



## HOW TO MOTIVATE DE-MOTIVATED JAPANESE COLLEGE EFL LEARNERS

**Yuichi Todaka**

Miyazaki Municipal University, Japan

### **Abstract:**

In Japan, English is a significant part of everyday life. We see English advertising signs all around us, we use English loan-words in Japanese written and spoken communication, and many Japanese songs incorporate English into their lyrics (Aspinall, 2003). On the other hand, it is known to scholars that many Japanese students are de-motivated to study English. Hasegawa (2004) reports that 71% of junior high school students and 77% of senior high school students are not motivated to study English. Among the reasons for de-motivation are the lack of perceived relevance of English learning and the lack of confidence in capabilities. Thus, this present study focuses on the following four areas as tools to help de-motivated students become re-motivated and to enable them to sustain that motivation to study English throughout the 2016 academic year: (1) the four sources of self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1977); (2) the establishment of concrete EFL study reasons for future careers; (3) the development of time management skills; and (4) the understanding of effective self-regulated learning. 210 Japanese college freshmen in four different proficiency groups participated in this study. It was found that when focus was placed on sources of self-efficacy, students in all the proficiency groups were able to significantly improve their English listening skills throughout the academic year, and that students in general were able to sustain relatively high self-efficacy beliefs about their English listening skills. However, a sharp decline was found in the number of students who were able to sustain that motivation during the two-month summer break. It is suggested that ample examples of concrete English study reasons that are associated with students' future careers as well as activities for visualization (Sampson, 2012) might need to be implemented into our pedagogic approach to help our freshmen put their acquired knowledge into action during the summer break.

**Keywords:** self-efficacy beliefs, concrete EFL study reasons for future careers, time management skills, self-regulated study cycle

## 1. Introduction

Ever since the Meiji period, when English classes were introduced in Japan to compete in an industrializing world (Butler & Iino, 2005), the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (hereafter, MEXT) has been establishing various measures to reform the English education system in Japan. The primary reason for such measures in recent years is to help Japanese EFL learners develop necessary English skills so that they can communicate with foreigners in English. However, many Japanese EFL learners are not motivated to study English. Based on a questionnaire about English lessons in secondary school students, Hasegawa (2004) found that 71% of junior high and 77% of senior high school students reported that they were demotivated to study English. In addition, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011, p. 150 cited in Sampson, 2016, p. 15) suggest that *'in Japan...demotivation among learners of English seems to be a major educational concern'*. In fact, Doyon (2003: 4) describes Japanese college students as followed:

*"For many students the motivation to study English is directed towards passing difficult entrance examinations that will hopefully propel them into a high ranking university. It is said that once many of these students enter university, very little studying takes place with the university becoming no more than a leisure land or moratorium where students can take a break before entering the workforce."*

(Hane 1996; Gittlesohn 1989; Stronach 1988; Sugimoto 1997)

Todaka (2009) administered a questionnaire assessing 55 Japanese college EFL learners' motivated learning behavior. It was found that the participants considered themselves to be able to become competent L2 learners because they enjoy learning English, and because they understand the utilitarian benefits associated with being able to speak English. However, they indicated that *"...they had experienced varying degrees of anxiety in L2 communication, and that they do not have confidence in their linguistic abilities."* Furthermore, they also indicated that *"...they did not consider themselves to be diligent language learners."*

Kikuchi and Sakai (2009) reported that (1) course books, (2) inadequate school facilities, (3) test scores, (4) non-communication methods, and (5) teachers' teaching styles and competencies were all found to be demotivating factors for Japanese high school students. Notable among the factors extracted, they reported that non-

communicative teaching methods, ones that focus on grammar and preparation for college entrance examinations for example, were perceived to be de-motivating by many participants. In addition, a recent study by Jahedizadeh (2016) reports that class materials, lack of interest, experiences of failure, classroom environment, and poor teachers significantly influenced student burnout. As indicated, there exists tremendous lack in Japanese EFL learner motivation and in their self-efficacy beliefs to carry out a necessary task.

Self-efficacy theory states that “*people’s belief(s) in their capabilities to produce desired effects by their own actions*” (Bandura, 1997, p. vii) is the most important factor in determining how people choose to engage in challenges and how much effort they make when faced with them (Maddux, 2002). Thus, self-efficacy is not simply perceived skill, nor is it simply a prediction of behavior and an intention to attain a particular goal. Self-efficacy is what one believes they can do with their skills under certain conditions (Maddux, 2002). Since Bandura (1977) first proposed self-efficacy theory, many articles relating to it have been published in the fields of psychology, sociology, kinesiology, and medicine.

Bandura (1977) outlined the four sources of self-efficacy: (1) performance outcomes; (2) vicarious experiences; (3) verbal persuasion; and (4) physiological feedback. Performance outcomes denote that our positive or negative experiences can influence our ability to perform a given task. Vicarious experiences are referred to as the influence of someone else’s success or failure on one’s own high or low self-efficacy. Verbal persuasion means that personal self-efficacy is affected by what others say to us about what they believe we can do or not. Finally, physiological feedback is described as the positive physiological and emotional sensations that are likely to lead one to have high self-efficacy in a given situation.

Raofi et al. (2013, pp. 63-65) reviewed 32 articles published between 2003 and 2012 with regard to the effectiveness of self-efficacy theory in ESL/EFL contexts. They found that 12 articles examined the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and ESL/EFL performance based on either course grades (Mahyuddin et al., 2006; Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2007; Hsieh & Schallert, 2008), proficiency in reading (Mills, Pajares & Herron, 2006; Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2007), or listening (Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2006; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Tilfarlioglu & Cifici, 2011). They report that the findings of these studies indicate a direct relationship between self-efficacy and performance, which is in line with the findings in other research domains such as math and education in general (Dennissen et al., 2007; Multon et al., 1991; Pajares, 1996). Furthermore, 7 articles examined the relationship between self-efficacy and anxiety (Mills, Pajares & Herron, 2006; Erkan & Saban, 2011; Anyadubalu, 2010; Cubukcu, 2008) and the relationship between self-efficacy and attributions (Hsieh & Kang, 2010; Hsieh &

Schallert, 2008; Graham, 2006). The findings of these studies indicate a significant inverse relationship between one's self-efficacy level and ESL/EFL performance. In other words, students with high self-efficacy attribute their failure to a lack of effort, whereas low-level self-efficacy students attribute their failure to low ability.

Raofi et al. (2013) also report on the findings of studies focusing on factors that influence the enhancement of self-efficacy beliefs, though the number of those studies was limited. Cakir and Alici (2009) found that past successful experiences and social persuasions are influential factors that affect learners' self-efficacy. Wang & Pape (2007) reported that factors such as past experience, interest, attitudes toward English language, social persuasion, task difficulty, and social and cultural setting are all important in determining learners' self-efficacy level.

Todaka (2017), in addition, reports that teachers need to help Japanese college EFL freshmen establish their English study reasons that are associated with their future careers. Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) also indicate the importance of students' future visions as an effective way to assist them in a long-term ongoing endeavor.

The L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009) stresses the importance of L2 learners' self-perception of their desired future self-states. Furthermore, the intensity of that motivation partly depends on learners' ability to produce mental imagery (Dörnyei and Chan, 2013). Markus and Nurius (1987, p. 159 cited in Dörnyei, 2013, p. 440) report that "*possible selves encompass within their scope visions of desired and undesired end states*". Dörnyei and Chan (2013) assert that L2 learners with a vivid ideal self-image are more likely to motivate themselves and carry out necessary tasks to realize their desired 'future selves' that are associated with English skills. In other words, if L2 learners can visualize their future in which they utilize their English skills in their careers, they tend to motivate themselves and to sustain motivation to study English. Thus, L2 learners need to carefully consider their concrete English study reasons that are associated with their future careers.

Brown (2004) conducted research on Japanese university students' motivation for English learning, and reported that the amount of actual time students spent studying English depends on their reasons for taking action. He also indicated that "*the key is not the specific nature of the reasons or attitude, but the intentions and actions that result*" (p. 8). Thus, reasons for necessary English study to improve Japanese college EFL freshmen's English skills have to be clearly recognized and decided on by the freshmen themselves.

Todaka (2017) also found that time management skills for prioritization of English study need to be taught to help de-motivated Japanese college EFL freshmen find the time to improve their English listening skills. Ammar (2007, p.6) reports that "*poor time management has been correlated with school-related tensions and feelings that one is less in control of time than is desired (Macan, 1996).*" Indeed some of our 2016 freshmen

couldn't sustain their motivation to improve their English listening skills because they felt overwhelmed with college assignments.

Ammar (2007) investigated the effectiveness of improving prospective EFL teachers' time management strategies on their teaching performance and instructional self-efficacy beliefs and found that prospective teachers who were trained in time management strategies were more able to manage their classes so that student learning could be maximized (p.1). Roblyer (1999 cited in Lynch and Dembo, 2004) argues that students who are poor at managing time are likely to achieve less in distance courses. Furthermore, Lynch and Dembo (2004, p. 3) point out, "*self-regulated learners are proactive in managing not only their study time but also their study environment (Zimmerman and Martines-Pons, 1986).*" Time management skills have been found to be one of the important self-regulatory learning attributes that can help learners in classroom-based learning become effective autonomous learners (Lynch and Dembo, 2004, p. 4). Although their studies focus specifically on the time management skills of EFL teachers and distance learners, we can state that training in time management strategies can also help other EFL learners engage more efficiently in their English study. Garcia-Ros et al. (2004 cited in Ammar, 2007, p. 5) investigated how well time management skills could predict the academic achievements of Spanish high school students. They reported that effective time management skills did lead to higher academic achievement of those high school students. In addition, students with effective time management behaviors can indeed organize, prioritize, and budget their time in accordance with the requirements of the learning situations (Bidjerano, 2005; and Zimmerman, 2002, cited in Ammar, 2007, p. 6). Because MEXT is planning to promote Japanese students' English abilities, especially communicative skills, and because Japan ranked last on 2005/2006 TOEFL tests among Asian countries, including North Korea, our focus is to find ways to help our students improve their chances of developing necessary English listening skills.

The objectives of the present study are twofold: (1) to examine how our pedagogical approach assists Japanese college EFL learners in realizing the importance of establishing new and concrete study reasons that are associated with their future careers so that the positive effects of high self-efficacy beliefs can help them sustain their motivation to improve English listening skills; and (2) to investigate the extent in which time management skills help Japanese college EFL learners create time to engage in necessary English tasks.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Participants

210 Miyazaki Municipal University freshmen participated in this study. They were categorized into four groups according to their university English program placement test scores: (1) 54 students were grouped as introductory level students; (2) 105 students were placed in two intermediate classes, (53 students in intermediate I class and 52 students in intermediate II class); and (3) 54 students were assigned to an advanced class. Regardless of the study grouping however all of the participants should be considered as low introductory to low intermediate level students, as their mean TOEIC listening test scores ranged from 315.9 to 326.5 among nine TOEIC tests that had been officially conducted in Japan in 2015.

The study participants attend both CALL and language acquisition classes throughout the entire academic year, in 15 weekly classes over the spring and fall semesters. They attend the CALL classes in the groupings described above and the language acquisition classes as one entire freshman group seated in a large lecture hall.

### 2.2 Instruction

The CALL classes were taught by the author in the following way: (1) lectures on important English suprasegmental features (e.g., Vance 1987; Todaka 1995); (2) various exercises specifically designed to teach phonetic features; (3) advice on various listening strategies for the needs of individual students; (4) shadowing training using DVD movies; and (5) evaluation of progress according to self-assessment checklist items.

In this study, we also focused on the following:

(1) The four sources of self-efficacy proposed by Bandura (1977):

We ensured that each student gained confidence by having his/her experience an achievement in each class period. In particular, various strategies were employed to ensure that all students would understand the listening materials that was presented in each class period so that they could get a boost in confidence in their capability for English listening (i.e., performance outcomes).

(2) Positive role models:

Six teaching assistants, juniors at the same university, participated in all classes and functioned as role models for the participants. The instructor provided positive verbal feedback to each student to support each in their belief in their capabilities and to promote active engagement in each listening activity. Furthermore, the instructor ensured that participants were provided with positive physiological and emotional sensations to help them develop high self-efficacy in class (i.e., vicarious experiences).

(3) Relaxed classroom environment:

The instructor carefully provided a classroom environment in which students could feel free to ask questions and where students were not afraid of making mistakes (i.e., physiological feedback).

(4) Verbal support:

Because our self-efficacy is affected by what others say to us about what they believe we cannot, the instructor always reminded students that anyone can improve his/her English listening skills if he/she understands and employs appropriate learning strategies.

(5) The importance of establishing concrete, longer-term study objectives/reasons:

As the effectiveness of short-term objectives/goals for sustaining motivation has already been reported (Bandura 1977), each student was asked to write down their ultimate long term objectives/reasons for studying English in college. Also, while being constantly reminded to consider their 'future EFL selves' each student was asked to write down the level of English skill they thought is necessary to attain in order to realize that 'future EFL self'. Based on the level of English skill they hope to attain, each student wrote down their short-term English study goals for the spring semester, summer break, and fall semester. Students' ultimate objectives/reasons for English study in college and study objectives/reasons for the spring semester were collected during the fifth week of the term. The study objectives/reasons for the summer break and fall semester were collected during the last week of the term.

(6) The importance of understanding the learning process:

During the first half of the term, students were taught and reminded what an effective learning cycle is in order to help them engage in actual tasks to improve their English listening skills.

(7) The importance of time management skills:

During the spring term, students were taught and reminded how to manage time effectively so that they can create time for daily English study.

(8) Appropriate and interesting class materials:

Materials were specifically designed and adjusted to students' proficiency levels so that the students could retain confidence in their English listening skills throughout the term. In addition, the instructor made sure to utilize instructional procedures that ensure the students understand step-by-step strategies to improve their English listening skills.

(9) Team work:

Classroom activities were mainly carried out in pairs or in small groups so that students could assist one another in understanding effective ways to improve their English

listening skills. Members of pairs or groups were changed weekly so that students had opportunities to work with many different classmates.

(10) Regular assessment:

Weekly quizzes were given. All the question items on each quiz were taught in advance. The objective of the weekly quizzes was to make sure students incrementally understood the important strategies for improving their English listening skills.

(11) Reminders of the importance of concrete English study reasons, time management skills, regulated English study cycle, and of self-efficacy beliefs during the fall semester: The author did not teach the CALL classes in the fall semester. Because of this, constant reminders of the importance of the above points were presented throughout the fall semester, at the beginning of the lecture in the author's language acquisition class.

### **2.3 Assessment Tools**

Student improvement in English listening skills was evaluated using the results of TOEIC. The listening portions of two different TOEICs were administered at the beginning and end of the spring semester in 2016. In addition, we formulated a ten-item self-efficacy questionnaire to further assess our students' English listening skills. Because self-efficacy perceptions are both context- and task-specific (Maddux 2002) and cultural context-specific (Oettingen, 1995), we specifically designed this self-efficacy questionnaire to assess our students' motivational level during the spring, summer, and fall semesters in the 2016 academic year (see Appendix 1).

In addition, we formulated two other questionnaires to evaluate what motivated our students to improve English listening skills during the spring semester; and (2) to assess our students' motivational level during the spring, summer, and fall semesters in the 2016 academic year (see Appendix 2).

## **3. Results and Discussion**

First, we examined the participating students' TOEIC scores from April, July, October, and January during the 2016 academic year. The following four tables indicate the results. The maximum score for the listening test was 495. The numbers in parentheses indicate standard deviations.



**Table 1:** TOEIC scores in April 2016 and January 2017 (entire academic year)

Times / Proficiency level	April	January	P value / F value
Introductory	203 (45.6)	265 (49.7)	P<.0001 F=44.09
Intermediate I	225 (48.6)	294 (63.3)	P<.0001 F=36.91
Intermediate II	233 (40.59)	315 (49.2)	P<.0001 F=80.66
Advanced	273 (55.3)	348 (55.1)	P<.0001 F=45.4

As Table 1 shows, students in all proficiency groups made significant improvements in their TOEIC listening scores during the 2016 academic year.

The next table indicates their TOEIC scores in April and July (spring semester).

**Table 2:** TOEIC scores in April and July 2016 (spring semester)

Times / Proficiency level	April	July	P value / F value
Introductory	203 (45.6)	248 (38.7)	P<.0001 F=29.97
Intermediate I	225 (48.6)	277 (49.8)	P<.0001 F=27.76
Intermediate II	233 (40.59)	285 (36.8)	P<.0001 F=46.19
Advanced	273 (55.3)	318 (47.4)	P<.0001 F=18.39

As seen above, students in all proficiency groups made significant improvements in their TOEIC listening scores during the spring semester in 2016.

The following table compares their TOEIC scores in July with those in October (after summer break).

**Table 3:** TOEIC scores in July and October 2016 (summer break)

Times / Proficiency level	July	October	P value F value
Introductory	248 (36.7)	244 (49.4)	P<.65 F=0.21
Intermediate I	277 (49.8)	277 (66.4)	P<.95 F=0.004
Intermediate II	285 (36.8)	286 (49.8)	P<.95 F=0.003
Advanced	318 (47.4)	331 (51.3)	P<.17 F=1.89

As seen above, no significant TOEIC score improvements were found in any of the four proficiency groups after the summer break. In other words, our students could not sustain their motivation to improve English listening skills during the two-month summer break.

The following table shows student TOEIC scores in October 2016 and January 2017 (fall semester).

**Table 4:** TOEIC scores in October 2016 and January 2017 (fall semester)

Times / Proficiency level	October	January	P value / F value
Introductory	244 (49.4)	265 (49.7)	P<.037 F=4.46
Intermediate I	277 (66.4)	294 (63.3)	P<.21 F=1.62
Intermediate II	286 (49.77)	315 (49.2)	P<.0052 F=8.16
Advanced	331 (51.3)	348 (51.1)	P<.12 F=2.48

The table above indicates that students in introductory and in intermediate II groups made significant improvements in their TOEIC scores over the fall semester.

As described in the methodology section, lectures on second language acquisition were given once a week throughout the fall semester in a large room in which all the freshmen attended. During these lectures, students were constantly reminded of the importance of establishing concrete English study reason(s), time management skills, regulated English study cycle, and of self-efficacy beliefs. Thus, we can speculate that these reminders had an impact on students in the introductory and intermediate II groups as they were able to motivate themselves to improve their English listening skills during the fall semester. However, no positive influence of such reminders on students in the other two groups was found.

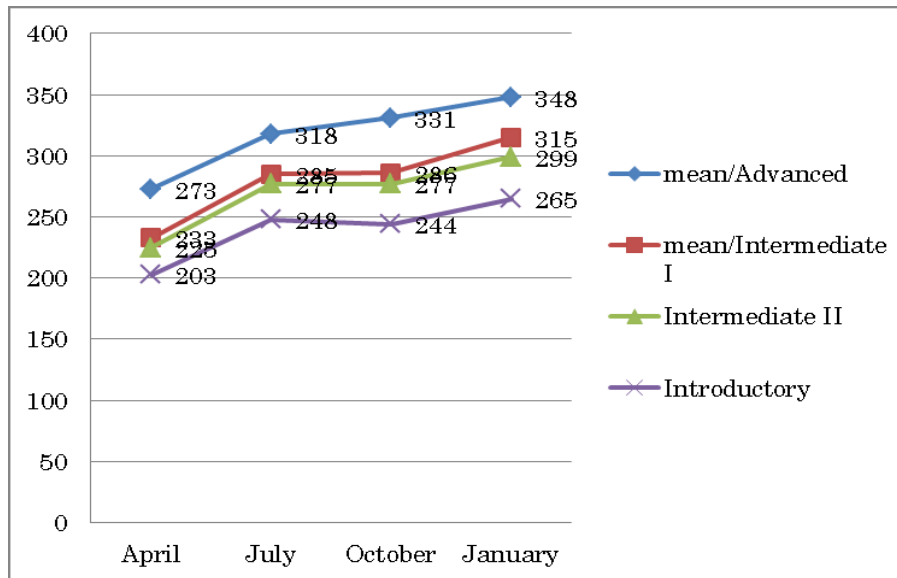
The following table shows the percentage of students in each proficiency group who were able to sustain their motivation to improve their English listening skills. The data were collected three times: (1) July; (2) October; and (3) January.

**Table 5:** The number of students who sustained their motivation to improve English listening skills

Months / Groups	July 2016	October 2016	January 2017
Introductory	71 %	12 %	26 %
Intermediate I	67 %	10 %	50%
Intermediate II	75%	6 %	42%
Advanced	77 %	19 %	67 %

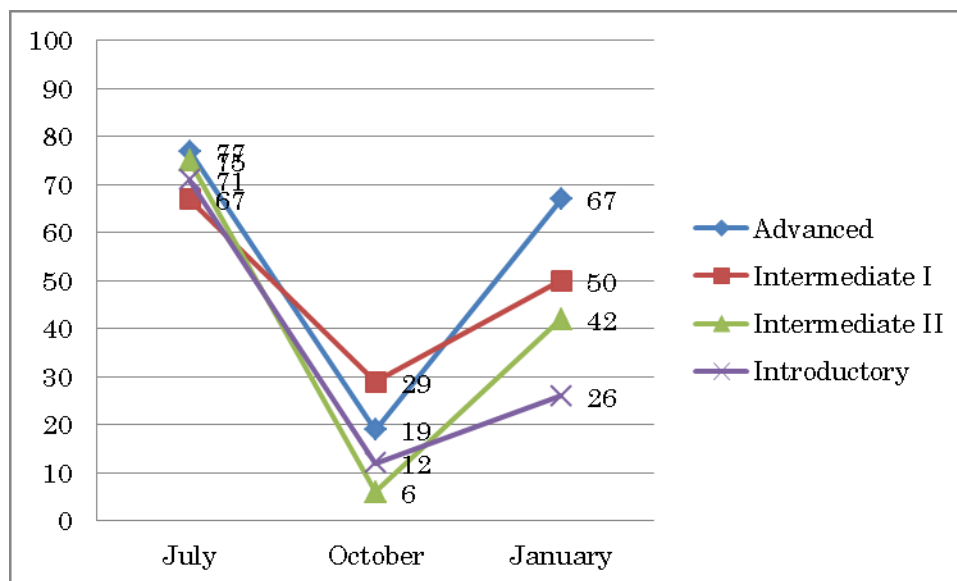
As seen above, students in all of the proficiency groups had difficulty sustaining their motivation during the two-month summer break. However, some improvements in their motivation during the fall semester can be seen.

The following graph plots the mean of each TOEIC test taken over the 2016 academic year.



**Graph 1:** Comparison of the mean TOEIC scores throughout the 2016 academic year

The following graph shows the number of students who were able to sustain motivation to study English.



**Graph 2:** Comparison of the percentage of students who were able to sustain motivation throughout the 2016 academic year

As seen in the above graphs, students in all groups had real difficulty sustaining their motivation to study English during the summer break; however, it is difficult to discern the real reasons why the data shows the introductory and intermediate II groups as the only students who were able to improve their English listening skills during the fall semester. One plausible reason might be associated with the number of absences when the January data were collected. All of the students in intermediate I and

advanced groups participated in the January data collection; however, 11 students in intermediate I and 13 students in introductory groups were absent when the data were collected. It is possible that motivated students were absent on that day because of the spread of flu at the time of data collection. This speculation can be supported by the fact that only 3 students in the introductory group and 1 student in the intermediate II group were absent when the January TOEIC test was administered. Thus, the actual number of students in the introductory and intermediate I groups who were able to sustain their motivation to improve their English listening skills during the fall semester might have been much greater.

Next, the factors that contributed to our success in helping students sustain their motivation during the spring semester were examined.

The following table 6 indicates the students' responses to our questionnaire items regarding the reasons for their ability to sustain motivation to improve their English listening skills. The questionnaire consisted of 7 reasons, each scaled from 10 (totally disagree) to 50 (totally agree). Thus, each of the questionnaire items produces results that range from 10 (totally disagree) to 50 (totally agree). The standard deviations are indicated in the parentheses.

**Table 6:** Motivating factors during the spring semester

Reasons/groups	Introductory	Intermediate I	Intermediate II	Advanced
Successful experience in class	34.1 (6.1)	35.6 (6.5)	34.4 (6.8)	33.4 (6.8)
Understood the importance of concrete English study reasons	39.1 (7.9)	37.8 (7.2)	38.0 (8.1)	41.1 (8.7)
Understood how to improve English listening skills	38.5 (7.0)	38.9 (7.5)	38.2 (6.7)	38.3 (6.6)
Relaxed learning environment	39.1 (8.3)	36.4 (8.3)	36.5 (9.8)	35.1 (8.9)
Understood important points because of weekly quizzes	40.6 (8.5)	39.4 (8.6)	37.4 (6.7)	38.0 (7.6)
Appropriate textbook materials	40.6 (8.1)	39.2 (6.5)	38.2 (7.6)	38.9 (7.9)
Instructor taught class in an enjoyable manner	42.1 (8.1)	42.5 (6.9)	41.5 (7.4)	44.0 (6.9)

The table shows, that students in all of the proficiency groups attributed their success in their ability to sustain motivation to how the instructor taught his classes. As mentioned earlier, in the field of EFL, student motivation is affected by various factors such as learning conditions, teachers' methodologies and behaviors, inappropriate materials, or lack of learning facilities or equipment (Jahedizadeh et al., 2016). Sakai and

Kikuchi (2009) reported that there are six demotivating factors in Japanese EFL contexts: (1) teachers; (2) characteristics of classes; (3) experiences of failure; (4) class environment; (5) class materials; and (6) lack of interest. These factors contribute to learners' demotivation to study English. Hasegawa (2004) found that inappropriate teachers' behaviors had significantly contributed to students' demotivation. Furthermore, Arai (2004) reported that classroom and teachers' behaviors are the most important factors that affect student motivation or demotivation towards English study.

Next, table 7 indicates the results of our students' self-efficacy scores regarding their listening skills in 2016. The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions, each scaled from 20 (totally disagree) to 100 (totally agree). The entire questionnaire produces results that range from 200–1000.

**Table 7:** Self-efficacy scores in April, July, and October 2016

Times/Proficiency level	April	July	October	P value F value
Introductory	746 (100.3)	785 (88.5)	714 (96.8)	P<.039 F=4.38 P<.002 F=14.6
Intermediate 1	771 (87.9)	744 (88.9)	733 (85.5)	P<.126 F=2.4 P<.555 F=.35
Intermediate 2	778 (89.4)	743 (105.63)	756 (94.50)	P<.073 F=3.29 P<.52 F=.42
Advanced	740 (95.93)	775 (97.36)	759 (101.9)	P<.0.78 F=3.2 P<.43 F=.63

As seen above, self-efficacy scores for the introductory group improved significantly, at the 95% confidence level, over the period from April to July. However, this same group's self-efficacy scores worsened significantly during the summer break. Self-efficacy scores did not significantly change from April to October in the other proficiency groups.

As shown in Table 5 and Graph 2, the number of students who were able to sustain motivation during the summer break dropped drastically in all of the proficiency groups; however, only the self-efficacy scores in the introductory group dropped significantly during the summer break. Thus, our students' self-efficacy beliefs about their listening skills cannot be attributed to the sharp decline in motivation to study English during the summer break.

Let us now examine the reasons why the majority of our students were unable to sustain their motivation to study English during the two-month summer break. The following table indicates the reasons for our students' inability to sustain motivation during the summer break.

**Table 8:** Primary reasons for students' inability to sustain motivation during the summer break (Advanced students)

Reasons
I gave in to temptations (13 students).
I studied Korean.
I still don't know what I want to be in the future (5 students).
I played with my friends when I went back to my home town.
I prioritized part-time jobs and getting a driver's license over study (13 students).
I was able to study in accordance with my study plans in August, but I started working part-time in September. So, I couldn't study English.
I am still a freshman. So, I thought I still have lots of time to study until I graduate from college.
I could not manage my time appropriately (4 students).
I tried to study English, but I just couldn't continue it.
It was extremely difficult to study English all by myself during the break.
I completely lost interest in English study.
I just couldn't motivate myself to study English.

**Table 9:** Primary reasons for students' inability to sustain motivation during the summer break (Intermediate I students)

Reasons
I was thinking about my future career.
I thought I still have time to study English until I graduate from college.
I prioritized part-time jobs or getting a driver's license over study (14 students).
I couldn't manage my time appropriately (7 students).
I gave in to many temptations (15 students).
I went to Korea.
I didn't need to use English during the break.

**Table 10:** Primary reasons for students' inability to sustain motivation during the summer break (Intermediate II students)

Reasons
I prioritize other activities over study (25 students).
I gave in to temptations (11 students).
I tried to study, but I just couldn't continue it (3 students).
I'm still a freshman. So, I thought I still have ample time to study English before I graduate from college.
I couldn't manage time appropriately (3 students).
I didn't have a DVD player at home. So, I couldn't study English.
I lost interest in English study (2 students).
I studied Korean or Chinese (2 students).
I went to Korea.

**Table 11:** Primary reasons for students' inability to sustain motivation during the summer break (Introductory students)

Reasons
I prioritized other activities over study (15 students).
I gave in to temptations (10 students).
I couldn't manage time appropriately (4 students).
I studied Korean.
I went to Korea.
I was not used to studying during the summer break.
I tried to study English, but I just couldn't continue it (6 students).
I don't have any English study reasons.
I don't have any future career plans (2 students).
My study plans were not appropriate enough for me to study English during the break.

As seen above, various reasons for students' inability to study English during the break were found. Many students reported that they either gave in to temptations or prioritized other activities over English study. In addition, some students reported their inability to manage time appropriately. According to Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014), however, all of the reasons reported by students could be attributed to their inability to truly envision their 'future EFL selves'. Students had not really found concrete reasons for English study that are associated with their future careers. Indeed, those students who were able to sustain motivation to study English during the summer break reported that they either like studying English (i.e. intrinsic motivation) or have clear reasons for English study (i.e. their future careers). The importance of concrete reasons for English study that are associated with their future careers can be seen in students who couldn't sustain motivation to study English during the summer break, but who could re-motivate themselves to study English during the fall semester. All of them found concrete English study reasons that are associated with their future careers during the fall semester. Thus, they were able to motivate themselves again to study English after the summer break. Jahedizadeh et al. (2016 cited in Falout, 2012 and Ushioda, 1998), found that de-motivated students can rehabilitate their motivation so that they can be re-motivated. Furthermore, a lack of interest in English study stems from students' sense of irrelevance of English in their day-to-day life (Jahedizadeh et al., 2016).

The following table shows the results of the questionnaire about the importance of concrete study reasons, time management skills, regulated study cycle, and of learning strategies. Students were asked to respond to how well they had understood the importance of those four factors in sustaining their motivation to improve English

listening skills. The questionnaire was administered in January 2017, during the 14<sup>th</sup> class period in the fall semester in.

**Table 12:** The number and percentage of students who understood the importance of concrete study reasons, time management skills, regulated study cycle, and learning strategies

Items/groups	Introductory		Intermediate I		Intermediate II		Advanced	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Concrete study reasons	38 (100%)	0 (0%)	48 (100%)	0 (0%)	40 (100%)	0 (2%)	51 (98%)	1 (2%)
Time management skills	38 (100%)	0 (0%)	47 (98%)	1 (2%)	40 (100%)	0 (0%)	52 (100%)	0 (0%)
Regulated study cycle	37 (98%)	1 (2%)	46 (96%)	2 (4%)	39 (98%)	1 (2%)	51 (98%)	1 (2%)
Learning strategies	33 (87%)	5 (13%)	47 (98%)	1 (2%)	40 (100%)	0 (0%)	52 (100%)	0 (0%)

As the table shows, all the students except for one in the advanced group understood the importance of establishing concrete English study reasons. Thus, as mentioned earlier, it takes at least one year to help Japanese college freshmen to understand the importance of establishing concrete English study reasons. In addition, most students in all of the proficiency groups understood the importance of time management skills, learning strategies, and regulated study cycle. Again, however, many students could not sustain motivation to improve their English listening skills. In addition, the number of students who were able to sustain motivation to improve their English listening skills dropped drastically during the two-month summer break. Thus, it is extremely difficult for our freshmen to really visualize what they might be doing in their future careers with English skills. Agawa et al. (2011, p. 13, cited in Sampson, 2016, p. 16) reported the following:

*“In a university setting uncovered amotivation, in which the participants noted ‘no interest in foreign languages, cultures or people’ and ‘not understanding for what purpose English is being studied’*

(my translation, Sampson, 2016:16)

Sampson (2016, p. 17) also reports the following:

*“The literature suggests perceived relevance of English study to be an integral influence on the motivation of Japanese students. Sitting in classrooms week in week out as part of*



*a set of compulsory subjects, many learners may have only a vague idea of the purpose of their EFL studies and be uncertain as to how they might use English in the future."*

Because most high school students study English only to pass college entrance exams, Todaka (2013) reports on the importance of concrete English study reasons for college students.

As the present study indicates, it takes quite some time for Japanese college freshmen to realize the importance of concrete English study reasons/purposes. The study also suggests that it might be important to provide students with concrete examples that show why motivated Japanese EFL learners are able to sustain their motivation to study English. For even though students who understood the importance of concrete English study reasons, many still couldn't sustain their motivation to study English. In other words, it is just as difficult for Japanese college freshmen to *perceive the relevance of English study*, as it is for secondary school students. Jahedizadeh et al. (2016) also indicates that students' perceptions of interest and joy affect their mastery of goal orientation.

Also, because there is actually little use of English in day-to-day life in Japan, it is important for instructors to carefully plan to provide Japanese college freshmen with ample examples of concrete English study reasons so that they might be able to visualize their 'future EFL selves' by the second year of college (Yashima, 2000, 2002, 2009). Gilad (2017) introduces four easy steps to perfect visualization: (1) establish your goal; (2) create a detailed, sensually-rich picture of that goal already attained; (3) focus, repeat, focus, repeat, focus; and (4) add a surge of positive energy. Gilbert and Wilson (2007), cited in Falout (2013, p. 46), however, identify four types of potential fallacies when students try to visualize the future: (1) overestimating or underestimating; (2) omitting full details, (3) abbreviating; and (4) prospecting.

Concerning the first issue, overestimating or underestimating, people tend to remember their most unusual or worst-case experiences when they try to simulate future events for themselves. Those experiences can impact negatively on students, which might lead to learner de-motivation. Thus, instructors need to help students understand that the ups and downs of learning are part of the natural learning process. Falout (ibid) recommends incremental thinking, proposed by Dweck (2000), and suggests the following:

*Incremental thinking creates openness to unknown possibilities as beneficial to personal growth, and with it students can anticipate and accept a wide range of both positive and negative experiences as they prefeel their future with English. Then they may be less*

*likely to fall into the traps of overestimating or underestimating their actual future feelings.*

(p. 47)

With respect to the second issue, omission of full details, Sampson (2012 cited in Falout, 2013, p. 47), asked his students to visualize many types of possible future selves including successful and unsuccessful selves, and to create a timeline that starts from their present self to their best possible future selves utilizing English. Students then worked together to brainstorm the courses of action they might be able to take when they are faced with trouble along that timeline. Through this activity, his students were better able to begin to foresee their 'future selves' using English.

As for the third issue, abbreviation, Falout (2013, p. 47) states that '*abbreviating a future situation involves incompletely playing out the full scenario in our minds*'. In other words, people tend to look for the upsides, and ignore the downsides that might come on the path to an actual future situation. Thus, it is important for students to learn from others on how they can cope with struggles and find their best possible 'future selves' utilizing English.

With reference to the last issue, prospection, Falout (2013, p. 47) reports that 'people tend to refeel future events based on their immediate external contexts and internal conditions'. Since English for Japanese students is a test-oriented subject, 'students are then disconnected from each other, their teacher, and their own L2 selves' (p. 48). Thus, it is important for students to meaningfully connect with each other so that they can simulate their future for English study in the real world.

One more important issue that needs to be addressed is time management skills. Almost all of the participating students were able to understand the importance of time management skills in prioritizing English study over other activities at the end of the academic year. Additionally, several strategies to help students create time for English study were taught, including utilizing a weekly class schedule sheet in the spring semester. Most students however could not properly manage their time to engage in necessary tasks to improve English listening skills during the summer break. Although necessarily speculative, the time management skills they learned in the spring semester could have been activated during the summer break if concrete English study reasons that are associated with future careers had been established. In order to help students establish their 'EFL future selves', the instructor needs to present Japanese college freshmen with a web of EFL 'future self' examples that can be used with visualization activities.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study examined the positive effects of the establishment of concrete English study reasons on self-efficacy beliefs of our students. It was found that students could sustain their motivation to improve their English listening skills based on the findings of various self-efficacy studies.

In terms of English listening skills based on TOEIC scores, we might be able to say that the methods utilized in this study helped our students improve their listening skills during the 2016 academic year. In addition, students' self-efficacy beliefs about English listening skills were high when they were first investigated at the onset of the spring semester. Students sustained their high self-efficacy beliefs throughout the 2016 academic year in general. Thus, it seems our methods also might have helped students sustain their motivation to improve English listening skills. However, a careful examination of our motivation questionnaire revealed a phenomenon opposite to what was expected.

Although the majority of our students were able to sustain motivation to improve their English listening skills during the spring semester, most of them had difficulty doing so during the two-month summer break. More than 80% of our students could not sustain their motivation during the break. Students also had trouble managing their study time during the break, even though time management skills were also taught in the spring semester. Thus, it is difficult to account for the observed phenomena from a perspective of self-efficacy beliefs.

Based on the results of our questionnaire, it was found that most students either gave in to temptations or prioritized other activities over English study during the summer break. Those students who were able to sustain motivation to study English however, had concrete English study reasons that are associated with their future careers. In addition, most students indicated that they had understood the importance of concrete English study reasons and time management skills to sustain motivation to study English at the end of the academic year. Nevertheless, around 50 % of our students could not sustain motivation to study English throughout the 2016 academic year.

One possible interpretation is that it does take at least one year for our freshmen to truly understand the importance of concrete English study reasons and time management skills. Another plausible interpretation is that our pedagogical approach could not truly help students carry over their understanding the importance of concrete English study reasons and time management skills and put that understanding into effect during the spring semester. In other words, a constant reminder of such importance alone could not help students truly vision their future EFL selves.

Also, the visualization measures suggested by Gilad (2017) and Sampson (2012) and the fallacies when simulating the future (Gibert and Wilson, 2007 cited in Falout, 2013) need to be carefully considered, before we can implement them into our pedagogic approach.

It is important to note that previous studies of future L2 selves lack any qualitative nature in how exactly Japanese students visualize their 'future L2 selves' (Sampson, 2016). Therefore, because it is difficult for college freshmen to think of their concrete English study reasons that are associated with their future careers, sufficient examples of various concrete reasons of English study that motivated Japanese EFL learners have might need to be provided. There are many sources of these English study reasons and merits of having English skills for future careers on the Internet. Thus, instead of having students try to think of concrete study reasons or merits of having English skills for their careers on their own, the instructor can direct students to these sources in class while also having them engage in the visualization activities that Sampson (2012) suggested.

The proposed pedagogic approach, with the new findings in this study incorporated, will be used again in the 2017 academic year. It is hoped that the majority of our 2017 academic year freshmen will then be better able to visualize their 'future EFL selves' in the spring semester. And with that, better able to use the self-regulated learning cycle and effective time management skills to overcome the usual temptations and to prioritize English study over other activities during the 2017 summer break.

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**Appendix 1: A Questionnaire on EFL Learners' Self-efficacy in Listening Skills**

- 1) I have the ability to improve my listening skills if I try hard.
- 2) I have the ability to concentrate on the content to which I listen.
- 3) I believe that my proficiency in listening will improve by practicing it.
- 4) I am sure that if I practice listening more often, I will be able to understand English movies without subtitles.
- 5) Sometimes the listening practice in the class is difficult and I cannot understand it completely. But I believe that I can understand it if I listen to it many times.
- 6) I can sustain my motivation to improve my English listening skills.
- 7) I believe in my own capabilities to overcome difficult listening tasks.
- 8) I won't be stressed out even if I make mistakes in listening tasks.
- 9) I know I can deal with any unexpected difficulties I may face in listening tasks.
- 10) I know I can improve my listening skills if I continue my study.

**Appendix 2: English study motivation questionnaire items**

- Q1. Have you been able to sustain your motivation to study English since you entered university?
- Q2. If so, let us understand why you were able to do so. If not, let us understand why you weren't able to do so.
- Q3. For those students who were able to sustain motivation to study English, do you always make concrete plans to accomplish study objectives?
- Q4. For those students who were able to sustain their motivation to study English and always make concrete plans to accomplish study objectives, do you reflect on your study strategies to see if your learning strategies are working or not?
- Q5. For those students who have completely lost interest in English study, what caused you to lose interest in English study?

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