

Language Learning Motivation and Achievement : Sri Lankan University Students of Japanese as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

This study explores the motivational dimensions and their relationship with Japanese language achievement of Sri Lankan university students. An exploratory factor analysis demonstrated 7 factors of motivation and a regression analysis showed that only 2 motivational factors significantly affect achievement. Goal Achievement showed a positive significant effect, whereas Incentive Orientation showed a negative significant effect on Japanese language achievement. Influenced by social, cultural and contextual factors in Sri Lanka, student goals seemed to be more outbound towards the target country, Japan and long-term instrumentalities seemed to shape achievement as opposed to short-term instrumentalities.

Keywords: Sri Lankan university students of JFL, motivation, achievement

1. Introduction

Motivation, concerns what moves a person to make certain choices, to engage in action, to expend effort and persist in action (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2001: 3). More research on the effects of different motivational dimensions on second language acquisition (SLA) seems to be needed due to the ambiguity of past results (Svanes, 1987). Contextual or cultural factors may have contributed in producing such conflicting results in extant studies (Clément & Kruidenier, 1983). Dörnyei (1990) also argued that research on motivation and SLA should consider the social and pragmatic dimensions of motivation. Motivational dimensions found in second language (L2) contexts may not be directly applicable to foreign language (FL) contexts (Dörnyei, 1990). Achievement has an important impact on student progress in school (Guay and Vallerand, 1996), and many researchers have shown that motivation is an important factor to consider in examining achievement (Grolnick et al., 1991). Extant studies have investigated how different types

of motivation affect student achievement in L2/FL acquisition in several social contexts such as Canada (Gardner & Lambert, 1972), Nepal (Hashino, 2000), Singapore (Guo & Okita, 2001), and Thailand (Narita, 1998). However, Sri Lankan JFL (Japanese as a Foreign Language) student motivation and its relationship with students' Japanese language (JL) achievement have not received adequate attention although Japanese has a history of more than 30 years in the Sri Lankan education system. Therefore, the current study is original in examining possible motivational dimensions in the Sri Lankan context and investigating the effects of each different dimension of motivation on students' JL achievement. Furthermore, it is important for Sri Lankan teachers to understand what types of motivation help students achieve their JL achievement, thereby teachers can adapt their teaching strategies.

Japanese language has a long history in the Sri Lankan education field. It was first introduced to Sri Lanka in the 1960's to the private sector, and was adopted later as an optional subject for national level qualifying examinations¹. Japanese was introduced to the university system in 1978 and currently is offered as main and auxiliary subjects with only two universities² offering it as a main/major subject. Passing Japanese at the G.C.E. A/L examination is a pre-requisite to continue in the university level. Apart from Japanese, several other foreign languages (Chinese, French, German, Hindi, Korean, Malay, Persian, Russian, and Urdu) are taught in the university system³. In the university, examination scores are crucial in graduating, and especially scoring high marks is a significant factor in obtaining a better grade at graduation. Depending on a higher GPA (Grade Point Average), students can obtain a First Class, Second Class Upper, or a Second Class Lower Division pass as opposed to an Ordinary pass. For example, securing a First Class or a Second Class Upper Division pass makes the student eligible for entering positions in the academic and government administration fields, which is

¹ General Certificate of Ordinary Level (G.C.E. O/L) and General Certificate of Advanced Level (G.C.E. A/L) examinations.

² University of Kelaniya and Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka.

³ University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka, Admission to Undergraduate Courses of the Universities in Sri Lanka, 2013-2014.

considered highly prestigious in the Sri Lankan society. In the current study, I examine the dimensions of motivation in the Sri Lankan university JFL context and the effects of different motivational dimensions on student JL achievement.

2. Studies on Motivation

The study reported here mainly draws upon the social-psychological perspective of motivation, emphasizing on attitudes towards the target language, its community and social context of learning, distinguishing between the “integrative” (a sincere and personal interest in the target language, people and its culture), and “instrumental” (the practical value and advantages of the language) orientations (Gardner and Lambert, 1972). Drawing on the notion that student motivation is highly influenced by social, cultural and contextual factors, research on JFL motivation is conducted in various geographical locations, i.e, Far-East Russia (Ikari, 2005), Nepal (Hashino, 2000), New Zealand (Nuibe et al., 1995), Singapore (Guo & Okita, 2001), Taiwan (Yang, 2011), Thailand (Narita, 1998), and Ukraine (Onishi, 2010) demonstrating different motivational dimensions. Furthermore, some studies have attempted in examining the relationship of motivation and achievement (i.e, Guo & Okita, 2001; Hashino, 2000; Narita, 1998). Extant studies on Japanese language education in Sri Lanka report of ‘economic’ (Kano, 1996), ‘educational’, ‘practical’ (Miyagishi, 2000; 2001), ‘integrative’, ‘instrumental’ (Inoue, 1999) and ‘incentive’ (Yamamoto, 2001) motives. Ozaki (2002) points out the ‘passing exams’ motive while Wada (2007) reports of ‘friendship’, ‘employment’ and ‘understanding Japanese people’ motives. However, these studies do not pay adequate attention in exploring student motivation comprehensively. Considering the highly competitive nature of the Sri Lankan education system, its importance placed upon achievement, it is important to explore the motivation and its relationship with JL achievement of Sri Lankan university JFL students.

3. Method

In order to explore the dimensions of student motivation in learning Japanese, I developed a questionnaire using 7-point Likert scales, which have been published in the

literature (Gardner and Lambert, 1959; Ikari, 2005; Narita, 1998; Nuibe et al, 1995; Onishi, 2010; Schmidt & Watanabe, 2001). First, I designed the questionnaire in English considering the availability of scales in the literature. I translated the English scales into Sinhala⁴ where two native speakers back translated the questionnaire, and checked its comprehensibility. I pre-tested the questionnaire with a randomly selected student sample through their Japanese language instructors in Sri Lanka, discussed comprehension issues, and subsequently revised the questionnaire slightly.

I selected University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka for the survey, since it has a comparatively longer history in teaching JFL and a larger JFL student population. A total of 126 students (1st year: 44, 2nd year: 39, 3rd year: 43) learning Japanese in the Department of Modern Languages, took part in the survey. I removed 6 incomplete responses resulting in 120 completed questionnaires. I requested for additional details such as age, sex, and mother tongue. Students' average age ranged from 20 to 24 years. Participants of this survey have been studying Japanese for 2 years in the high school and/or another 2 years in the middle school. In the university, students take Japanese with 1 or 2 other main subjects, and several auxiliary/elective subjects depending on the credit requirement. At the entrance to university they are expected to possess a knowledge equivalent to Japanese Language Proficiency Test level 4 (N4) or above and level 2 (N2) or above at the completion of the degree program.

I used student Japanese language final examination scores as a measure of JL achievement (Guo & Okita, 2001; Narita, 1998) to minimize any possible effect of knowledge gap that would result from implementing a single common test. I requested teachers of each year to indicate the range of marks (e.g, 100-90, 89-80) each student received in order to obtain confidential examination scores. The final examination is a written test on grammar, comprehension and composition (70 marks). Short tests during the semester evaluate speaking, listening, and culture (30 marks), which make the total of 100. The same criterion applies for all 3 academic years.

⁴ Sinhala is one of the two official languages in Sri Lanka and more than 70% of the population are Sinhala speakers.

4. Results

Using the SPSS software (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), I conducted an exploratory factor analysis to find out the constituent components of student motivation and a regression analysis to examine their relationship with JL achievement. Before analyzing the data, I performed a data validation test using Cronbach's α (> 0.7) which fulfilled acceptance criteria (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988). The Scree Plot suggested that a 7-factor solution is best to describe the data after varimax rotation (I removed open ended question, and 8 questions with low communality < 0.45). Total variance explained is 58%. I adopted question items with factor loadings of more than 0.40 as constituents of each factor, and labeled them based on their contents.

F1 "Incentive Orientation" deals with incentives such as qualifying for university education, gaining social recognition and a high status through Japanese language study. Acquiring information about Japanese economy, politics, history and literature, interest in reading Japanese magazines, newspapers and novels are the main items on F2 and I labeled this factor as "Understanding Japan". F3 "Goal Achievement" concerns accomplishment of future goals such as study, work, permanent residency and travel in Japan, whereas F4 constitutes of items dealing with interest in cultural artifacts such as Noh, Kabuki, movies, dramas, and understanding the Japanese way of life. Q 44 'I want to write a letter to my Japanese friends' also loaded on this factor, since correspondence with friends such as pen friends gives first hand information on cultural aspects. Accordingly, I labeled this factor as "Interest in Culture". F5 consists of items related to Japanese language study i.e, fondness towards teachers, feeling of enjoyment derived through study and class. However, Q 32 'I like Japanese food' and Q 16 'I am interested in Japanese fashion' which seem less related to Japanese language study also loaded on this. It is natural for young students to have a liking towards Japanese food and fashion as these are rare chances for them to practically experience the language they learn. Therefore, I labeled this factor as "Enthusiasm in Japanese Language Study". F6 "Knowledge and Exchange Orientation" constitutes of items related to the importance of foreign language study and broadening the world vision, utilizing Japanese language knowledge in

Table 1 : Factor loadings and contents of Japanese language learning motivation

F1 Incentive Orientation ($\alpha = 0.80$)		F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7
Q 8	I wanted to get good marks in the A/L exam.	0.73	0.07	-0.06	0.05	-0.05	0.10	0.07
Q 10	I studied Japanese at secondary/ high school.	0.73	0.06	0.00	-0.16	-0.03	0.13	0.06
Q 6	I can gain the respect of other people if I know a third language and it will add to my social status.	0.65	0.04	-0.04	0.19	0.11	0.15	0.09
Q 40	I am proud of myself, because I can learn a third language that others do not.	0.59	-0.12	0.14	0.31	0.06	0.19	0.08
Q 9	It is an easy language compared to other languages offered in the university.	0.56	0.08	0.09	0.09	0.13	-0.07	0.34
Q 12	Japanese is a popular language in Sri Lanka these days.	0.50	0.41	0.24	-0.10	0.25	-0.01	0.11
Q 35	It will enable me to be a more knowledgeable person.	0.46	0.20	0.30	0.01	0.19	0.34	0.15
Q 13	I want to read and understand Japanese comics (<i>Manga</i>).	0.43	0.40	0.20	0.14	0.34	0.01	-0.13
F2 Understanding Japan ($\alpha = 0.85$)								
Q 15	I am interested in Japanese economy and politics.	0.19	0.80	-0.01	-0.08	0.03	0.11	0.06
Q 14	I am interested in Japanese literature.	-0.05	0.73	0.04	0.29	0.21	0.04	0.03
Q 11	I want to know about Japanese history.	0.14	0.62	0.12	0.17	0.28	0.18	-0.02
Q 18	I want to read Japanese magazines, newspapers and novels.	0.09	0.62	0.12	0.45	0.15	-0.01	0.03
Q 36	I am interested in Kanji characters.	-0.07	0.61	0.07	0.12	0.16	0.24	0.13
Q 19	I want to write articles and essays in Japanese.	0.10	0.57	0.05	0.53	-0.09	0.19	0.00
F3 Goal Achievement ($\alpha = 0.92$)								
Q 24	I want to pursue further study in Japan in the future.	0.06	0.09	0.81	0.02	0.15	-0.12	0.04
Q 27	I am interested in working in Japan after graduation.	0.04	0.12	0.80	0.06	0.04	0.20	0.14
Q 25	I want to live in Japan permanently in future.	-0.01	0.14	0.80	0.09	0.13	0.12	0.04
Q 43	I want to visit and travel in Japan.	0.13	-0.10	0.66	0.27	0.22	0.12	0.00
F4 Interest in Culture ($\alpha = 0.88$)								
Q 21	I am interested in traditional culture (Noh, Kabuki, Sado, Ikebana etc.).	0.08	0.16	0.05	0.67	0.12	0.10	0.19
Q 22	I want to have a further understanding of Japanese people, their culture and their way of life.	-0.07	0.26	0.05	0.66	0.10	0.20	0.08
Q 20	I want to watch Japanese movies, TV dramas and videos.	0.33	0.07	0.30	0.59	0.34	-0.06	0.03
Q 44	I want to write a letter to my Japanese friend(s).	0.12	0.12	0.11	0.57	0.24	0.14	0.07
Q 17	I want to sing and listen to Japanese (pop) songs and understand them.	0.39	0.33	0.19	0.43	0.36	-0.02	-0.08
F5 Enthusiasm in Japanese Language Study ($\alpha = 0.95$)								
Q 4	I like my Japanese language teachers.	0.02	0.26	-0.02	0.04	0.75	0.02	0.05
Q 3	I enjoy the Japanese class.	0.03	0.15	0.19	0.27	0.75	-0.01	0.10
Q 32	I like Japanese food.	0.27	0.09	0.27	0.19	0.60	0.05	0.01
Q 2	I enjoy the learning of Japanese language.	0.01	0.13	0.29	0.34	0.57	0.17	-0.05
Q 16	I am interested in Japanese fashion.	0.34	0.29	0.23	0.10	0.43	0.14	0.24

F6 Knowledge and Exchange Orientation ($\alpha = 0.90$)								
Q 28	It will help me gain new ideas and broaden my worldview.	0.09	0.25	0.05	0.18	-0.02	0.69	0.05
Q 29	Studying foreign languages is an important part of education.	0.09	-0.04	-0.14	-0.16	0.39	0.61	0.28
Q 30	I want to make Sri Lanka a technologically and economically developed country like Japan.	0.27	0.27	0.15	0.16	-0.17	0.60	0.09
Q 31	I want to be a bridge/mediator between Sri Lanka and Japan in cultural & international relations.	0.17	0.24	0.41	0.25	0.00	0.54	-0.12
Q 48	It will enable me to get self-esteem boost.	0.46	-0.03	0.15	0.26	0.19	0.49	-0.18
Q 33	I want to be friendly with Japanese people and knowing Japanese would enable me to communicate with them easily.	0.18	-0.04	0.30	0.37	0.31	0.46	-0.21
F7 External Influence Orientation ($\alpha = 0.88$)								
Q 34	My friends influenced me to learn Japanese.	-0.02	-0.03	-0.04	-0.11	0.11	0.06	0.71
Q 46	My parents urged me to study Japanese language.	0.16	-0.11	0.22	0.13	-0.14	-0.14	0.67
Q 47	Member/s of my family/ relative works in a Japanese related company or engages in activities related to Japan.	0.14	0.10	-0.06	0.26	-0.06	-0.06	0.58
Q 37	It will help me to get a promotion more easily in my future career.	0.21	0.12	0.13	0.01	0.18	0.32	0.54
Q 38	I think it is one of the most widely used languages in the Asian region.	0.03	0.22	0.02	0.05	0.05	0.39	0.49
Q 39	I like playing Japanese video and internet games.	0.42	0.08	0.16	0.26	0.24	0.00	0.45
Cumulative variance %		25.9	33.3	39.7	45.0	49.9	54.1	58.0

Table 2. Effect of seven factors on JL achievement

Independent variables	Dependent variable
	JL achievement (examination scores)
Incentive Orientation (F1)	-0.227 **
Understanding Japan (F2)	-0.002
Goal Achievement (F3)	0.245 **
Interest in Culture (F4)	-0.051
Enthusiasm in Japanese Language Study (F5)	0.074
Knowledge and Exchange Orientation (F6)	-0.110
External Influence Orientation (F7)	-0.042
Model fit (Adjusted R ²)	0.385

Notes: Multiple regression analysis. Control variables: academic year, sex.

† $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Sample: 120 students.

developing own country and for international exchange with Japan. F7 “External Influence Orientation” constitutes of items concerning influence on Japanese language study by various external parties such as family, friends, and relatives (refer Table 1).

In order to examine the effect of different motivational dimensions on JL achievement, I conducted a regression analysis using the 7 factors as independent variables, JL examination scores as the dependant variable, and academic year, student sex as control variables. Results showed that effects of only two factors are statistically significant on JL achievement. Goal Achievement (F3) has a positive significant effect, whereas Incentive Orientation (F1) has a negative significant effect on JL achievement (refer Table 2).

5. Discussion

The current study explores the motivational dimensions of university JFL students in the social context of Sri Lanka, and the effects of these different dimensions on JL achievement. While Goal Achievement (F3) showed a positive effect, Incentive Orientation (F1) showed a negative effect on JL achievement. The following discussion bears on the social, cultural and contextual background of these findings.

Goal Achievement (F3) positively affects JL achievement. In line with Gardner and Lambert's (1972) dual classification of L2 motivation, Goal Achievement (F3) in this particular sample is an embodiment of the practical value and advantages associated with the language (instrumental motivation) in the form of future goals such as further study, work, residency and travel in Japan. Particularly, studying in Japan is largely dependent on procuring financial assistance such as a scholarship, since self financing is difficult. In this particular university, a few scholarships are awarded to selected students a year to study in Japan (short/long term programs), on the basis of examination and selection test scores. Furthermore, obtaining employment opportunity and permanent residency consequently are directly connected with JL achievement, as the Japanese government is seeking individuals with sound Japanese language knowledge. However, travel which does not necessarily demand high achievement in the language might be a secondary motive which is realized subsequent to study, work and residency in Japan. In Nepal (Hashino, 2000), despite the lack of practical value Japanese has in the society, instrumentally motivated students ('to be a Japanese language teacher', 'to study in Japan') were found to be high achievers. In Singapore (Guo & Okita, 2001), job orientation

emerged as the 3rd predictor of JL achievement. Contrastingly, in Thailand (Narita, 1998) instrumental motivation had a negative effect on JL achievement. However, Japanese-related local employment opportunities are not prominent in the motivational construct of Sri Lankan students as opposed to extant studies (Guo & Okita, 2001; Hashino, 2000; Narita, 1998). Work component in Goal Achievement (F3) Q27 'I am interested in working in Japan after graduation' denotes a desire to work in Japan. I contend two reasons for this tendency: the lack of Japanese-related employment in the country (Japan Foundation, 2013) and student perception towards working in Japan as more lucrative and prospective when compared to working in Sri Lanka which is still a developing country.

Incentive Orientation (F1) negatively affects JL achievement. A similar result is found in Narita (1998), where students with an Incentive Orientation did not score high marks. This orientation represents the highly competitive 'exam-oriented' Sri Lankan education system and student perceptions of knowing a new and different third language (other than the mother tongue and English). Scoring high marks is a crucial factor for advancing grades and graduating both in school and in the university. Moreover, when compared to students of other subjects, Japanese language students are comparatively few in number⁵. Consequently, students find learning Japanese as a means of acquiring social recognition. However, results suggest that these motives do not affect achievement positively. Reasons I claim for this trend is twofold. First, as opposed to the strict and competitive school education system, (Q8 'I wanted to get good marks at the A/L exam') the looser, free-oriented and less competitive university education system might have changed student attitudes towards scoring high marks. Second, students' desire to gain social recognition through Japanese language study is not materialized due to the low social status and lack of utilitarian value Japanese has in the Sri Lankan society when compared to English.

⁵ A total of 261 out of 950 Arts/Humanities students study Japanese in Kelaniya and Sabaragamuwa Universities (data from each university), whereas 4250 Arts/Humanities students are enrolled in the entire university system (University Grants Commission data).

Although both Goal Achievement (F3) and Incentive Orientation (F1) represent pragmatic and instrumental aspects of learning a foreign language, they influence language achievement in completely opposite ways. I contend that this tendency is unique to Sri Lankan university students who seem to place more importance on enhancing professional career and future goals: long-term instrumental motivation, rather than focusing on good grades: short-term instrumental motivation (Kyriacou & Benmansour, 1997).

6. Conclusion

One of the interesting findings emerging from this study is that, student goals which lead to JL achievement are more outbound rather than inbound as they are directed towards the target country, Japan. Second, JL achievement depends on long-term instrumentalities, but not on short-term instrumentalities. Another important practical implication is that, more language-related motivational components i.e., Understanding Japan (F2), Interest in Culture (F4), Enthusiasm in Japanese Language Study (F5), Knowledge and Exchange Orientation (F6) do not affect JL achievement in the Sri Lankan university context. Therefore, teachers may adopt a teaching strategy which encourages these aspects of language learning by inculcating positive attitudes towards the Japanese culture, and intrinsic aspects of learning. This study is the first of its kind in a Sri Lankan context and these results may be specific to the university level. Thus, future research may consider Japanese language learning in the school level in order to see whether these findings are generalizable to JFL learning as a whole. Replication in other student samples in both Sri Lanka and other countries would help in improving the findings of this study. Nevertheless, the current study provides key insights in understanding how student motivation relates to JL achievement and the influencing social, cultural and contextual factors in Sri Lanka.

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