

# Self-Efficacy, Motivation, and Perceived Importance of English as an L2 Among Japanese University Students

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The purpose of this study was to conduct action research examining the relationships between university students' self-reported efficacy in the four skills, their perception of the importance of learning English, and their motivations for studying English as a second language (L2). Quantitative data was collected through a Likert scale questionnaire measuring these three constructs. The participants involved in the study were from intact classes at a university in Kansai. The data was analysed using SPSS (ver. 24). The results showed that although participants perceived English as being very important for their professional future, their motivation and self-perceived efficacy were low. This short study provides useful reflection for other educators at the tertiary level of education.

本論の目的は、大学生の自己評価による英語4技能の能力と、英語学習の重要性に対する認識と、英語学習に対する意欲の3つの関係性を探るため、アクションリサーチを行うことである。これら三要素の関係性を明らかにするために、リッカート法によるアンケートを用いて定量的データ収集を行った。本論は関西にある大学の学生の協力のもとに行われた。データ分析にはSPSS (ver.24)を用いた。その結果、学生は自分の将来のために英語を重要だと認識しているが、英語学習に対する意欲および自分の英語力に対する評価は低いことが分かった。本論は、大学教員にとって有益な情報を提供する。

**T**eachers of required English classes at Japanese universities often comment on the lack of student motivation. It is possible that educators might assume this low degree of motivation means their students do not perceive English as being important. This study was conducted in an effort to gain insights into the dynamics behind this situation by investigating whether there is a relationship between lack of motivation and student perception of the importance of English and whether there is an interaction between these factors and student self-efficacy?

## Literature Review

### *Self-Efficacy*

Educational psychology has long been interested in the theory of self-efficacy. It was first developed by Bandura in the late 1970s. He defined self-efficacy as “people’s judgements of their capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances” (1986, p. 391). Key to this concept is the understanding that self-efficacy is “concerned not with the skills one has but with judgements of what one can do with whatever skills one possesses” (Bandura, 1986, p. 50).

Bandura (1986) outlined four sources of self-efficacy, namely:

1. *Performance experiences*: denoting our past experiences in handling tasks. If we have succeeded in completing a task in the past through our own efforts, we will possess higher self-efficacy in the future when attempting a similar task. Conversely, negative past experiences will lead to lower self-efficacy in the future.
2. *Vicarious experiences*: our self-efficacy levels are influenced through observation of the experiences of others.
3. *Verbal persuasion*: our self-efficacy levels are influenced by what others say to us about what they believe we can or cannot do.
4. *Physiological feedback*: we associate positive or negative physiological cues from our own bodies with success or failure in a given situation.

Research has shown that learners' self-efficacy has a significant influence on academic achievement (Caprara et al., 2008) and has proven to be a strong predictor of student performance in learning a second language (Raooifi, Tan, & Chan, 2012). Many of the studies (Chularut & DeBacker, 2004; Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2007; Wang & Pape, 2007) show positive relationships between self-efficacy and L2 performance across the four skills; however, the vast majority of published research has taken place outside of Japan

and, as a result, is limited in generalisability to the English L2 classroom in the Japanese context.

### Motivation

Motivation has long been a subject of wide-ranging research when it comes to Japanese students studying L2 English in tertiary education. Since the turn of the century, motivational research has become more focused on the links and interactions between learner motivation and identity/self. As a reflection of this shift in focus, Dörnyei (2005, 2009) proposed the L2 Motivational Self System—a framework comprising three components, which together regulate a learners' L2 motivation:

1. *The ideal L2 self*: refers to the L2 specific facet of a learners' ideal self and represents all the attributes that a learner would ideally like to possess (i.e., being a successful L2 speaker).
2. *The ought-to L2 self*: represents the attributes that a learner believes they ought to possess in order to avoid negative outcomes such as failing an L2 exam (Dörnyei, 2005).
3. *L2 learning experience*: concerns learner motivation in the immediate learning environment (e.g., classroom atmosphere).

Base from these concepts, motivated behaviour in an L2 learner can be described as the need to reduce the discrepancy between ideal/ought-to self and the actual self (Pigott, 2011).

Dörnyei's Motivational Self System has been implemented in numerous studies using Japanese learners of English. Studies from Taguchi, Magid and Papi (2009) and Aubrey (2014) have reinforced Dörnyei's claim that the ideal L2 self is "shown to be a significant predictor of motivation". Ueki and Takeuchi's study (2013) also demonstrates positive relationships between the ideal L2 self and motivation and cites evidence of a correlation between ideal L2 self and self-efficacy in that "there is a positive relationship between the ideal L2 self and self-efficacy, although the relationship has been relatively unexplored in SLA research" (p. 28).

### Perceived Importance

The perceived importance of learning English as an L2 is heavily interwoven with the construct of motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985) illustrated this connection with their Self-determination Theory. The theory proposes two main types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation refers to one's intrinsic interest in the activity [e.g., learning English] *per se*, and extrinsic motivation is based on rewards extrinsic to the activity itself (Noels, Pelletier,

Clement, & Vallerand, 2001). Self-determination theory goes on to coin the term 'identified regulation'. This concept brings together the two constructs of motivation and perceived importance quite neatly. Identified regulation is a form of extrinsic motivation whereby one carries out an activity [e.g. learning English] because one believes it to be important for one to achieve a valued goal. For example, a student will study English in order to achieve their goal of becoming an international lawyer (Yashima, 2009). The student sees English as being important for achieving their goal and therefore is motivated to learn English.

### Current Study

Previous research has been conducted regarding the relationship of self-efficacy and motivation as well as the relationship of perceived importance and motivation; however, to the best of our knowledge, there has been little or no research conducted regarding the interaction between these three constructs in the Japanese EFL context. This study sought to measure and identify the three constructs of self-efficacy, motivation, and perceived importance of English and to analyse the relationship and interactions between them. The model created by a review of the literature outlines a potential relationship where learners perceive English as being important, are motivated to study, and therefore improve their abilities. Based on this model, the following research questions were created:

1. What is the relationship between the three constructs of self-efficacy, motivation, and perceived importance of English?
2. Will the model created by a review of the literature be seen in the results of our study?

### Methodology

#### Participants

The study was carried out with first and second-year Information Science students at a major university in Kansai ( $n = 208$ ). The students were enrolled in either the intermediate or upper intermediate English classes. The range of TOEIC scores for these two groups of students spanned from 400 to around 700. Although level of proficiency was originally hypothesised to play a role, no interaction was found between the students' levels and any of the items; therefore, the analysis was conducted without the use of proficiency as a factor.

#### Instrument

The instrument used was created based on models by Brown (2004) and Kelly (2005), which were in

turn based on Gardner's (1985) Socio-educational Model instrument. After creation, the items were given to a panel of six university language teachers. After revisions were made, the instrument was submitted to a highly proficient English-speaking Japanese native who provided the final feedback and translated the items into Japanese.

The instrument consisted of response items on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (low) to 6 (high). All items shared the same alignment and none were reverse ordered. Instructions and items were given in English and Japanese. All classes in the study were

administered the instrument within the 14th week of a 15-week fall term.

## Results

To assess the dimensionality of the items within the questionnaire, a principal components analysis was conducted using SPSS (ver. 24). Prior to analyses, the assumptions for principal components analysis were found to be met. The number of components was found by using the scree test and the interpretation of the factor solution. The scree plot indicated five factors with eigenvalues greater

Table 1. *Correlations Between Items and Factors*

Items	Importance	Foreign Orientation	Confidence		Motivation	Mean Score
			Speaking	Reading & Writing		
<i>Self-Efficacy</i>						
speaking			.75	.34		2.6
listening			.54	.47		2.99
reading				.87		3.31
writing			.36	.70		2.93
understanding				.78		3.4
having a conversation			.86			2.63
giving a presentation			.82			2.56
<i>Perceived Importance</i>						
self-improvement	.62					4.14
getting a job	.85					4.84
travel	.39	.53				4.61
understanding foreign media	.34	.58				4.65
job advancement	.77					4.65
meeting new friends	.32	.69				4.02
options in the future	.76					5.08
improving my TOEIC/TOEFL score	.72					4.88
<i>Motivation</i>						
my own goals	.48	.52				4.07
my family's expectations					.86	2.95
my teacher's expectations					.85	2.82
I enjoy speaking English		.74			.36	3.51
I enjoy reading English		.73			.31	3.53
I enjoy foreign media		.75				4.34

than 1. Based on this plot, five factors were rotated using a Varimax rotation procedure. The five factors generated from the rotation were interpreted as: 1) importance, 2) foreign orientation, 3) confidence—speaking, 4) confidence—reading and writing, and 5) motivation. Cronbach's alpha was used as a measure of internal consistency and reliability; the score of .87 indicated satisfactory reliability.

The mean scores in Table 1 indicate a relatively low rate of self-efficacy among the students across the whole range of self-efficacy related items. Scores below 3.0 indicate a moderately consistent measure of disagreement for the response item, scores of between 3.0 and 4.0 indicate fluctuations between agreement and disagreement, and scores above 4.0 indicate a moderately consistent measure of agreement (see Appendix).

## Discussion

The first research question of this study was to investigate the interaction between the three constructs discussed. According to the aforementioned studies, if students perceive English as being important, they will be highly motivated to study (Deci & Ryan, 1985). However, this was not found to be strongly supported when looking at the data. Although the items indicating intrinsic motivation fit into the category of 'agree a little', it was only by a small margin - *my own goals* (4.07) and *I enjoy foreign media* (4.34). The overall scores did not share consistency in positive agreement as was recorded in the construct of perceived importance. In addition, the literature suggests that students should be incorporating this high level of perceived importance of English into creating a strong *ideal L2 self* and *ought-to L2 self* within the construct of motivation and result in higher scores of agreement (Yashima, 2009). In contrast, the scores indicate that students have low to moderate levels of motivation as measured on the scale created for this study.

Looking at the relationship between self-efficacy and motivation, results found in the literature suggest that students who are more motivated to study will become more proficient and should have a higher level of self-efficacy (Ueki & Taguchi, 2013). However, we did not find this to be true in the results of our study. Similar to the moderately neutral responses to the items in the motivation construct, most scores within the self-efficacy items centred around the response 'disagree a little' in terms of having confidence in their English skills. Responses to items in the self-efficacy category were lower than responses in either of the other two constructs—motivation and perceived importance of English.

In regard to the second research question, the relationship between the three constructs is contrary to our previous expectations; that is, students perceive English as being very important in diverse fields but lack motivation to study and believe they possess very poor English skills. One possibility behind this can be found in research done by Bandura (1986), who describes past experiences as being one possible factor affecting the level of self-efficacy a person possesses (i.e., past negative experiences would lead to a low level of self-efficacy in a given skill set). Much research has been done regarding the types of past negative experiences Japanese learners of English have had (Arai, 2004; Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Hasegawa, 2004). These studies found a wide range of factors that resulted in negative student experiences from junior high up until and including studying at the university level. Instead of the one-directional relationship posited previously, the data suggest a multi-directional relationship where self-efficacy influences motivation. Although the students in our study perceive English as being very important directly for themselves, their low self-efficacy has a nullifying effect upon their level of motivation.

Although the data we collected in our questionnaire conclusively outline certain relationships between the factors in our study, this data is cross-sectional. Even though statistically significant relationships can be found, without collecting longitudinal data, we can only hypothesise the cause-and-effect relationship between constructs. Future research into this area should attempt to measure the constructs of self-efficacy, motivation, and perceived importance of English over the course of a school year or longer.

## Conclusion

The questionnaire's results suggest that the students do not believe themselves to be competent users of English, especially in regards to the more communicative aspects of the language. However, the perceived importance section of the questionnaire indicates that they do actually perceive English to be important for their future in terms of their career and their life away from work. This contradiction creates a back and forth struggle resulting in a lack of motivation. This paints a rather sad picture of the L2 English education these students have experienced and perhaps are experiencing. As English teachers and curriculum designers, we not only need to endeavour to create L2 environments where students can raise their abilities, but we need to raise student *confidence* in

their abilities, which will hopefully lead to them being more motivated to acquire the language.

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Appendix

Questionnaire About Opinions of English

Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_ 回生

Gender: Male (男性) / Female (女性)

This is a short questionnaire about your opinions of English. Please check the box which best matches your opinion. Thank you. あなたの「英語」に対する考えを教えてください。最も考えに近いものにチェックをつけてください。ご協力ありがとうございます。

I am confident about ... ... について自信がある		strongly disagree (ぼったくない)	Disagree (ない)	disagree a little (あまりない)	agree a little (ややある)	Agree (ある)	strongly agree (とてもある)
1	speaking スピーキング						
2	listening リスニング						
3	reading リーディング						
4	writing ライティング						
5	understanding 理解すること						
6	having a conversation 会話をすること						
7	giving a presentation プレゼンテーションを すること						
English is important for.... 英語は....(の)ために大切だ		strongly disagree (ぼったくない)	Disagree (ない)	disagree a little (あまりない)	agree a little (ややある)	Agree (ある)	strongly agree (とてもある)
8	self improvement 自己研鑽						
9	getting a job 仕事を得る						
10	travel 旅行						
11	understanding foreign media (movies, newspapers etc) 海外メディア(映画、新聞など)を理解する						
12	job advancement 仕事の昇進・昇格						
13	meeting new friends 新しい友人をつくる						
14	options in the future 将来の選択肢を広げる						
15	improving my TOEIC, TOEFL grade TOEICやTOEFLのスコアをあげる						
I want to study English because (of).... ・私は....(の)ために英語を勉強したい ・私は英語を勉強したい、なぜなら....		strongly disagree (ぼったくない)	Disagree (ない)	disagree a little (あまりない)	agree a little (ややある)	Agree (ある)	strongly agree (とてもある)
16	my own goals 私自身の目標						
17	my family's expectations 家族の期待に応える						
18	my teacher's expectations 先生の期待に応える						
19	I enjoy speaking English 英語を話すのが楽しい						
20	I enjoy reading English 英語を読むのが楽しい						
21	I enjoy foreign media (movies, Internet etc.) 海外メディア(映画、インターネットなど)を楽しむため						

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