

Motivational Profiles of Japanese University Learners of English: A longitudinal study

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Abstract

This paper presents the findings of a follow-up survey on English learning motivation for first-year university students majoring in Policy Studies in rural Japan (N=194). It also depicts the changes in motivation, and the factors underpinning English learning motivation, before and after one year of study at university. The participants' changes are reported in relation to the five groups reported in Moritani and Manning (2016) as well as the overall motivational changes. The findings suggest that more motivated participants at the beginning of the course decreased their motivation, while relatively less motivated students maintained their previous levels. Some motivational variables shifted toward a central standard for all participants. The authors argue that students may be subconsciously adjusting to meet a community standard, not only as learners of English, but also as university students.

1. Introduction
2. Background of the study
3. The study
4. Results
5. Discussion and pedagogical implications
6. Conclusion

1. Introduction

Motivation is one of the most influential factors to determine success or failure in second language learning (Shirai, 2012). Mastering a foreign language for most adults requires a prolonged period of time for learning. No one would persevere so long without strong motivation. Unlike other personal factors that affect acquisition of a foreign language, such as personality and aptitudes, language-learning motivation tends to vary more over the course of study (Kojima, Ozeki & Hiromori, 2010; Shirai, 2012). Therefore, it is important to understand the students' motivational status and implement timely and appropriate educational interventions to enhance student motivation.

Although change may be positive or negative, the negative changes known as “demotivation” have been receiving increased attention in the field of English learning in recent years (Kikuchi, 2015; Ushioda, 2013, 2015). Ushioda (2015) notes “Japan leads the world when it comes to

academic research on ‘demotivation’ in language learning” (p.14) and calls for investigations of student motivational trajectory to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of language learning motivation. In order to gain additional insights into students’ motivational trajectory, this current study, which monitors first-year university students in rural Japan, investigated the changes in motivation and the factors underpinning L2 learning motivation within the framework of the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009).

2. Background of the study

The L2 motivational self system, proposed by Dörnyei (2005), centers on the self concept to explain L2 learning motivation. Its foundations are rooted in the possible-selves theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987). The possible-selves theory asserts a person holds a future representation of him/herself and wants to move toward positive representations, as well as away from any negative representations. Self-discrepancy theory contends that the discrepancy between the current self and the future self representation leads to motivated behavior. Following these psychological theories, Dörnyei (2005) put forward his theory, the L2 motivational self system, which consists of three dimensions: ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and learning experience. Ideal L2 self is the person you want to become in the future as a speaker of the second language you are learning. Ought-to L2 self is an interpretation of the expectations by others, such as parents, teachers, and friends. In his framework, these selves work as “future self guides”(Dörnyei, 2014, p. 8). However, the most important aspect of the framework is learning experience. Classroom activities, the teacher, the curriculum, the classmates, the grades and other learning experiences have a strong influence on whether a person continues to study more.

Since the proposal of Dörnyei’s framework, robust discussions on the relationships between this framework and other affective factors have taken place. Taguchi, Magid & Papi (2009) examined the framework in Japanese, Chinese, and Iranian contexts and revealed the relationship between ideal L2 self and instrumentality-promotion. Instrumentality-promotion is the motivation to learn a foreign language for positive pragmatic benefits, such as getting a good job. The other kind of instrumental motivation, known as instrumentality-prevention, is the motivation to learn English to avoid negative outcomes, such as failing an exam. In their study, instrumentality-prevention was strongly connected to ought-to L2 self rather than to ideal L2 self. Other affective factors such as L2 anxiety and L2 confidence have been explained within this framework in other studies (e.g. Ryan, 2009; Yashima, 2009).

Yashima (2002) investigated English learning motivation of Japanese students and developed the psychological construct called “international posture.” International posture is defined as “a tendency to relate oneself to the international community rather than with any specific L2 group” (Yashima, 2009, p.145). She reported that international posture has a direct impact on willingness to communicate in English (WTC). Increasing WTC in a second language is considered to be “a suitable goal of L2 learning” (MacIntyre, et. al., 1998, p.558) because willingness to communicate is a minimum condition for attaining a certain level of communicative competence in a L2. In one particularly influential study, Yashima (2002) revealed that enhancing international posture

increases WTC, and went on to later report that an imagined international community enabled students to create their ideal selves (Yashima & Zenuk-Nishide, 2008; Yashima, 2009). Several other self-enhancement programs have also been described in the literature (e.g. Fukada et.al., 2011; Sampson, 2012). As briefly noted here, the L2 motivational self system explains L2 motivation with self-concept and the interrelationship among the self-concept and other affective factors, including L2 anxiety, L2 confidence, international posture, and WTC. These affective factors have been demonstrated in previous studies and numerous practical applications have been carried out.

With the development of the L2 motivational self system, more context-specific studies emerged. For example, Apple, Falout and Hill (2013) conducted a motivational study, which included students majoring in science and engineering, and reported that ought-to L2 self was a more influential factor for learning behavior than the ideal L2 self for their students. Moritani and Manning (2016) conducted a similar study with first- and second- year university students majoring in Policy Studies in rural Japan. They depicted the students motivational dispositions at the beginning of the academic year with the questionnaire items previously validated in the literature. The psychological variables employed were ideal L2 self (IS), ought-to L2 self (OS), instrumentality-promotion (PRO), instrumentality-prevention (PRE), L2 confidence (CON), L2 anxiety (ANX), cultural interest (CI), attitude toward English speaking community (EC), and international posture (IP). They found that overall motivational disposition was instrumentally oriented for these students. These authors further classified their participants into five subgroups using a cluster analysis. Cluster analysis is often used for multivariate exploratory studies to identify more homogeneous subgroups because it does not require to presume those subgroups on a priori basis (Staples & Biber, 2015). Using this statistical technique, Moritani and Manning (2016) extracted five more homogeneous subgroups from their whole participant group and then they verified those five subgroups were sufficiently different from each other using Kruskal-Wallis test. Figure 1 shows the characteristics of the five subgroups extracted in their study.

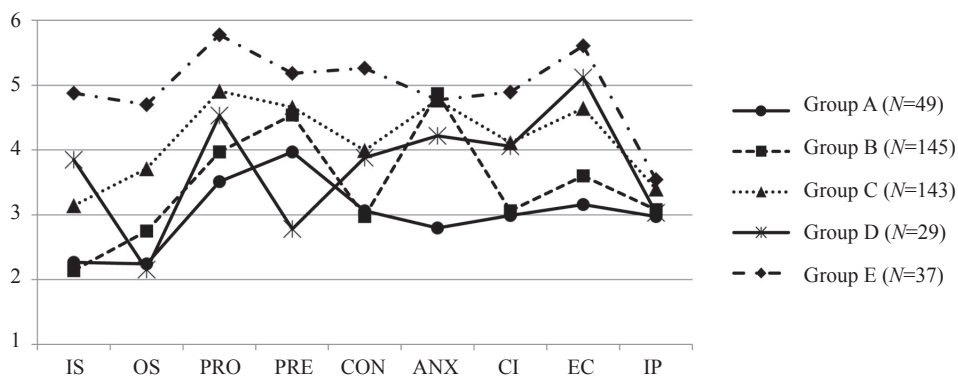


Figure 1. Five subgroups reported in Moritani & Manning (2016, p.81)

Group A is a low motivation group with low anxiety and low cultural social interest. Group B is a low motivation group with high instrumental orientation. Group C is an interim group with high instrumentality-promotion. Group D is a unique group with high IS and low OS. Moritani and Manning (2016) argued that this tendency a typical representation of the strong connection between IS and PRO and between OS and PRE, which have been observed in previous studies as well (Dörnyei, 2005; Taguchi, Magid & Papi, 2009). Group E is the most motivated group. This current study aims to investigate how members of these groups develop their motivational orientation after experiencing one academic year. The research question is as follows: How did first-year university students' motivational dispositions change after one academic year?

3. The study

In order to monitor the changes in L2 motivation, a set of questionnaires was conducted at the beginning and the end of the academic year.

Instruments

As mentioned earlier, the questionnaire was developed by adopting questionnaire items used in the previously-validated studies (Papi & Teimouri, 2012; Ryan, 2009; Taguchi, Magid & Papi, 2009; Yashima, 2009). It used a 6-point Likert scale, with 6 representing 'strongly agree' and 1 representing 'strongly disagree', and contained 53 items in total: thirty-six items measuring motivational variables, eight items regarding the Willingness to Communicate in English (WTC), and nine distractor items. The details of the items as well as internal consistency (Cronbach α) of each category are as follows:

1. Learning intention (LI: 3 items, $\alpha=.81$)
2. Attitudes toward English classes (AE: 3 items, $\alpha=.83$)
3. Ideal L2 self (IS: 3 items, $\alpha=.85$)
4. Ought-to L2 self (OS: 3 items, $\alpha=.74$)
5. Instrumentality promotion (PRO: 3 items, $\alpha=.74$)
6. Instrumentality prevention (PRE: 3 items, $\alpha=.78$)
7. L2 confidence (CON: 4 items, $\alpha=.77$)
8. L2 anxiety (ANX: 4 items, $\alpha=.86$)
9. Cultural interest (CI: 3 items, $\alpha=.78$)
10. Attitude toward English speaking community (EC: 3 items, $\alpha=.88$)
11. International posture (IP: 4 items, $\alpha=.80$)

Four versions of the questionnaire with the same question items in different order were created in order to reduce possible contamination resulting from the fatigue effect. Participants took approximately fifteen minutes to complete the questionnaire in both cases. The first questionnaire also included self-assessed language proficiency scales and a few questions regarding past experiences learning English. The second questionnaire did not include these items.

Participants & Procedures

The participants included 194 first-year university students (male: 122 (62.9%); female: 72 (37.1%)) majoring in Policy Studies in a rural area of Japan. The total population of the first year students was 225 at this university. The first questionnaire was administered during a freshman orientation in April 2015 and 220 samples were collected and later incomplete and invalid responses were eliminated. The second questionnaire was conducted in January 2016 during one of the final English classes for freshmen. In total, 194 validly paired samples were collected. The numbers of students in each group explained above are summarized in Table 1. Group D comprises only 10 students. Caution needs to be paid when interpreting the results of this group because of its small sample size.

Table 1
Summary of the participants' groups

<i>Groups</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>N</i>
Group A	Low motivation group with low anxiety and low cultural social interest	17
Group B	Low motivation group with high instrumental orientation	76
Group C	Interim group with high instrumentality-promotion	68
Group D	Unique group with high IS and low OS	10
Group E	Most motivated group	23

Analysis

In order to identify any differences in L2 learning motivation before and after one academic year, LI, AE and WTC were subject to the Wilcoxon signed-ranks test. The significance level was set at $p < .05$. After that, the changes in the motivational variables explained above were examined using the same method.

4. Results

Table 2 indicates the overall changes in motivation to learn English. LI decreased significantly from 3.39 to 3.19, but the decrease was slight as a small effect size indicates. There were no differences in scores on AE and WTC between pre- and post-survey.

Table 2
Overall changes in motivation

	Pre-survey		Post-survey		<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	Effect size(<i>r</i>)
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>			
LI	3.39	1.15	3.19	1.09	-3.574	.000*	.26
AE	3.24	1.19	3.17	1.12	-1.151	.250	.08
WTC	2.86	1.04	2.76	1.04	-1.234	.217	.09

Note. $N=194$, * $p < .05$

We are now looking into five subgroups. As shown in Table 3, Group A did not show any significant changes in LI, AE or WTC. Categorized as a low-motivation group, all of these scores remained lower than the mid-point of the scale (3.50) in the post-survey. However, changes in motivational orientation were observed (Figure 2). Statistically significant differences were found in PRO, CI, and EC. PRO improved from 3.65 to 4.00 ($Z=-2.343, p=.019, r=.57$), CI improved from 3.21 to 3.78 ($Z=-3.064, p=.002, r=.74$), and EC improved 3.22 to 3.82 ($Z=-2.510, p=.012, r=.61$). The effect sizes in all of these cases were large.

Table 3
Changes in motivation (Group A)

	Pre-survey		Post-survey		Z	p	Effect size(r)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
LI	2.90	1.10	3.14	1.23	-1.731	.083	.43
AE	2.86	1.17	3.20	1.24	-1.574	.115	.38
WTC	2.57	.75	2.68	.98	-.937	.349	.23

Note. N=17,*p <.05

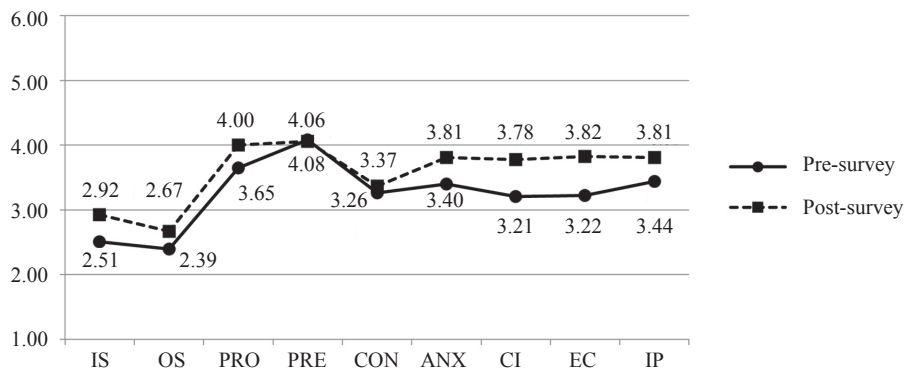


Figure 2. Changes in motivational orientation (Group A)

There were also no significant differences found in LI, AE or WTC in Group B (Table 4). This group is another low-motivation group. Similar to Group A, their scores for these variables also remained below the mid-point of the scale. The changes in motivational orientation (Figure 3) were also observed, but the changes were somewhat different from Group A. Group B significantly decreased PRO ($Z=-2.513, p=.012, r=.29$), PRE ($Z=-2.549, p=.011, r=.29$), and ANX ($Z=-3.398, p=.001, r=.39$) while they increased CI ($Z=-2.202, p=.028, r=.25$) and IP ($Z=-5.311, p=.000, r=.61$). The increase in IP stands out due to the relatively large effect size.

Table 4
Changes in motivation (Group B)

	Pre-survey		Post-survey		Z	p	Effect size(r)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
LI	2.80	.95	2.79	1.04	-.145	.885	.02
AE	2.62	.96	2.76	1.02	-1.684	.092	.19
WTC	2.39	.94	2.55	.99	-1.696	.090	.20

Note. N=76,*p <.05

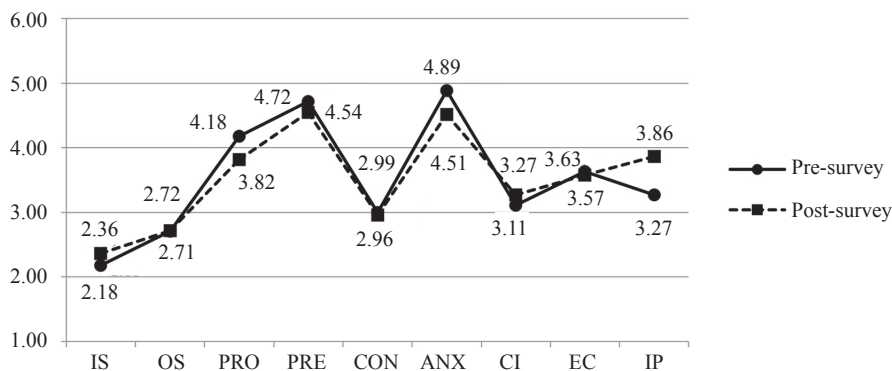


Figure 3. Changes in motivational orientation (Group B)

Group C is an interim group and one of the biggest groups in this study. As Table 5 shows, they decreased LI from 3.61, just above the mid-point, to 3.36, just below the mid-point. The decrease was statistically significant with large effect size, which means the decrease was serious. There were no changes in AE or WTC. Assumingly, this serious decrease in their motivation occurred due to changes in motivational orientation (Figure 4). Significant differences were found in IS ($Z=-2.931, p=.003, r=.61$), OS ($Z=-2.781, p=.005, r=.58$), PRO ($Z=-3.991, p=.000, r=.83$), CON ($Z=-3.281, p=.001, r=.69$), and EC ($Z=-3.81, p=.001, r=.71$). All of these cases have large effect sizes. Additionally, their ANX showed a significant decrease ($Z=-2.017, p=.044, r=.42$).

Table 5
Changes in motivation (Group C)

	Pre-survey		Post-survey		Z	p	Effect size(r)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
LI	3.61	.82	3.36	.99	-2.878	.004*	.60
AE	3.49	.97	3.31	.99	-1.882	.060	.39
WTC	3.01	.86	2.79	1.03	-1.799	.072	.38

Note. $N=68, *p < .05$

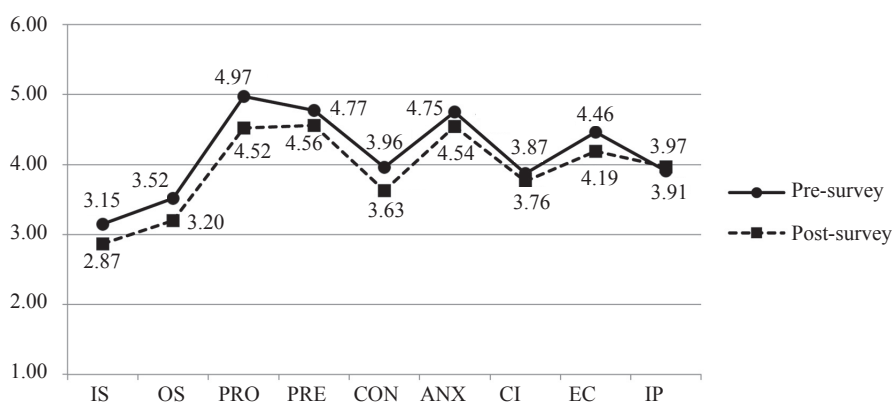


Figure 4. Changes in motivational orientation (Group C)

The members of Group D, the unique group with high IS and low OS, showed an even sharper drop in LI, from 4.13 to 3.23, as shown in Table 6. The members of this group also changed their attitudes toward English learning as indicated in AE. These changes were perceived as negative changes. Their motivational orientation also significantly changed in PRO ($Z=-2.059, p=.040, r=.65$) and CI ($Z=-2.572, p=.010, r=.81$) in a negative way (Figure 5).

Table 6
Changes in motivation (Group D)

	Pre-survey		Post-survey		Z	p	Effect size(r)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
LI	4.13	.87	3.23	1.18	-2.682	.007*	.85
AE	4.03	.88	3.43	.97	-2.360	.018*	.75
WTC	3.45	.91	2.96	.70	-1.790	.074	.57

Note. N=10,*p <.05

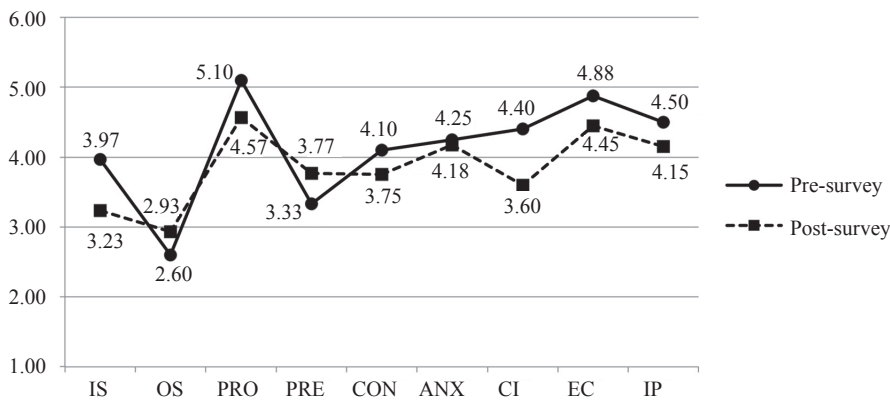


Figure 5. Changes in motivational orientation (Group D)

The last group is the most motivated group of the five. As shown in Table 7, their LI showed significant decrease from 4.71 to 4.00, which is a large decrease as evinced in the large effect size ($r=.56$). Their motivational orientation also changed. As Figure 6 indicates, their CON decreased ($Z=-2.910, p=.004, r=.61$) and their IP also slightly went down ($Z=-2.043, p=.041, r=.43$).

Table 7
Changes in motivation (Group E)

	Pre-survey		Post-survey		Z	p	Effect size(r)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
LI	4.71	1.30	4.00	.81	-2.678	.007*	.56
AE	4.45	1.30	3.99	1.27	-1.646	.100	.34
WTC	3.92	1.08	3.33	1.22	-1.770	.077	.37

Note. N=23,*p <.05

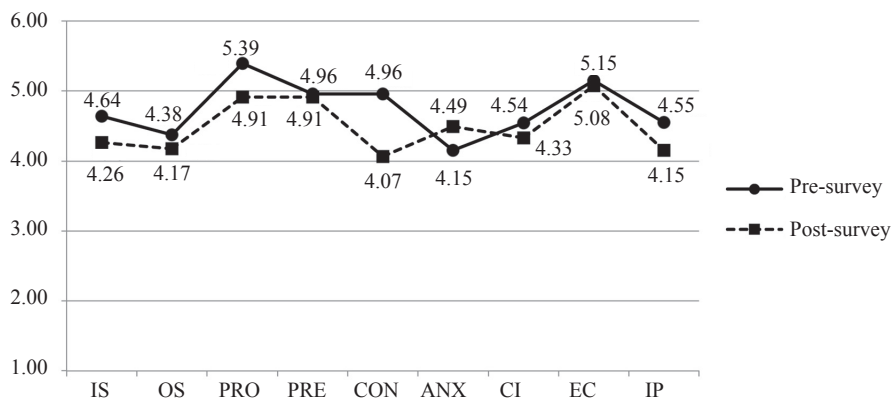


Figure 6. Changes in motivational orientation (Group E)

5. Discussion and pedagogical implications

The data obtained showed that the participants' overall motivation to learn English (LI) diminished while their attitudes toward English learning (AE) and WTC showed no change (Table 2).

Group A was one of the low-level groups, but showed improvement, with large effect sizes, in PRO, CI, and EC. This combination of results shows that students gained some interest in culture, and perhaps realized that English might help them be more successful in the future. However, to improve their proficiency and have a strong enough desire to actually initiate or maintain communication with people from other cultures, increasing their attitudes toward English learning (AE) and WTC should be emphasized. It might be possible to improve the AE and WTC by harnessing their motivation to investigate other cultures. This could be done by providing students with opportunities to interact in low-risk environments with people from other countries. Introducing international chat rooms for language learners in class would be a practical example of this approach.

The data revealed that Group B saw themselves in an international setting better than they did at the beginning of the academic year, while they slightly decreased their PRO ($Z=-2.513$, $p=.012$, $r=.29$) and PRE ($Z=-2.549$, $p=.011$, $r=.29$). These results demonstrate that even while observable changes in language learning motivation may not be detected, psychological changes can occur. English is a powerful tool in international settings and a certain level of proficiency can have pragmatic benefits if they see their future selves in international settings. In this case, teachers should help students use their increased IP as a catalyst to enhance other factors contributing toward language learning motivation. Drawing attention to opportunities to be a more active global citizen and using providing exposure to role models that can demonstrate the usefulness of English would be an appropriate first step.

The overall results of this study indicate that the decline in motivation was caused mostly due to the sharp drop in motivation of relatively motivated students at the beginning of the year (Group C, D, E). Groups C, and D both decreased their PRO scores. Group C ($N=68$) decreased their score for PRO considerably ($r=.83$). It is reasonable to assume that instrumentality-promotion affected

their overall motivation to learn English. Decreased scores were observed in other factors, too. Their ideal L2 self became less clear. They felt less pressure (OS), lost confidence (CON), and lost interest in people in English speaking countries (EC). The learning experience indicated in AE did not change while their motivation declined. Although the learning experience is generally considered to be the most influential factor for learning motivation in the L2 motivational self system (Dörnyei, 2005; Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, 2009), more self-related internal factors seemed to affect their learning motivation in this case. Whether the students are aware of these changes, changes to their self perception did occur and the students seem to be less interested in investing effort toward learning English.

Group D's PRO score dropped sharply during one year course of study, as evinced in the large effect size, $r=.65$. Although, as mentioned earlier, caution is needed when interpreting this score, as this group was only comprised of 10 students. Changes in a few students could easily have affected the mean score of the entire group.

As for Group E, the situation is a bit different. Their scores for CON and IP decreased significantly. They were optimistic about mastering English at the start of their college education, but felt less confident one year later. This is worrisome, as people usually don't invest effort into things they believe they can't accomplish or attain (Self-Efficacy Theory, Bandura, 1997). Since no changes in IS, OS and other variables were observed, the reduction of L2 confidence might have had direct impact on their learning motivation. Their international posture also decreased, though it is still relatively high.

Interestingly, the students' attitudes toward IP became somewhat more unified over the course of the year. The post survey IP scores of each group are 3.81 (Group A), 3.86 (Group B), 3.91 (Group C), 4.15 (Group D), 4.15 (Group E), respectively. Some averages increased while others decreased, but all scores moved toward the middle. The participants of this study were immersed in the culture of this university for one year. It seems that they may be adopting a community standard. This is an unexpected observation. People are probably not aware of this phenomenon. However, this evidence suggests that rather than forming subgroups of like-minded individuals, the entire university, not just the English program, is functioning as one big Community of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), as people gradually influence each other toward conformity. If the other scores are examined from the viewpoint of standardization, the same explanation can be applied to changes in motivation (LI). The low-motivation groups maintained their level of motivation (LI) and motivated groups diminished their motivation (LI). In this case, one group was more resistant to change, but the group as a whole still became more unified.

The results obtained in this study implies that students grew to meet a collective standard, which brings positive changes to some students, while negative changes to others. In the case of levels of motivation (LI), the low-level groups seem to have had a larger influence on others. To make the change more positive, instrumental promotional goal setting is one approach that could be attempted. The students in this study were generally instrumentally orientated and the reduction of instrumentality was observed in some groups. Retaining or regaining instrumentality is one strategy that would be appropriate for this group of participants. This could be accomplished by introducing

periodic reminders about the pragmatic benefits of having a strong English ability and higher test scores. However, it is not a universal solution. While focusing on English as a means to an end may be easier to immediately envision for students, it might not sustain their motivation far beyond job hunting. Self-enhancement programs and strategies to improve their willingness to communicate should also be implemented to equip students with more communicative English ability applicable in international settings, in which they see themselves. Helping them get further involved in international events will also set them on a course to continue being active and prepare them for life long learning.

One of the difficulties faced when suggesting pedagogical implications is that the groups are not isolated. The groups discussed in this paper had been made using statistical analysis for the purpose of research, but in reality students are sorted by proficiency test results for required English courses and by interest, or convenience, for elective English courses. Plus, they are all mixed up for classes outside the English program. The slow gravitation toward a collective standard of thought is demonstrative of this mixed group formation. Suggesting a focus on one thing or emphasis on another is easy to do while writing this paper, but difficult to implement when the students are mixed together. Separating groups by attitudes, as determined through the surveys and analyses conducted, would be a unique management technique and enable the implementation of more informed and targeted motivation strategies. However, it would bring many other potential problems, such as polarizing attitudes and promoting extremism, a phenomenon that has been observed with the increased use of filters in social media (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015). Diversity should remain in place.

Understanding that there is likely a gradual shift toward a subconscious consensus in some areas, and that students with lower-levels of motivation tend to have a bigger influence on others, is enlightening and can be used to approach the situation differently. Carefully considering student-student interaction is especially important, as peer influence may be stronger than that of teachers, parents, and other adults in many situations (Mellanby, Rees & Tripp, 2000 cited in Newton & Ender, 2010, p. 9). Therefore, strategies to enhance campus-wide motivation levels need to be given more consideration and priority. Perhaps the most effective way to improve language-learning motivation is to make it a priority of the university as a whole, as opposed to a required subject on the side. The poor attitudes toward English learning and WTC, observed in this study, should be addressed at a campus-wide level. More opportunities for intercultural communication and exchange need to be incorporated into the curriculum. While systematic efforts to further raise our levels of international posture are made, opportunities for active involvement, using L2, need to be created as well. Working to create an atmosphere of general enthusiasm and a campus-wide buzz of excitement about intercultural communication and using language might be a more effective strategy than trying to support individuals.

6. Conclusion

This study followed up on an earlier study conducted by Moritani and Manning (2016), which used previously-validated survey items found in the literature and cluster analysis to categorize

participants into five subgroups. This present study sought to answer the research question; How did first-year university students' motivational dispositions change after one academic year? The survey from the previous study, given at the start of the school year, was administered once again to freshmen at the end of the academic year. A total of 194 validly paired samples were collected. Analysis successfully identified several areas of motivational change for each of the five groups. It also revealed that while the participants' attitudes toward English learning and WTC did not change, their overall motivation to learn English diminished, largely due to a drop in motivation from more highly motivated students at the beginning of the year. It was also observed that the students' attitudes toward international posture and learning intentions became more similar over one year's time. It was suggested that the students are influencing each other and that a campus-wide effort to raise motivation might be the most effective approach. This study illustrated how learning experience can influence students' learning motivation as Dörnyei (2005) emphasized. It was disappointing to observe language-learning motivation diminish, but the results of this study enabled a better understanding of the motivational system as whole and revealed alternative approaches for potential improvement. It is hoped that the results of this study will prove useful in taking a more informed and strategic approach to improving motivation for language learning in the future.

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