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# Research into Second Language Learning Motivation in Japan

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## Abstract

This paper aims to clarify the applicability of research into second language motivation research in Japan to English language teaching practices. In order to accomplish this, three areas will be covered. First, an overview of the research done in Japan will be provided. Second, a model analysis of five studies done in differing contexts using different methodologies will be provided, and finally the relevance of these studies to English language teaching practice will be discussed.

## Introduction

For teachers, integrating theory into classroom practices and procedures is often a daunting task. This is especially true when it comes to motivation. Due to the plethora of recognised theories of motivation, the differing experimental approaches and disagreements over terminology and definitions teachers “can find few guidelines that suggest how to cohesively and consistently apply the most useful and practical elements from this extensive array of motivational information” (Wlodkowski, 1986, pp.44-45, cited in Dornyei 2001b). This paper is an attempt to help solve this problem.

To this end an overview of the L2 motivation research in Japan will be provided. Following this, five studies will be examined by first looking at the major research methodologies in L2 motivation research and how these studies fit into them. Finally the relevance of the studies to teachers in Japan will be discussed.

## An overview of L2 motivation research in Japan

Language learning motivation as a major research concern in Japan is a recent phenomenon. Perhaps the reason for this is that learner variables in general were not of much interest. Large class sizes and predominantly teacher-centred teaching methods discouraged attention to individual learners (Kimura, Nakata & Okumura 2001, p. 50). Research in Japan has been largely at the tertiary level and focused on identifying the underlying structures of language learning motivation in Japanese EFL contexts (Irie, 2003, p.87). Furthermore, most of the studies have been

cross-sectional. Few longitudinal or qualitative studies have been carried out in Japan. Berwick & Ross (1989, p.89) concludes that this preference for a “snap-shot” approach to the research done in Japan has led to ambivalence in the findings. For example, research on motivation in Japan has failed to demonstrate clear links between motivation and proficiency (p.193). In addition, Prappel (1982) and Okamura & Bichard (1985) contend that natural exposure to English and experience using the language are more powerful predictors of proficiency than motivation.

Since 1990 studies on language learning motivation in Japan have been published including: Konishi (1990); Matsukawa and Tachibana (1996); Miyahara, Namoto, Yamanaka, Murakami, Kinoshita, and Yamamoto (1997); Sawaki (1997); Takanashi (1991, 1992); and Yashima (2000) (all cited in Kimura, Nakata & Okumura, 2001). Much of the research on motivation in Japan has used Robert Gardner’s approach and regarded his findings to be applicable to Japan (Kimura, Nakata & Okumura, 2001, p.51). This is not surprising. According to Dornyei (2001a, pp. 46-47), Gardner’s motivation theory is the most influential in the L2 field. Further, the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), the instrument used to operationalise the main components of Gardner’s theory, has been shown to have very good construct and predictive validity and it is the only published standardised test of L2 motivation (p.52). Nearly all survey studies done in Japan contain items intended to measure instrumental and integrative motivation (Irie, 2003, pp. 87-88).

Despite the fact that Gardner’s own studies have verified the reliability and validity of the A/MTB in Canada (Gardner, 2001) some question of the instrument’s validity in Japan has been raised. Brown, Robson and Rosenkjar (2001) cautions that the A/MTB may not be a valid measure of a unitary construct. They conclude that, “Clearly, further study of the construct validity of the A/MTB is warranted, especially when it is applied to this population” (p.389). Nevertheless, according to Irie (2003, p.94), there is support for Gardner’s socio-educational model and its applicability in Japan.

Yashima (2000) reports that learners who are both integratively and instrumentally motivated tend to show better learning behaviours but she concludes that these reasons for learning can affect proficiency only through the mediation of effort and a desire to learn. Yashima’s conclusion is curious because there seems to be a separation made between motivation and effort.

For Gardner, motivation involves a goal, effort, a desire to achieve the goal, and a favourable attitude toward activities involved in language learning. Gardner’s definition of motivation differs from the standard psychological definition of motivation in that he included effort as a component of motivation rather than considering it a result of motivation (Gass & Selinker 2001, p. 350). Some of the inconsistencies in the research done in Japan may have arisen through a misinterpretation or misapplication of Gardner’s model.

Kimura, Nakata & Okumura (2001) and Irie (2003) argue that it is difficult to divide language

learning motivation into 2 distinct types such as integrative/instrumental or intrinsic/extrinsic motivations because overlap will occur between the four types. Gardner (2001) states that scores on Integrative Orientation and Instrumental Orientation tend to correlate significantly and the high positive correlations between the two classes of reasons simply indicate that neither class of reasons is mutually independent. LoCastro (2001, cited in O'Donnell, 2003, p.36) calls for an expansion of Gardner's framework to include a greater role for individual differences, particularly the learner's identity as a non-native speaker of the target language.

Irie's review of the literature is particularly informative because it included studies published in Japanese. Most of the studies she reviewed were factor analytical studies. According to Irie (p.86) the recurring patterns are highlighted by two sets of contrasting motivational concepts: instrumental and integrative motivation on the one hand contrasted by mastery and performance goal orientation on the other.

The current research suggests that Japanese learners have a tendency to appreciate the instrumental value of learning English for exams, jobs, travel and meeting native speakers. Furthermore, the interest in travel and native speaker contacts differs from the traditional definition of integrative motivation. That is, Japanese learners do not wish to integrate into English speaking communities. Both instrumental motivation and positive attitudes toward English speakers and their cultures have a positive influence on proficiency when present with effort and a desire to learn. Again, a separation is made between motivation and effort, a separation not made by Gardner.

Irie suggests that mastery and performance orientation may help explain the language learning motivation of Japanese learners. (p.97). She cites Miyahara (1997) and Yamamoto (1993), which found factors similar to mastery orientation. Kubo (1999) found that a fulfilment-training orientation, which Irie associates with mastery orientation, often associates with other motivational variables including: cognitive appraisals, self-evaluation of learning skills and cost of learning. That is, mastery oriented learners are more likely to employ learning strategies.

Hiromori (2003), perceiving a gap between what motivation researchers were studying and what EFL practitioners wanted to know, applied self-determination theory to the study of EFL motivation. This study found that learners' perceptions of their own competence have a strong influence on their motivation. Hiromori suggests that teachers can enhance intrinsic motivation by fulfilling the learners desire for relatedness. Furthermore, a desire for an autonomous climate in the classroom might affect motivation indirectly through learners' perceptions of being competent. For Hiromori the most important educational implication of the study was that targeting learners' perceptions of self competence and the development of a variety of types of motivation could be a good strategy for effectively enhancing a student's self determined forms

of motivation, including intrinsic motivation, in school settings (p.173).

So then, in summary, research into motivation in Japan has been cross-sectional, for the most part. The subjects of the studies have been largely college and university learners. The major focus of the research has been the underlying structures of L2 motivation. Robert Gardner's approach has underpinned much of the research but some researchers have questioned the extent to which it applies to Japan and some have differed from Gardner with regard to the place of effort vis-a-vis motivation. Japanese learners tend to be instrumentally motivated to learn English. Interest in travel, traditionally seen as a type of integrative motivation, appears to fit within instrumental motivation among Japanese learners. Mastery and performance orientations and Self Determination Theory may provide further explanation of Japanese L2 motivation.

The long and short of it is that the research up till now has provided both teachers and researchers alike with more questions and few answers. Hiromori's perception of a gap between what researchers have been investigating and what teachers want to know is real. Research in language learning motivation is critical in successful classroom teaching and it is important that the theories posited by researchers are applicable to classroom instruction (Okada & Shimabayashi, 2002). It is equally important for teachers to look critically at the research in order for them to determine whether or not the research is indeed applicable to their classrooms. A model analysis of five studies conducted in Japan follows.

### **A model analysis of 5 studies of L2 motivation in Japan**

The 5 articles chosen for close consideration here were chosen because they specifically investigated motivation in Japan and they provide a variety of types of studies. The articles were analysed keeping the following questions in mind:

- What types of studies were done?
- What aspects of EFL student motivation were studied and what conclusions were drawn?
- How relevant are these studies to English teachers?

#### **What types of studies were done?**

The studies are summarised in Table 1 and Table 2 below. Looking at Table 1 we can see that Berwick & Ross (1989) is a longitudinal study consisting of repeated cross-sectional studies; Kimura, Nakata & Okumura (2001) is a factor analytical study; O'Donnell (2003) and Takada (2003) are survey studies; and Duppenhaler (2002) is an experimental study.

### **What aspects of EFL student motivation were studied and what conclusions were drawn?**

In this section we will consider the studies according to the learning contexts in which they

were conducted: first, Kimura, Nakata & Okumura (2001) because it investigated a wide variety of learning contexts and it deals with the underlying components of L2 motivation in Japan; next, Berwick & Ross (1989) and O'Donnell (2003) because they were conducted at universities and share a common concern with the effect of entrance exams; then Duppenhaler (2003), and finally Takada (2003).

Kimura et al (2001) follows the trend away from social psychology toward an educational focus in L2 motivation research. Looking at Table 1 we see that the study investigated the motivational components that characterise a sample of learners from 12 different institutional settings including: junior high school; senior high school (3 different schools); junior college English majors; university social science majors, science majors, foreign language majors, and English language education majors; and language school learners. Kimura et al (2001) found 6 factors to describe the L2 motivation of these learners, which they labelled Intrinsic-Instrumental-Integrative Motive, Extrinsic-Instrumental Motive, Influence of Good Teachers, Language Use Anxiety, Preference for Teacher Centered Lectures and Negative Learning Experiences. The largest single factor was Intrinsic-Instrumental-Integrative Motive. This factor contains elements that are normally not associated with each other and it demonstrated that L2 motivation in Japan is complex. Kimura et al also looked at how the components of L2 motivation differed between the learning contexts and genders. Intrinsic-Instrumental-Integrative Motive was high among junior high school learners, junior college English majors, foreign language majors, and English language school learners. Extrinsic-Instrumental Motive was positive among junior high school learners and engineering majors. It was negative for senior high school learners, social science majors, education majors and language school learners. Influence of Good Teachers was positive for junior college English majors, foreign language majors, English education majors and English language school learners but negative for secondary school learners, science majors, and engineering majors. Foreign language majors were found to be less anxious in the classroom than senior high school students, junior college English majors or social science majors. Interestingly, for senior high school students only Language Use Anxiety was positive. This suggests that senior high school students may lack language learning motivation, and promotion of L2 learning motivation by their teachers may be hampered by high language use anxiety. This study also found a preference for teacher-centred lectures among the senior high school boys surveyed. The researchers admit that two of the schools from which the samples were drawn are academically oriented. Nevertheless, a high degree of language use anxiety would lead to a preference for teacher-centred instruction in less academically oriented institutions as well.

The lack of motivation among high school seniors found in Kimura et al (2001) contradicts the assumption underlying Berwick and Ross (1989) that the "intensity of motivation to learn

English' hits a peak in the last year of high school... Once the university examinations are over, there is very little to sustain this kind of motivation..." (p.206). Referring once again to Table 1 we see that Berwick and Ross (1989) was a longitudinal study consisting of two cross-sectional studies, one conducted at the beginning of the academic year and the other conducted after approximately 150 hours of classroom instruction. The results of the pre-tests showed little relationship between attitudes and motivation and proficiency. In the case of the structure test a general interest in English was the strongest predictor of proficiency. In the case of the listening pre-test the strongest predictor was a desire to study overseas. Gain scores on the listening post-test were too small to show any significant relationship changes in attitudes and motivation. However, there was a significant relationship between structure post-test gain scores and motivation. Twice as many items on the motivation survey (six versus three) predicted twice as much of the variance in gain scores (forty-three percent versus twenty percent). The researchers

**Table 1: Research design summary**

Study	Subjects	N	Purpose of the study	Instruments
Berwick & Ross (1989)	1st year public university (International commerce majors)	90	Examine how attitude and motivation changes develop concurrently with changes in proficiency over the course of one academic year, approx. 150 contact hours.	CELT Forms A & B Listening and Structure subtests (Harris & Palmar, 1986); TOEFL Reliability: (CELT A Structure=.78, Listening=.77; CELT B Structure=.76, Listening=.75; Structure gain score reliability =.57, Validity=.70, Listening gain score reliability=.34, Validity=.73 50-item attitude and motivation questionnaire (administered twice) Reliability not reported. Stepwise and block wise regression analysis.
Kimura et al (2001)	12 different learning contexts within Japan.	1,027 JH: 12% SH: 45% T: 39% LS: 4%	Investigate the various motivational components characterising different learning contexts in Japan.	50-item motivational questionnaire based on components of motivation suggested by Schmitt, Borie, & Kassabgy (1996), Clement et al (1994), Dornyei (1990), Miyahara et al (1997) and Tremlay & Gardner (1995). Reliability (Cronbach $\alpha$ ): .865 Factor analysis MANOVA
Duppenthaler (2002)	2nd year students at a private girls' high school in the Kansai area	99	Investigate the effect of 3 types of written feedback on student motivation	10 item bilingual pre-treatment questionnaire using 5 point likert scale; 20 item bilingual post-treatment (last item open ended but answers converted to 5 point likert scale). Reliability not reported for questionnaires. Logistic regression, MANOVA; 40 item cloze test. Split-half adjusted reliability: .82; in class writing assignment. MANOVA.
O'Donnell (2003)	1st year private university in the Nagoya area	135	Examine the influence of entrance examination preparation, teacher and parental expectations, and ss beliefs formed after 6 years of study on motivation.	85-item 6 point Linkert scale questionnaire based on BALLI, A/MTB, and Gardner's (1985) semantic differential scale. Reliability (Cronbach $\alpha$ ): .877; Pearson correlations and paired t-tests.
Takada (2003)	1st year private JHS in Metro, Tokyo.	148	Examine the differences between ss who received English instruction in primary school and ss who did not with regard to foreign language anxiety, 3 constructs of motivation and foreign language learning aptitude.	32 item Japanese questionnaire using a modified FLCAS (20 items) and modified version of Dornyei (1990) (12 items). Reliability; Anxiety=.87, Interest in FL=.62, Instrumental motivation=.70, Need for achievement=.70; LLM. Reliability: auditory memory=.85, phonemic coding=.78, rote memory=.73, inductive ability=.61; ANOVA

**Table 2: Summary of conclusion**

Study	Conclusions
Berwick & Ross (1989)	Overall attitudes not strongly related to proficiency prior to instruction at university. Attitudes more related to individual differences on the structure pre-test (20%) than to differences on the listening pre-test (10%). Post-test survey showed broadening of motivation. Initial levels of motivation transitory.
Kimura et al (2001)	Largest factor of language learning motivation complex, consisting of intrinsic, integrative and instrumental subscales. Learners needing English for present or future careers tend to be motivated intrinsically and integratively as well as instrumentally. Japanese learners may not be so easily motivated to learn foreign languages.
Duppenthaler (2002)	Study confirmed the positive effect of journal writing has on motivation regardless of feedback type.
O'Donnell (2003)	Parents and teachers continue to emphasise English for entrance examinations. The dichotomous focus on English for entrance examinations or general fluency may not accurately explain ss perceptions of the language learning experience in secondary school. Contradictory beliefs about language learning attitudes appeared.
Takada (2003)	Study failed to find positive effects for foreign language study in elementary school (FLES). Results suggest that FL anxiety and motivation may be affected by factors other than the starting age of FL learning. Urges caution against the overestimation of FLES as a motivation booster.

suggest that this broadening of motivation may have been as a result of a wider variety of learning experiences, including the establishment of an exchange programme with an American university.

Berwick and Ross identified two latent motivational components that they labelled “Support” and “Interest”. They found that “Interest” was a significantly better predictor than “Support”. They state that there appears to be an experiential dimension to learners’ motivation that develops over the year and begins to replace the entirely instrumental motivation that came before. While teachers were not found to be of direct influence they have influence in their roles as counsellors and administrators and they can encourage the kind of broadening of motivation observed in this study.

O'Donnell (2003) was conducted in the midst of change at universities in Japan. Changing demographics have made passing entrance exams less important as new avenues for entry are established so that universities can maximise the number of students they can draw from the dwindling pool of high school graduates available. In view of this changing situation O'Donnell sought to uncover whether learners continue to be influenced by preparation for entrance examinations, what role teacher and parental expectations played in influencing student motivation, what beliefs students held after six years of study and what impact these beliefs might have on their desire to increase their English proficiency while studying at university.

O'Donnell's study found that the students generally held a negative view of their secondary school English language education. Following this rather unremarkable observation were a number of surprises. First, while students acknowledged that anyone could learn a language they did not feel that they had an aptitude for learning it. The study also revealed that the participants



were not particularly integratively or instrumentally orientated. Teachers and parents still emphasized learning English for entrance exams. However, when O'Donnell asked the participants to define their parents, teachers and their own language study orientation as either focused on examination preparation or general fluency he found that the traditional dichotomous construct did not accurately reflect reality. A number of students believed that preparing for entrance exams helped their general proficiency and vice versa.

The studies considered thus far have investigated motivation from a broad perspective. Duppenthaler (2002) narrows its focus to investigate student motivation toward a specific set of pedagogical procedures. With regard to teacher feedback to student journal writing he posed the question: "Do students who receive meaning focused feedback show a greater degree of positive motivation than students who receive either positive comments or error-focused feedback?" (p. 131). The result of his experiment revealed that the answer to Duppenthaler's question is, not really. All the participants claimed to believe that journal writing had a positive affect on their English proficiency. All groups claimed that journal writing had changed their attitudes toward studying English for the better. The students in the group receiving meaning focused feedback differed from the other two groups in that they were more anxious to receive journals back every week and they said that they would like to do journal writing the following year. Duppenthaler concludes that the findings of this study confirm the positive effects of journal writing on student motivation.

Finally we look at Takada (2003), which examined the differences between students who received foreign language instruction in elementary school (FLES) and students who did not (non-FLES) with regard to foreign language anxiety, 3 constructs of motivation (interest in foreign languages and foreign language speakers, instrumental motivation, and need for achievement) and foreign language learning aptitude. The only significant variable was need for achievement. The no-FLES students felt that they were behind the FLES students. Takada concludes that FLES students are not necessarily at an advantage.

### **How relevant are these studies to English teachers in Japan?**

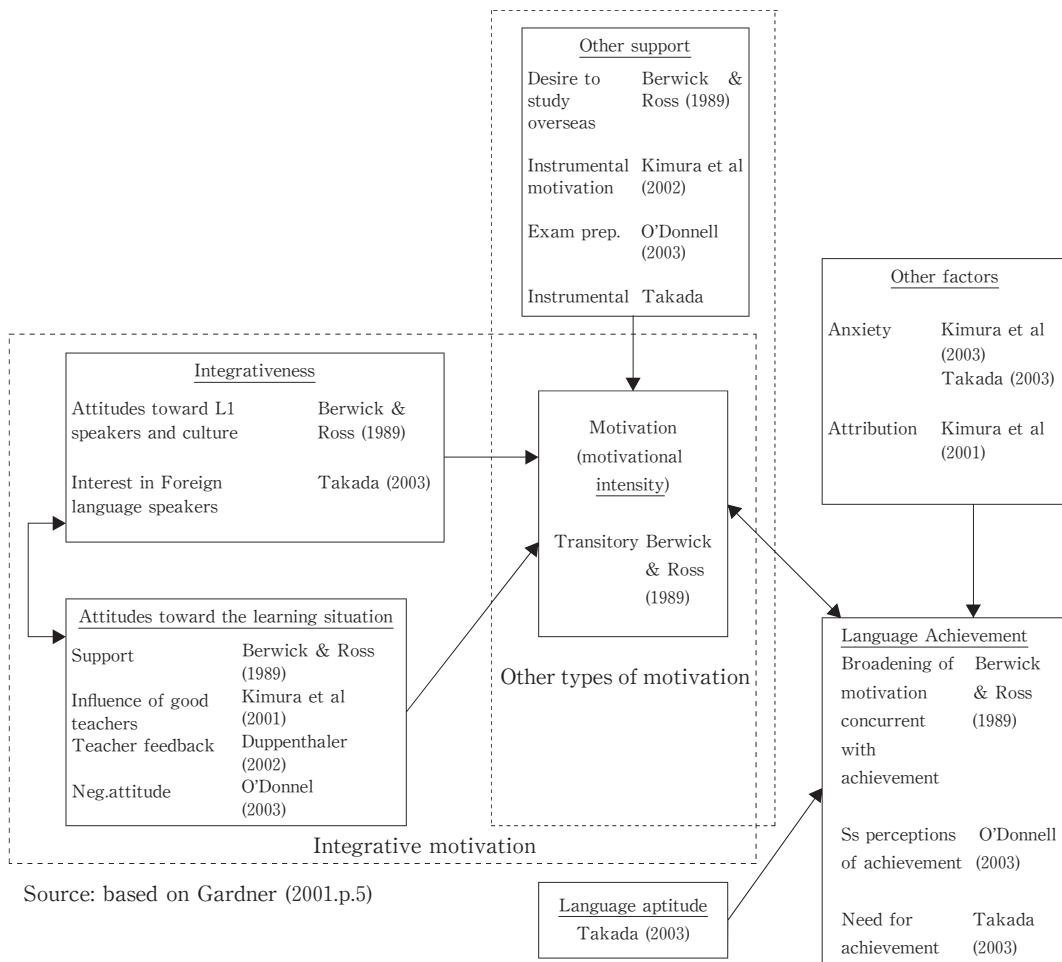
In order to determine the relevance of these studies we must first look at their quality with regard to design and reporting. The checklist provided in Brown (1988. pp. 59,60.) is a good tool to use for this. Also, Brown (2001) and Dornyei (2003) are excellent references to use to determine the quality of questionnaires. Overall the studies examined here measure up fairly well. Reliability is a concern, especially since the reliability of the questionnaires employed was not always reported. However, some researchers including Williams & Burden (1997, p.90) contend that individual traits are more usefully considered as variable and context-specific. Therefore a



given questionnaire should be expected to produce different results on different occasions. Studies employing questionnaires should also include the questionnaire in its entirety in the report. This was not done in Berwick & Ross (1989).

Next we need to look at the content of the studies. As Dornyei (2001b, p.13) notes, theories of motivation that represent a few selected motivational factors do not lend themselves to effective classroom application and therefore we need a detailed and eclectic construct that represents multiple perspectives. Figure 1 below is an attempt to do this. It is an adaptation of Gardner's basic model of the role of aptitude and motivation in second language learning (2001, p.5). While there has been some question as to how applicable Gardner's work is to the situation in Japan, it has clearly been influential and so Gardner's model serves as a good basis for framing the five studies considered here. However, some significant changes have been made in order to reflect the Japanese situation more accurately. In Gardner's original model there is only one large

**Figure 1: Schematic mapping of studies onto a modified version Gardner's model.**



box containing *integrativeness, attitudes toward the learning situation and motivation*. Gardner labels this box *integrative motivation*. *Other support, other factors, language achievement and language aptitude* circle around the *integrative motivation* box freely. In Figure 1 above another box has been added labelled *other types of motivation*. Inside this box are *other support and motivation*. The two boxes, *integrative motivation and other types of motivation* are roughly equal in size and they intersect. This is to show their mutual interaction. As we have seen, L2 motivation in Japan is complex, with both integrative motivation and instrumental motivation having more than one dimension.

In Gardner's original model the arrow between motivation and language achievement is solid and unidirectional from motivation to achievement. In Figure 1 above the arrow is dotted and bi-directional. This reflects the uncertainty over which factor is the cause and which factor is the effect. Gardner's model is the result of a study whereas Figure 1 is merely a mental image derived from the literature on motivation in Japan. Still, it serves a purpose in attempting to see the shape of L2 motivation as we know it in Japan today. Seen together we can conclude that the five studies examined here are relevant to teachers but the question was not, are the studies relevant but rather how relevant are the studies?

Individually, the most relevant study is Duppenenthaler (2002) because it has direct pedagogical implications. Apart from the time it takes teachers to read them, journals are easily incorporated into most English language courses. More studies of teacher interventions should be done. Kimura, Nakata & Okumura (2001) is also very important because of the range of learning environments studied. Other similar studies including a larger sample of language school learners would be most welcome. As Berwick & Ross (1989, p. 207) states, Japan has more language schools than any country in the world. Motivation to learn a language is clearly present among the adult population. A greater understanding of this population's L2 motivation might help explain the lack of it among learners in traditional learning environments. Takada (2003) is of great interest to secondary school teachers who are concerned about how language education in primary school will affect the instruction delivered in junior and senior high school. Clearly further study is needed, especially since the Ministry of Education's stated purpose for implementing language education in primary schools is to promote motivation rather than acquisition (p.9). Berwick & Ross (1989) and O'Donnell (2003) are the least relevant studies here. Teachers are well aware of the tyranny of the exam culture in Japan. Berwick and Ross's observation that motivation is transitory is something teachers observe every day. In the classroom student motivation often changes from moment to moment. At the end of the day what teachers need is more research into classroom interventions. Action research is often impractical for teachers

with limited time and resources. Researchers would serve the field well by working with teachers and assisting them in action research projects.

## Conclusion

This paper has attempted to help make the often mystifying state of L2 motivation in Japan manageable for teachers. To this end an analysis of five very different studies done in Japan was offered. This was provided as an example of how teachers might make critical judgements about studies of motivation and their applicability to teaching practice. Also a brief overview of the research into second language learning motivation in Japan was provided. Finally a plea for more classroom-based research was made in order to provide teachers with the kind of understanding of L2 motivation that interests *them*. Japan seems to be lagging behind in this regard. It's time that Japan not only catches up with the rest of the world, but ultimately it should surpass it, just as it has done in the area of industry.

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