyses with the 2013 data. It is apparent that the correlational patterns noted in Table 8 are similar to that of Table 7 with an exception to the motivation section 4 of instrumentality-prevention. In 2012, there was a marginal, yet statistically significant relationship between the students' motivation for instrumentality-prevention and their grammar scores in TOEFL. At the entry to the English curriculum, those students with higher instrumental and preventive motivation tended to have lower grammar scores in TOEFL. However,

such a tendency disappeared as they moved up to the second year after spending a year in the curriculum. As a result, students' TOEFL grammar scores and their instrumental and preventive motivation presented no relationship with each other in any meaningful way anymore.

**Table 8** Correlation coefficients across test and motivation sections from the 2013 admirations

<i>n</i> = 84		1	2	3	4	5
TOEFL	1. LC	1				
	2. Gram	.21	1			
	3. RC	.31**	.08	1		
	4. Total	.67**	.62**	.74**	1	
Motivation	6. Motiv_1	.04	.04	.01	.04	.05
	7. Motiv_2	-.13	<b>-.32**</b>	.08	-.17	-.02
	8. Motiv_3	.08	<b>-.33**</b>	-.08	-.18	.02
	9. Motiv_4	-.02	-.10	-.11	-.13	.16
	10. Motiv_5	.16	.13	.16	<b>.22*</b>	.03
	11. Motiv_6	.16	.01	.00	.07	.00
	12. Motiv_7	-.06	-.09	-.04	-.09	.14
	13. Motiv_8	-.03	-.16	-.09	-.15	-.01
	14. Motiv_11	-.02	-.10	-.13	-.13	.10
	15. Motiv_12	-.07	<b>-.22*</b>	-.06	-.17	-.03

\*\* significant at  $p < 0.01$

\* significant at  $p < 0.05$

Motiv\_2. Parental encouragement/family influence

Motiv\_3. Instrumentality – promotion

Motiv\_5. Linguistic self-confidence

Motiv\_12. Cultural interest

### **III. Discussion and Conclusions**

As mentioned earlier, we administered the same questionnaire to the same group of students over two years in order to observe the changes of their motivational orientations towards English learning. Among the ten facets of motivational orientations, two of them – parental encouragement (or family influence) and instrumentality-promotion – resulted with statistical significance for the changes after a year study in the program. The change in parental encouragement was positively directed, which means students were provided with more encouragement and support for studying English from their parents and/or other family members after they entered the university. However, their motivation for instrumentality-promotion decreased after a year, which could indicate that as they studied in the program, their motivation for promotion in test scores of TOEFL or TOEIC might have become weaker. At this point, we do not know if this weakened instrumental motivation is due to the shift of their motivation to other more integrative aspects of English learning or if it is due simply to their weakened interest in improving test scores or their future career goals.

With regard to the students' development in English proficiency assessed by TOEFL tests, there were areas with differing degrees of development. While students demonstrated much progress with the listening skills, a relatively marginal development was observed with the reading skills. We believe that this developmental difference between language skills is due mostly to the characteristics of the English curriculum in the program, which puts a heavy emphasis on the oral aspects of English proficiency.

In order to find out if the development of English proficiency is related in any systematic way to students' language aptitude, we examined the correlation coefficients across three parts of PLAB and the three sections of TOEFL using gain

scores. As discussed earlier, there were no statistically meaningful relationships between PLAB and TOEFL except one correlation ( $r=-0.23$ ,  $p<.05$ ) between Part 5 of PLAB, Sound discrimination, and the reading section of TOEFL. Since the effect size of the correlation is very marginal, imposing a meaningful interpretation to it may be inappropriate. Nonetheless, the negative sign indicates that the students' higher performance in sound discrimination in foreign language learning may be somewhat adversely related to their slower development in English reading skills. An analysis with more data may help to confirm if such an interpretation of the adverse relation is plausible between students' sound discrimination ability and their reading development.

Finally, we conducted two correlational analyses to examine if and how the development of students' English proficiency and the changes of their motivational orientations are related. The first analysis with the 2012 data revealed that students' scores on the grammar section of TOEFL were negatively correlated with several motivation measures: parental encouragement (or family influence), instrumentality-promotion, and instrumentality-prevention. The negative correlations indicate that those students with higher motivational orientations of the three aspects tend to have lower scores on the grammar part of TOEFL. Or it may well be the other way that those students with higher scores on the grammar section of TOEFL may be less concerned about the three motivational aspects, especially the instrumentality-prevention being the least concerning. At this point, we cannot verify which direction we should take to interpret the adverse relationships between TOEFL grammar and the three motivational aspects. A more in-depth look into the data is surely required to draw a conclusive interpretation of the finding.

Before concluding the preliminary report of our project, we need to note a couple of problems that we faced while conducting the study. First, as we began to analyze



our data, we realized that one year of study in the program may not be enough to expect notable changes in students' motivational orientations. As students are exposed to a large number of English classes in their first as well as second years in the program, it is not likely to expect notable changes in students' motivation towards learning English. It is probably the third year in the program that the students begin to judge the value of learning English more seriously. As juniors, they go out to the job market and consider what qualifications the companies require from them (e.g., if and how much English abilities are required by the companies).

Also, in this study, students' English proficiency was assessed only through the use of the TOEFL tests. Since the English curriculum at Kanda University heavily focuses on the development of students' oral proficiency, looking at the changes of their English speaking should provide us with a better account of the relationship between the development of English proficiency and the changes of their motivation and initial aptitude. We leave this topic as a future research avenue of ours.

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language motivation, aptitude, and proficiency

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