

Motivation to study English: The case of Japanese expats living in Vietnam

Abstract

English as a lingua franca is becoming increasingly common in as a tool for communication in EFL countries. Such is the case in Vietnam. Historically, the Japanese have been a cooperative economic partner with the Vietnamese. In light of these two realities, we wanted to see if Japanese expats who had lived or who were living in Vietnam were more motivated to study English than when they were in high school or university. The results from an online questionnaire revealed that they were significantly more motivated to study English because of their days in Vietnam compared to when they had been in high school or university and that the driving factors were their need to use English on a day-to-day basis as well as experiencing a psychological shift in their mindset regarding the role of English.

Keywords

English as-a-lingua franca, L2 motivation, Educational motivation, L2 Ought-to Self, L2 Ideal Self, Need

Introduction

The notion of using English as an everyday language in a country where English is not a native language is becoming a reality for many expats and their families who are non-native speakers of English themselves. As one would expect, competency in English must be at an appropriate level so that the EFL users can effectively communicate with their EFL counterparts. If one side or the other lacks the expected proficiency, they will not only risk immediate disadvantages in understanding but there can be serious collateral consequences in business and social matters (Ozdemir, 2014). This is especially true in southeast Asia where English is now being regularly used as both a lingua franca and an international

language for communication business and social settings (Kirkpatrick, 2010; Doan, Pham, Pham & Khan, 2017).

Vietnam is a case-in-point. Since the introduction of the Đổi Mới Policy in 1986, which promotes the internationalization of Vietnamese society with English language learning as one of its main tools, the value of English has steadily risen to new heights, and, consequently, has created a very robust interest in the learning and using of English (Ngo & Tran, 2024). By internationalizing their economy with English at the wheel, the net effect for Vietnam is that it has become a country with a rapidly decreasing poverty rate and a stable economy. The influence of English has become widespread to the point that most job advertisements now include a requirement stating that potential employees must possess 'good' levels of English to perform their duties effectively.

Overall, Vietnam has become English-dependent in many ways, and, as such, the ability to communicate in English effectively has become a necessary condition for success in international interaction at all levels of society. Pragmatically, this implies that when Vietnam's international partners are in Vietnam for whatever reason, English is the go-to language (Nghia & Vu, 2024).

One of Vietnam's most reliable partners has been Japan due to the cooperative spirit the two nations have forged over the years both economically and socially (Strangio, 2023). This has only accelerated in recent years as Japanese companies have continued to expand their presence and invest heavily in Vietnam (Anonymous, 2023). Of course, along with Japanese companies come Japanese workers and their families, many of whom live in Vietnam in support of their companies. As both countries, in theory, promote English in education in both primary and secondary school, rather than using Vietnamese (and in line with the principles behind the Đổi Mới Policy), English is the natural choice for communication between the two sides.

Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has also emphasized the importance of communication skills in English, pointing out that a) all Japanese students learning English should ultimately be able to use English to interact with others, and, perhaps more importantly, b) Japanese language learners should be acutely aware that English communication skills are essential to communicate effectively on the global stage (MEXT, 2011).

Considering that English has made significant strides in Vietnam--the host country in this picture--the natural question is how has the Japanese expat community fared in this partnership? In light of this, we intend to take a closer look at those Japanese individuals who are residing in or who have resided in Vietnam to see how they would assess their own English language learning by asking them (via questionnaire) to provide a present self-assessment and to balance that with a reflective self-assessment--the latter harking back to when they were either high school students or university students. In other words, is this Japanese expat community more motivated to learn and use English than when they were in high school or university students? If they are, what are the reasons behind any change of heart?

Motivation to Communicate in an L2

We will traverse two paths here as motivation is a massive area of research. We first look at motivation to learn a L2, which will then be melded into a brief discussion on education-based motivation. It should be noted, however, that like most psychological constructs of this scale, the two concepts have wide areas of overlap.

Motivation as a psychological construct in L2 learning has been discussed in language circles seriously for more than a half-century. Gardner and Lambert (1959) divided L2 learning motivation into two overriding constructs that learners sense. The first is integrative motivation, which is derived from desired affiliation with the culture associated with the

language being learned, and the second is instrumental, a more utilitarian approach, which is driven by outside forces such as learning a language to pass a test or to excel at a job. The two constructs have natural overlaps--learners tend not to be driven solely by one or the other. Their views have been modified and discussed over the years, but those original concepts still hold great sway.

As for Clément (1980), among other things he discusses (e.g., fear of assimilation, integration, etc.), he points out that there is a necessity to develop self-confidence if one is to develop communicative competence in a 'foreign culture' (Clément & Kruidenier, 1985). L2 self-confidence can also be tied to acculturation issues, especially as it relates to one's identity. When the L2 learner encounters those in the 'other' culture, they are able to modify their identity, in a sense to ready themselves for the L2 interaction (Clément & Noels, 1992; Noels, Clément & Gaudet, 2004). Norton (2000; 2020) refined L2 learner's motivational identity as being socially interconnected to how that learner interprets his or relationship to the world. In other words, the commitment to learning a L2 is based upon the shifting of a learner's identity as he or she considers the future, what will occur in social contexts and what social power structures the learner will encounter. Building on Norton's work, Ushioda (2009) focused on the fact that learners come in all shapes and sizes. Thus, a learner's motivation is interconnected with the context in which they find themselves, their role in society, their histories and their backgrounds. Motivation cannot be separated from the complex interrelationships experienced by each learner. Examining

motivation from a reflective psychological stance, Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) developed a model that encompasses much of the aforementioned research. They divided motivation into a three-stage process: The preactional phase focuses on what L2 learners desire to achieve focusing on planning and goals; the actional phase focuses on executive motivation, which entails not only the act but also the immediate assessment such as success or failure and finally, the postactional phase which focuses on reflection concerning strategies and

attributing causes to what had transpired in the L2 encounter. This was clearly one of the stepping-stones to Dörnyei's (2005) well-known L2 Motivational Self System, which divided learners into three categories by their psychological make up: 1) the Ideal Self, which is what the learner would like to become as a L2 user, 2) the Ought-to Self, which is what others expect the L2 learner to be able to do, and 3) the L2 Learning Experience, which is related to execution of the L2 in learning settings and is often associated with classroom learning.

Much of the previous research alluded to a need--directly or indirectly--for more classroom-oriented perspectives on motivation. Based upon the self-determination model discussed by Deci and Ryan (1985), Noels, Clément and Pelletier (2001) measured the integrative motivation of 59 francophones learning English at an intensive English class in Canada. Intrinsic motivation positively correlated robustly with integrative motivation as learners expressed a sense of fun when learning English. More specifically, for our purposes, the study points out that the learners are, "...those who wish to learn English because it is enjoyable also desire to learn English in order to interact with members of the English community" (p. 434).

From a more theoretical view, Renninger and Hidi (2022) claim that once 'interest' in an activity is triggered, it can be maintained with or without external rewards in a kind of snowball effect with ever-increasing interest (i.e., having a 'positive' effect on the self). Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2000) focus on students' goal orientation as being central to motivational agency. Students can approach performance and mastery or avoid performance and mastery on a particular task dependent on several factors. One of those factors might be the tasks themselves. If students find intrinsic value in a task, they are more likely to be motivated by the task (Pintrich & de Groot (1990). These finding supported later research, which found that when students (n=100) were given more choices, provided with more 'interesting' tasks and/or allowed to work cooperatively that their motivational beliefs can be altered positively; and such factors also correlated positively with self-efficacy and

strategies (Pintrich, Roeser & de Groot, 1994). What these studies show is that motivation is not merely complex but individualistic, variable, temporal and connected to how learners view the classroom (see especially the conclusions reached by Dörnyei, 2002; 2019; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021).

With the understanding that L2 learners' motivational agency may shift temporally and based upon a learner's circumstances, we wanted to investigate the case of Japanese expats studying English in Vietnam. However, as it is impossible to 'turn the clocks of time' backwards, we wanted learners to reflect on their previous English language learning to act as a comparative measure to what they had experienced or were presently experiencing as L2 learners in Vietnam. To this end, using an altered version of Pintrich and de Groot's (1990) motivation model, we asked Japanese students to first reflect on their high school or university L2 studies in English (n=16), followed up by asking them to address the same items (n=16) concerning their English studies in Vietnam. Hence, we ask the following two research questions:

1. Based upon the results of the questionnaire, have the Japanese expats become more motivated to study English because of their experience in Vietnam?
2. Which, if any, of the 16 items addressed by the Japanese expats showed a significant increase in motivation to study English after living in Vietnam?

Methodology

The problems that one would anticipate when trying to tap into the Japanese expat community residing in Vietnam were minimized as one of the researchers lived and worked as a one-on-one English teacher for Japanese expats who were living in Vietnam. Hence, the participants represent a convenience sampling, primarily made up of her students. Of the 17 expats who were asked to participate in the research, all agreed and subsequently filled out the online questionnaire, which was developed using the application *surveyplanet*.

Considering that the number is not so large, we include a table here showing personal profiles of those participants.

First language	Sex	Age	Major in university (NA if did not attend)	Years of English study secondary schooling
Japanese	F	35	Art	3
Japanese	M	37	Astrophysics	6
Japanese	F	39	English	6
Japanese	F	40	Sociology	6
Japanese	F	38	NA	3
Japanese	M	42	Business Administration	6
Japanese	M	31	Law	6
Japanese	M	49	Jurisprudence	6
Japanese	M	35	NA	6
Japanese	F	56	Piano	6
Japanese	F	43	NA	6
Japanese	F	36	Electrical Engineering	6
Japanese	F	35	Home Economics/Clothing	6
Japanese	F	39	Economics	6
Japanese	F	39	NA	7
Japanese	F	42	NA	6
Japanese	F	45	Western Culture	6

Table 1: Participant Profiles

The tidbits of profile data that are relevant will be summed up briefly. As one can see, all of the participants are Japanese and speak Japanese as their primary language. There are five males and 12 females. The average age of the participants is 40.1, with the youngest being 31 years old and the eldest being 56 years old. Those who attended university represent a wide-spectrum of focused studies, which makes for an interesting group to examine. And, save for two participants who only studied English for three years during secondary schooling, the balance have the expected six and in one case seven years of English language study.

Concerning the questionnaire, as this study is based on primarily on psychological reflection comparing their ‘past’ selves with their present selves, we were looking for a tool that would lend itself to easy adaptation for comparing long-past selves with present selves (or short-past selves) but which also included subtle constructs of self-regulation and

strategies pointing to learner motivation. We decided on the questionnaire developed by Pintrich and DeGroot (1990) and adapted it for English language learners. We eliminated redundant items and those items that would not really make sense for our purposes. We ended up with 16 items, which were doubled to 32 for matching purposes; the first 16 addressed their high school or university studies and the latter 16 addressed their English language learning experience in Vietnam. The items were translated into Japanese by one of the researchers, so the participants could choose which language they preferred. Here is an example of a matched pair of items:

2. When you were a high school or university student, how would you rate this statement:

When studying English, I think I will be able to use what I learn in this class in the real-world.

18. While living in Vietnam, how would you rate this statement: When studying English, I think I will be able to use what I learn in this class in the real-world.

As one can see, Q2 requests students to reflect on their long-past selves while Q18 asks students to assess their short-past selves or even their present selves if they were still residing in Vietnam.

In keeping with Pintrich and de Groot's (1990) model, each of the 32 items included the following Likert scale responses:

- 1=Never true for me
- 2=Almost never true for me
- 3=Generally not true for me
- 4=Generally true for me
- 5=Almost always true for me
- 6=Always true for me

After making adjustments to the items, a score of "6" would always be considered a positive score, whereas a score of "1" would always be deemed a negative score. Our aim, of course, was to compare their scores from their earlier days as high school or university graduates with their time after residing in Vietnam. Besides these 32 items an additional six items were

added so as to get some open-ended commentary from the participants in the hopes of supporting some of the findings from the comparative portion of the questionnaire.

As a final step, we compared the group means to see if the group had become significantly more motivated to study English using Pintrich and de Groot's (1990) motivation measurement. We also looked particularly at the items themselves. In both cases, we wanted to see if there were robust positive outcomes in the reflective comparison. Hence, using a two-tailed paired t-test to compare the means, we checked their reflective assessment of when they were high school or university with those means of their time spent in Vietnam for both the group means and the individual questionnaire items. As the number of participants was only 17, we opted for a more restrictive α of .01 for all data collected (Meek, Ozgur & Dunning, 2007). These data were analyzed in MS Excel.

In addition, to support or refute any findings from the quantitative analysis, we also consider the commentary from the open-ended questions. It should be noted that most participants responded in Japanese. If a response was given in English, it will be pointed out. Otherwise, readers can assume that the original comment was in Japanese but has been translated into English for this study.

Findings

Sometimes a mere glance can reassure researchers that there were significant changes in the kind of 'before' and 'after' scenario we employed in this study. Such was the case here, and this was borne out in the group t-test data.

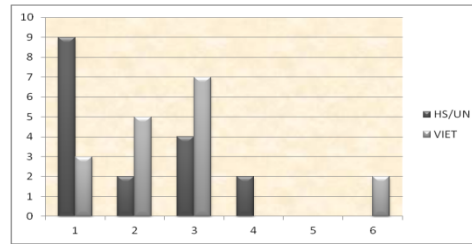
	<i>Group HS/Univ</i>	<i>Group Vietnam</i>
Mean	3.125	4.904411765
Variance	0.555175781	0.411678539
Observations	17	17
P(T<=t) two-tail	*4.26024E-07	
t Critical two-tail	2.920781621	

Table 2: Comparison of Group Means

Table 2 clearly reflects that the group of Japanese learners had become more motivated to study English when they were presented with the realities of living in Vietnam. This will be discussed forthwith.

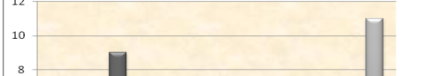
We also analyzed the individual paired items to see which items drove the changes in group motivation. Bar graphs have been added to the tables to enhance visually any data-driven effects that might have taken place with darker bars representing high school and university days, and lighter bars representing the time spent in Vietnam.

When studying English, it is important for me to learn what is being taught in the class.			
	Q1	Q17	
Mean	4	5.411765	
Variance	2.5	0.632353	
Observations	17	17	
df	16		
P(T<=t) two-tail	*0.00293		
t Critical two-tail	2.920782		
When studying English, I think I will be able to use what I learn in this class in the real-world.			
	Q2	Q18	
Mean	2.705882	5.529412	
Variance	1.345588	0.639706	
Observations	17	17	
df	16		
P(T<=t) two-tail	*6.2E-07		
t Critical two-tail	2.920782		
Even when I do poorly in English class, I try to learn from my mistakes.			
	Q3	Q19	
Mean	2.705882	5.529412	
Variance	1.845588	0.389706	
Observations	17	17	
df	16		
P(T<=t) two-tail	*4.2E-07		
t Critical two-tail	2.920782		
When studying English, my study skills are excellent.			
	Q4	Q20	
Mean	1.941176	2.705882	
Variance	1.308824	2.095588	
Observations	17	17	
df	16		
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.054815		



t Critical two-tail 2.920782


When studying English, what we learn in class is interesting.

	Q5	Q21							
Mean	3	5.588235	 <table><tr><th>Group</th><th>Value</th></tr><tr><td>HS/UN</td><td>9</td></tr><tr><td>VIET</td><td>11</td></tr></table>	Group	Value	HS/UN	9	VIET	11
Group	Value								
HS/UN	9								
VIET	11								
Variance	2.375	0.382353							
Observations	17	17							
df	16								
P(T<=t) two-tail	*1.76E-06								
t Critical two-tail	2.920782								

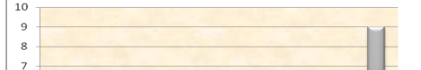
Understanding English is important to me.

	Q6	Q22																						
Mean	3.176471	5.705882	<table><thead><tr><th>Category</th><th>HS/UN</th><th>VIET</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>1</td><td>3</td><td>2</td></tr><tr><td>2</td><td>4</td><td>2</td></tr><tr><td>3</td><td>2</td><td>2</td></tr><tr><td>4</td><td>4</td><td>2</td></tr><tr><td>5</td><td>3</td><td>1</td></tr><tr><td>6</td><td>1</td><td>14</td></tr></tbody></table>	Category	HS/UN	VIET	1	3	2	2	4	2	3	2	2	4	4	2	5	3	1	6	1	14
Category	HS/UN	VIET																						
1	3	2																						
2	4	2																						
3	2	2																						
4	4	2																						
5	3	1																						
6	1	14																						
Variance	2.529412	0.470588																						
Observations	17	17																						
df	16																							
P(T<=t) two-tail	*1.11E-05																							
t Critical two-tail	2.920782																							

Even when studying English is hard, I never give up.

	Q7	Q23							
Mean	2.941176	5	 <table><tr><th>Group</th><th>Value</th></tr><tr><td>HS/UN</td><td>4</td></tr><tr><td>VIET</td><td>6</td></tr></table>	Group	Value	HS/UN	4	VIET	6
Group	Value								
HS/UN	4								
VIET	6								
Variance	1.558824	0.875							
Observations	17	17							
df	16								
P(T<=t) two-tail	*2.56E-06								
t Critical two-tail	2.920782								

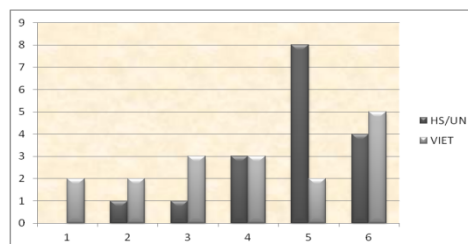
When studying English, I always try to understand what the teacher is saying even if it doesn't make sense.

	Q8	Q24							
Mean	3.882353	5.352941	 <table><tr><th>Group</th><th>Value</th></tr><tr><td>HS/UN</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>VIET</td><td>9</td></tr></table>	Group	Value	HS/UN	5	VIET	9
Group	Value								
HS/UN	5								
VIET	9								
Variance	1.485294	0.742647							
Observations	17	17							
df	16								
P(T<=t) two-tail	*0.00097								
t Critical two-tail	2.920782								

When studying English, I copy my notes over to help me remember material.

	Q9	Q25	
Mean	4.764706	3.941176	
Variance	1.191176	3.183824	
Observations	17	17	
df	16		

P(T<=t) two-tail 0.130172



t Critical two-tail 2.920782

Even when study materials in English classes are dull and uninteresting, I keep working until I finish.

	Q10	Q26																						
Mean	4	4.411765	<table><caption>Data for Q26 Bar Chart</caption><thead><tr><th>Frequency</th><th>HS/UN</th><th>VIET</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>1</td><td>1</td><td>2</td></tr><tr><td>2</td><td>1</td><td>1</td></tr><tr><td>3</td><td>3</td><td>1</td></tr><tr><td>4</td><td>7</td><td>2</td></tr><tr><td>5</td><td>3</td><td>6</td></tr><tr><td>6</td><td>2</td><td>5</td></tr></tbody></table>	Frequency	HS/UN	VIET	1	1	2	2	1	1	3	3	1	4	7	2	5	3	6	6	2	5
Frequency	HS/UN	VIET																						
1	1	2																						
2	1	1																						
3	3	1																						
4	7	2																						
5	3	6																						
6	2	5																						
Variance	1.75	2.882353																						
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0																							
df	16																							
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.233778																							
t Critical two-tail	2.920782																							

Before I begin studying English, I think about the things I will need to do to learn.

	Q11	Q27																						
Mean	2.294118	4.823529	<table><caption>Data for Q27 Bar Chart</caption><thead><tr><th>Frequency</th><th>HS/UN</th><th>VIET</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>1</td><td>5</td><td>0</td></tr><tr><td>2</td><td>7</td><td>2</td></tr><tr><td>3</td><td>1</td><td>1</td></tr><tr><td>4</td><td>3</td><td>1</td></tr><tr><td>5</td><td>1</td><td>7</td></tr><tr><td>6</td><td>0</td><td>6</td></tr></tbody></table>	Frequency	HS/UN	VIET	1	5	0	2	7	2	3	1	1	4	3	1	5	1	7	6	0	6
Frequency	HS/UN	VIET																						
1	5	0																						
2	7	2																						
3	1	1																						
4	3	1																						
5	1	7																						
6	0	6																						
Variance	1.595588	1.779412																						
Observations	17	17																						
df	16																							
P(T<=t) two-tail	*6.19E-05																							
t Critical two-tail	2.920782																							

I use what I have learned from old homework assignments and the textbook to understand new assignments.

	Q12	Q28
Mean	2.588235	4.058824
Variance	2.132353	3.433824
Observations	17	17
df	16	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.028994	
t Critical two-tail	2.920782	

Frequency	HS/UN	VIET
1	6	3
2	2	1
3	4	1
4	3	4
5	2	3
6	0	5

When the English teacher is talking, I really listen carefully to what is being said.

	Q13	Q29
Mean	3.647059	5.647059
Variance	1.367647	0.367647
Observations	17	17
df	16	
P(T<=t) two-tail	*7.75E-06	
t Critical two-tail	2.920782	

Frequency	HS/UN	VIET
1	0	0
2	3	0
3	5	0
4	5	1
5	3	4
6	1	12

When I'm reading for English class, I sometimes stop to consider the meaning.

	Q14	Q30
Mean	3.588235	5.352941

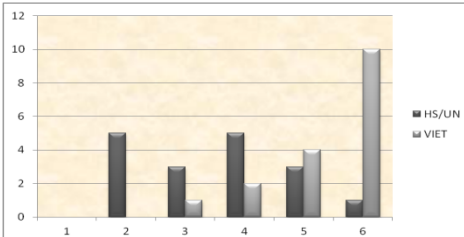
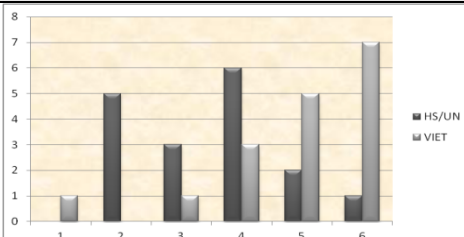
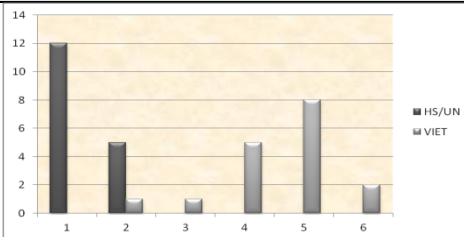
Variance	1.507353	0.867647	
Observations	17	17	
df	16		
P(T<=t) two-tail	*5.91E-05		
t Critical two-tail	2.920782		
I work hard to prove myself during English class even when I don't like the class.			
	Q15	Q31	
Mean	3.470588	4.882353	
Variance	1.514706	1.860294	
Observations	17	17	
df	16		
P(T<=t) two-tail	*0.00106		
t Critical two-tail	2.920782		
I can communicate effectively using English.			
	Q16	Q32	
Mean	1.294118	4.529412	
Variance	0.220588	1.014706	
Observations	17	17	
df	16		
P(T<=t) two-tail	*2.8E-10		
t Critical two-tail	2.920782		

Table 3: Item Analysis

The item analysis reveals robust results at the $\alpha=.01$ level for all but four pairs of items: Q4/Q20, Q9/Q25, Q01/Q26 and Q12/Q28. Of these, only pair Q9/Q25 (*When studying English, I copy my notes over to help me remember material.*) resulted in a lower group mean while they studied English in Vietnam. The remaining 12 pairs revealed positive motivational gains for participants while studying in Vietnam, and this obviously is the reason for the robust group mean as well. It should be noted that all participants had a positive mean increase in score while in Vietnam--the smallest gain being .3125 and the largest being 2.9375. The data will be discussed more fully in the upcoming section, and we will, of course, discuss the open-ended items in some detail there as well.

Discussion

As mentioned, the motivation to study English in Vietnam was significant driven by all but four pairs of items. As the items will also be discussed, we will focus here on selected commentary from the participants.

Q34 asked students directly if their motivation to study English was higher now than when they were in high school or university. All 17 participants indicated that it was higher now. Here are some of the selected reasons:

- ✧ I didn't feel much need when I was a student, but since I could communicate more when living abroad...I think there are so many things to think about.
- ✧ I need English for work and daily life. There are many opportunities to use what you have learned immediately.
- ✧ Because there is a need to use English.
- ✧ Because you need English at work or in everyday life. Because there are many opportunities to use what I learned right away.
- ✧ Because I feel it is necessary.

There are two principles that stand out. The first is a need to communicate in English. This aligns with [author and author, ?] who found that when EFL students were put in a situation where they needed to use English to communicate, regardless of perceptions of their own English capabilities, their motivational agency to use English went up not down. The second is immediacy. When EFL learners can use what they have learned in the class immediately and frequently, they not only use the language, they do not avoid opportunities to use it.

Q35 asked the expats to give advice to students who are studying English at university of high school. Their responses were quite interesting.

- ✧ ...Listening and speaking are the most important for me at work. I thought from my real life experiences that it would be better to study English while I was still a student. We don't know what's going to happen in life. It is important not to hesitate to speak English. Making mistakes is a given, and you can't learn without talking. When I was a

student, I often felt embarrassed. I was embarrassed because I thought I should speak with proper grammar and with native-like pronunciation, but what is really important is to try...

- ✧ The world is a big place, and I want Japanese people to leave Japan and play an active role outside of Japan. That's why it's more fun if you know English.
- ✧ I believe that in order to improve your English, it is important to have something you want to convey using English. I also want to have a business meeting at work, make a complaint, and talk to my friends! When I experience something like that, my English improves, and I feel like I should be able to communicate better next time. I finally understood that English is just a tool.
- ✧ It is important to learn the words and phrases that we use most often and to listen and speak as much as possible.
- ✧ You may think that English is not necessary now, but I think English is a necessary skill in Japan, where people often enter the workforce and work with people from various countries.

Again, there are two themes that stand out. The first is related to vision. The advice from these expats is that society is much broader than you think. Even if you remain in Japan, your thoughts should be how to use English to communicate with others, and if you do get the chance for other opportunities, English will be an indispensable tool. This is mindful of Dörnyei's (2005) Ideal Self, which is the ultimate vision of oneself as a L2 learner. In practice, this means providing students with a broader view of learning English and is exemplified by Yashima's (2002, p. 57) notion of 'international posture.'

Included in the concept are interest in foreign or international affairs, willingness to go overseas to stay or work, readiness to interact with intercultural partners, and, one hopes, openness or a non-ethnocentric attitude toward different cultures, among others.

The second piece of advice offered by the expats is that students should focus not only on learning the rules of English but to engage others in spoken communication. This may line up with MEXT's (2011) goals for Japanese language learners, but in practice, there appears to be a mismatch with what takes place in the classroom, especially regarding secondary school education. An impromptu survey of female Japanese university students studying English communication revealed that students' biggest complaint of their junior and senior high school English teachers was when teachers' put such a strong focus on understanding English grammar at the expense of all other skills, especially communication. They understood the importance of passing examinations but they also wanted to try speaking and listening to their peers in the L2. The expats supported this notion by their answers to Q35, which asked students what their goal was for studying English when they were high school or at university.

- ✧ To get credits and graduate from college.
- ✧ Because it was mandatory.
- ✧ For university entrance exams.
- ✧ I was just doing it because it was part of the class.
- ✧ For credits.

How can Japan change? The mindset is at the forefront. If students never actually believe they will use English for communication, they probably be less interested as was mentioned by the following participant.

- ✧ I was only learning English because it was part of the class, but I never imagined speaking with a native speaker.

To be sure, there were those who mentioned studying English just because they 'liked' it and one participant even mentioned the possibility of using English in her job, but for the most part, English was understood to be an academic exercise rather than a tool for communication.

When asked about their English language study aims in Vietnam (Q36), their answers were markedly different focusing solely on their abilities to communicate effectively with others.

- ✧ To communicate smoothly because I wanted to be able to use English at work.
- ✧ For work and for life fulfillment.
- ✧ For work and everyday life.
- ✧ To live in Vietnam without any problems. For example, dealing with troubles when going out or at an apartment. (*comment in English*)
- ✧ Because I have more opportunities to use English at work and in private.

Of the 17 participants, nine mentioned work, but there were also comments simply mentioning the ability to flourish in society while staying in Vietnam, which incorporated the notions of chatting with locals and with other internationals residing there.

Q38, the final item asked the participants if they valued English more than they did previously. The feeling was unanimous for all participants.

- ✧ After I was stationed in Vietnam, I felt a sense of crisis that if I could not speak English, my work would be affected.
- ✧ To use English in daily life and work made it essential, and its importance to me increased.
- ✧ When I was in Japan, I was able to get by without speaking English, but when I went to Vietnam, I realized that if I couldn't speak English, I wouldn't be able to convey my wishes.
- ✧ This is because opportunities to communicate in English have increased in dramatic fashion due to English having more information about everything.
- ✧ Because I began to live abroad. I also want my child to be able to speak English.

The primary theme expressed by participants was that English was the 'go-to' language on the global stage and a need to be able to use it to communicate on that stage.

For the individual items, we will first briefly discuss those items that drove the robust results one-by-one or grouped by similar content, and then look at those items that did not contribute to the significant changes for the learners.

Q1/Q17: When studying English, it is important for me to learn what is being taught in the class.

Q6/Q22: Understanding English is important to me.

Participants indicated a strong shift from their days in high school and the university. We look to the commentary from the students as the explanation, noting that many of them viewed their formal English studies in Japan as being a ‘necessary evil’ to obtain a grade, pass an exam or get credits. In Vietnam, they could use what they learned in class immediately and consequently, felt that the learning was vital for their successes.

Q2/Q18: When studying English, I think I will be able to use what I learn in this class in the real-world.

Q16/Q32: I can communicate effectively using English.

When students study English in Japan, despite MEXT’s (2011) proclamations and the apparent love of English by everyone in Japan, there is a gap between what is stated as being important and the perceptions as well as the practices of all of the stakeholders. Some international companies in Japan have begun conducting business in an English-only environment, often requiring new hires to provide standardized English test scores, but that is the exception to be sure. In addition, some talented but older managers at such firms often quit and look elsewhere when the ‘English Only!’ mandates are put in place. Some other firms have backpedaled from such mandates and moderated how English should be practically applied in Japan (Matsui, Onishi & Hara, 2018). On the other hand, as Vietnam is a rising star in Asia, they have been much

quicker to embrace English as a way to advance Vietnamese society (Ngo & Tran, 2024). As such, when the participants were studying English in Vietnam, they had a palpable sense that they would be using their English to communicate daily in various situations--something most of them did not experience or at least did not think they would experience while living and working in Japan.

Q3/Q19: Even when I do poorly in English class, I try to learn from my mistakes.

If learners perceive that 'studying English' is only to get a good grade, then it is quite natural not to be worried about not learning from mistakes because there are no additional consequences for not addressing errors. In fact, as some of the participants mentioned in the comments, they were embarrassed by making mistakes often leading to avoiding such situations rather than embracing their errors. When the participants talked about their experiences in Vietnam, they understood that their L2 was simply a communication tool so they could flourish by trying. Naturally, this means making mistakes but simultaneously learning to avoid continual mistakes--especially of meaning and understanding--a more serious concern.

Q5/Q21: When studying English, what we learn in class is interesting.

Q13/Q29: When the English teacher is talking, I really listen carefully to what is being said.

There are two aspects of interest related to the participants' significant change. The first is that in high school and university, students cannot visualize themselves using English beyond the four walls of the classroom, so 'real' understanding becomes less important than passing the class. This kind of 'mechanical' view of L2 learning is related to the contrast presented by Dörnyei (2005) of 'Ought-to Self' and 'Ideal Self.' High school and university students in Japan tend to see themselves in an 'ought-to' light as in, "I ought to pass this English class so I can graduate while not upsetting my teachers and my parents." When they are studying in Vietnam, they see themselves in the 'ideal'

light as in “I should learn this, so I can communicate with others on a day-to-day basis.”

The second relates to the first, inasmuch as the content of the classes--especially in high school--are primarily designed to pass formalized English exams; whereas, the content in their English classes in Vietnam is aimed at helping students use English for communication.

These items speak to learners’ L2 grittiness (Author, et al, ??). When there seems to be no observable benefit for enduring English language difficulties, there is a natural

Q7/Q23: Even when studying English is hard, I never give up.

Q15/Q31: I work hard to prove myself during English class even when I don’t like the class.

Q8/Q24: When studying English, I always try to understand what the teacher is saying even if it doesn’t make sense.

tendency to minimize effort rather than struggle. When in Vietnam and the stakes become much higher, the battle to succeed tends to outweigh the struggles associated with getting there.

Q11/Q27: Before I begin studying English, I think about the things I will need to do to learn.

As high school and university students, participants generally looked at their English classes as obstacles to various rites of passage, they naturally were less concerned about what should be learned and more concerned about getting a good grade. Being in Vietnam, on the other hand, elevated the importance of their English classes, so that they prepared themselves. This again paints the contrast of ‘Ought-to Self’ and ‘Ideal Self.’ The Ought-to Self looks at his or her English classes as impediments; whereas, the Ideal Self looks at English classes from a very practical perspective as an opportunities to obtain English language goals (Dörnyei, 2005).

Q14/Q30: When I'm reading for English class, I sometimes stop to consider the meaning.

Reading classes in Japanese high schools and universities are often regarded by students as being the most dreadful of all English classes. This is often because the classes aim at improving students' vocabulary knowledge as well as their scores on standardized tests such as TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication). Students feel pressure to read and look at reading as a duty. Very few students focus on the meaning, so there is little joy expressed in classes aimed at improving students' reading abilities in English (Author & Author, ??) However, for most participants, residing in Vietnam shed new light on the importance of reading and understanding vocabulary especially regarding the workplace and operating within Vietnamese society, where being able to navigate important English documents is one of the keys to being successful.

The following four items did not reveal a significant change in the learners. Q4/Q20 appears to be slightly different from the other three, so it will be discussed separately. As for the other three, the reasoning appears to be similar across the items, so we will discuss them as one group.

Q4/Q20: When studying English, my study skills are excellent.

It is not surprising that Q4/Q20 revealed no significant difference simply because in Japanese society, self-promotion is somewhat frowned upon. We would surmise that the participants probably improved their study skills dramatically based upon all of the other answers, but they are hesitant to express this.

Q9/Q25: When studying English, I copy my notes over to help me remember material.

Q10/Q26: Even when study materials in English classes are dull and uninteresting, I keep working until I finish.

Q12/Q28: I use what I have learned from old homework assignments and the textbook to understand new assignments.

In our opinion, these three items harken back to the ideals of how one *should* study in a Japanese high school or university. This is what dutiful students do, not to enhance their own capabilities but because they have been taught that this is what ‘good’ students do. The participants residing in Vietnam, on the other hand, see no practical reason for these enduring these practices, so they do not deem them as being important aspects to learning English.

Conclusion

In this study, we wanted to see whether or not Japanese participants, who had lived in Vietnam or were presenting living in Vietnam, were motivated to study English. Specifically, we wanted them to compare through reflection their previous thoughts about studying English with their present thought to see if their motivation to study English had risen. The results from the adapted version of Pintrich and de Groot’s (1990) motivational questionnaire revealed that as a group, the Japanese participants were significantly more motivated to learn English ($\alpha=.01$) than when they were high school students. To understand this further, we also looked at the 16 pairs of items (before and after being in Vietnam) to pinpoint the robust findings at the group level. 12 pairs demonstrated a significant change by participants ($\alpha=.01$). From the comments given by participants, we point to two important changes: 1) Students while studying in Vietnam felt an urgent need to study English because they were using English on a daily basis (Author & Author, ??), and 2) Students L2 self-vision had shifted from one of ‘Ought-to Self’ to an ‘Ideal Self’

in line with Dörnyei (2005). In line with the research, the students viewed the classroom as a place to prepare themselves for English communication.

Of course there are some limitations that must be addressed. This study was quite small with only 17 participants, all of whom were one of the researcher's former or present students. This can create a halo effect to be sure. Unfortunately, this could not be helped. It should also be noted that for other groups of language learners, the results might be quite different. The Japanese system of teaching language and the overall importance of learning English certainly has an effect on L2 learners.

The practical implications for this study are twofold: 1) Language teachers should be aware that students want some time to use English as a communicative tool, and as such, its value should not be demoted solely to that of an academic subject, and 2) there is still a need to improve the manner in which English is taught in high school and secondary school. This will require a shift in mindset, but it can be achieved by providing students opportunities outside of the classroom in the hopes that they adopt a more international mindset about learning English (Yashima, 2002).

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