

Motivational Enhancement Strategies in an EFL Context: What Strategies Are Used to Maintain Learners' Motivation to Keep Learning?

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Abstract

This study explored how Japanese college students maintain motivation in an EFL context in Japan, where learners inevitably encounter with great difficulties to keep learning because the context itself does not provide them with rich input and output opportunities, although the actual use of English is indispensable for improving English proficiency. For that purpose, a 30-item questionnaire – Motivational Enhancement Strategy Inventory (MESI) – was developed through the strict processes confirming validity and reliability. The participants were 102 female Japanese college students, who were asked to answer MESI. Based on the results of explanatory factor analysis, descriptive statistics, and a Pearson product-moment correlation, it was found that learners used a combination of strategies such as enjoying English use, gaining a stimulus to English learning, and trying to increase output. In an EFL context, while using strategies to change their moods in addition to the strategies stated above, learners tried to maintain their motivation to keep learning. It was also found that some strategies such as having a native friend were not easily employed. This study indicates that

there exist effective strategies for low-motivated EFL learners in order to enhance their motivation.

1. Introduction

Motivation is a well-known term and everyone uses it in their daily life. It is an indispensable component for people to achieve their goals because it supports the proceeds to their own goal and leads to success. In the field of foreign language learning, it is also necessary for learners to develop a high level of proficiency. However, it is usually difficult to maintain motivation because language learners are affected by numerous individual characteristics and social factors (Skehan, 1989). In EFL circumstances, learners have more difficulties keeping their motivation because language acquisition occurs in their social context, where English is rarely used outside the classroom: the EFL circumstances easily discourage learners by causing the decline of their willingness to acquire a new language. In the area of motivation for language learning, there were plenty of investigations that describe learner's motivation or examine the relationship between motivation and English learning. However, to date there has been little research of strategy focused on learners of low motivation, or the strategies *per se* to maintain motivations in an EFL context. This study focuses on such motivational strategies when learners have lost their motivation in learning a foreign language.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Motivation in Language Learning

Over the past three decades, numerous motivation research for second or foreign language acquisition have been conducted. In second/foreign

language learning, two kinds of motivation, integrative and instrumental motivation proposed by Gardner and Lambert (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992), have long been investigated (Gass, Behney, & Plonsky, 2013). However, it is sometimes difficult to clearly divide motivation into two areas as these could some overlap with each other (Dörnyei, 1995). On the other hand, as Gardner's study focused on motivation of immigrants coming to Canada, especially integrative motivation can be rarely seen in a situation where the target culture is not clearly specified. From different points of view, motivation can be dichotomized as intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: intrinsic motivation arises from the curiosity and interest in the activity itself, and extrinsic motivation relies on the anticipation of a reward from outside (Deci & Ryan, 1985). These two types of categories can be best utilized by combining "motivational dichotomies" (Brown, 2007, p. 175).

2.2 Learner Strategies and Motivational Strategies

Individual differences among learners in second/foreign language learning have been a concern for learners themselves, parents, language teachers, and researchers, and "understanding how the characteristics of individuals are related to their ability to succeed in learning a second language" (Lightbown & Spada, 2013) has been pursued for a long time. Among the learners' various characteristics such as learner style or aptitude, learner strategies that could be defined as thoughts and actions consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own language learning (Griffiths, 2013) have attracted great zeal because of their flexibility and the potential for training good learner strategies to less successful learners (Wakamoto, 2014). As the early seminal studies such

as Stern (1975), Rubin (1975) or Naiman, Fröhlich, Stern and Todesco (1978) identified, learner strategies employed by good language learners share the common features such as associating their target language with their original knowledge, having an effective use of grammatical knowledge, having a positive attitude toward learning, trying to make guesses, always searching for meaning, having willingness to practice or to use the language in real communication, or monitoring their language use. These strategies can be classified into several strategy classification systems such as memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies (Oxford, 1990), cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) or cognitive, communication, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies (Wakamoto, 2009).

Although motivation and learner strategies had been separately researched, Dörnyei (2001) emphasized the importance of their interconnection and proposed “motivational strategies (MSs),” which is defined as “techniques that promote the individual’s goal-related behavior” (ibid, p. 28). In a situation where there is often “a lack of time or energy, and a lack of environment support” (Gass, Behney, & Plonsky, 2013, p. 444) for adult learners, researching MSs has rationales: learners need to find appropriate opportunities of English input/output/interaction in which a limited exposure to English is available.

2.3 Research Questions

Therefore, it is worthwhile to investigate MSs in an EFL context like Japan. Our research questions are as follows:

- (1) What types of motivational strategies are available in EFL circumstances?

- (2) What motivational strategies do Japanese learners of English use when they have lost their motivation to keep learning English?

3. Method

3.1 Instrument

As a first step of the survey, we developed a questionnaire to investigate the construct of motivational enhancement strategies (Motivational Enhancement Strategy Inventory: MESI; see Appendix A). We paid careful attention to develop this questionnaire reliable and valid: in regard to the reliability, we made sure that this instrument was consistent through calculating Cronbach's alpha and as for the construct validity, we confirmed that the following six constructs of MESI were essential to research motivational enhancement strategy: language use strategies (Part A in the questionnaire), metacognitive strategies (Part B), strategies to control affective domain (Part C), strategies to gain a stimulus for English learning (Part D), strategies to increase instrumental (Part E) and intrinsic motivations (Part F). At the same time we ensured that items were suited to each construct of MESI to maintain high content validity. The first version of MESI consisted of 140 items. Through the process of several intense discussions, a pilot study, and repeated revisions, we deleted items that were considered redundant or irrelevant. At the same time, we added a few items that were considered essential so as to ensure higher reliability, construct and content validity. As a result, the final version on MESI comprised 30 items from Part A to Part G as explained below. Each question used a six-point Likert Scale ranging from "strongly agree," "agree," "rather agree," "rather disagree," "disagree" to "strongly disagree."

All of the parts consisted of five items. Part A was about "Language

Use Strategies” such as “I keep a diary in English” (item 1). Part B consisted of “Metacognitive Strategies” by which learners are aware of and understand their process of English learning. Part C was about “Affective Strategies” by which learners control their emotion. Part D was about “Strategies to Gain a Stimulus for English Learning” such as “I look for a person who gives me advice about how to study English” (item 17). Part E was comprised of “Instrumental Motivational Strategy” by which learners study English in order to achieve their aim. Finally, part F was about “Intrinsic Motivational Strategies” such as “I sing English songs” (item 27) and “I take interest in native English speakers (athletes, artists, etc.)” (item 30).

3.2 Participants and Procedures

In order to evaluate MESI, a pilot study was conducted to 24 Japanese college students majoring in English on December 6, 2013. Based on the suggestions from them, we considered if the questionnaire items and its format were easy to follow. As a result, 15 items out of 30 items were modified and one item was replaced by the other one.

The final version of MESI was taken in practice on December 19, 2013. The participants in this study were 102 college students who majored in English. They were all female, and participated in a *Foreign Language Learning and Teaching* course as an elective. Before starting MESI, the participants were instructed how to answer the questionnaire and ensured that the questionnaire did not affect any course grading. In addition, the participants were told that there were no right or wrong answers. MESI took approximately 15 minutes to complete.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Factor Analysis and Reliability of MESI

To investigate the structure of Motivational Enhancement Strategy (MES), a principal factor analysis with promax rotation was conducted. The factor loadings were set at more than .35. As a result, five items were excluded: items 1, 13, 14, 15, and 18. Then factor analysis with the same procedure was repeated. As a result, six factors were extracted (Table 1). In order to investigate if the questionnaire (MESI) was appropriate, we calculated three types of reliability: for the overall MESI, for the overall MESI with five items deleted, and for each factor. Cronbach's alpha for overall of MESI was .857, which was a high reliability. This proved that MESI was a reliable scale. Cronbach's alpha for 25 items was .810 and that for each factor was as follows: .849 (Factor 1), .778 (Factor 2), .751 (Factor 3), .618 (Factor 4), .662 (Factor 5), and .528 (Factor 6). Although the reliability of Factor 6 was relatively low, each item of Factor 6 was requisite to this research. It was worthwhile to continue analyzing the data as was. Six factors were important to investigate what type of motivational strategies Japanese learners use.

Factor 1 obtained seven items (items 26, 27, 28, 4, 30, 29, and 5) and was represented by "I listen to or watch my favorite English music, films and dramas" (item 26) and "I attend lessons taught by native English speakers" (item 5). These items were focused on Part F (Intrinsic Motivational Strategy) and Part A (Language Used Strategy). This factor was named Strategies to Enjoy English Use (EEU).

Five items were loaded on Factor 2, including items 25, 23, 22, 24, and 21. As one example, item 25 was expressed in "I make myself believe those

Table 1. The Factor Analysis of Motivational Enhancement Strategy Inventory

	Component						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Q26 I listen to or watch my favorite English music, films and dramas.	.953						
Q27 I sing English songs.	.786						
Q28 I associate English learning with my hobby.	.759						
Q 4 I watch English films.	.696						
Q30 I take an interest in native English speakers (athletes, artists and so on).	.576						
Q29 I make plans to go abroad.	.527						
Q 5 I attend lessons taught by native English speakers.	.368						
Q25 I make myself believe those who are good at English have an advantage in finding a job.		.835					
Q23 I make myself believe that speaking English is cool.		.670					
Q22 I try to get good results in tests such as the TOEIC or the TOEFL.		.665					
Q24 I live up to my parents' expectations.		.660					
Q21 I do my best because I pay high tuition fees.		.451					
Q 9 I think about the purpose of learning English.			.783				
Q10 I think of the reasons that I don't feel like studying English.			.686				
Q 8 I reconsider my ways of learning English.			.605				
Q20 I make a small bet on something about English learning with my friends.				.692			
Q19 I find a native friend who speaks English.				.532			
Q 7 I keep notes about the difficulties of English learning.				.481			
Q16 I find a friendly rival about English learning.				.463			
Q17 I look for a person who gives me advice about how to study English.				.374			
Q 2 I go to an English conversation school.					.745		
Q 3 I talk to non-Japanese in English.					.657		
Q12 I do something for a change.						.694	
Q 6 I am away from learning English for a while.						.570	
Q11 I give a reward to myself.						.538	
Correlation coefficients between components	1	—	.173	.009	.273**	.471**	.103
	2		—	.322**	.265**	-.001	.121
	3			—	.177	.003	.123
	4				—	.207*	.104
	5					—	.208*
	6						—

N=102.

Extraction Method : Primary Component Analysis (PCA).

Rotation Method : Promax.

Variance explained (by extraction): 49.3%

who are good at English have an advantage in finding a job,” all of the items were associated with Part E (Instrumental Motivational Strategy). This factor was labeled as Strategies to Have Instrumental Motivational (HIM).

Factor 3 was defined by three items (items 9, 10, and 8) and was represented by “I think about the purpose of learning English” (item 9) and “I think of the reasons that I don’t feel like studying English” (item 10). These items corresponded to Part B (Metacognitive Strategy). Therefore, this factor was termed Metacognitive Strategy (MS).

On Factor 4, five items were loaded (items 20, 19, 7, 16, and 17) and was represented by “I make a small bet on something about English learning with my friends” (item 20) and “I have a friend who speaks English” (item 19). These items were associated with gaining a stimulus to learn English. This factor was named Strategies to Gain a Stimulus to English Learning (GSE).

Two items were gathered on Factor 5; “I go to an English conversation school” (item 2) and “I talk to non-Japanese in English” (item 3). These items were related with communication in English. Therefore, it was labeled as Output Strategy (OS).

Finally, Factor 6 obtained 3 items (items 12, 6, and 11) and was expressed in “I do something for a change” (item 12) and “I am away from learning English for a while” (item 6). These items were connected with learners’ affect, so it was named Affective Strategy (AS). As can be seen, most of these factors corresponded to the constructs of MESI.

4.2 Correlations between Extracted Factors

The relationships among the factors were shown in Figure 1. There

were statistically significant correlations (Pearson product-moment correlation) between extracted factors, between EEU (Factor 1) and OS (Factor 5), and also between EEU and GSE (Factor 4). Especially, the relation between EEU and OS had the highest correlation in this research. Moreover, OS correlated with GSE and with AS. These three correlations among EEU, GSE and OS could be constructed in Figure 1. In addition, Figure 1 displays a high interrelation between HIM (Factor 2) and MS (Factor 3), and also between HIM and GSE.

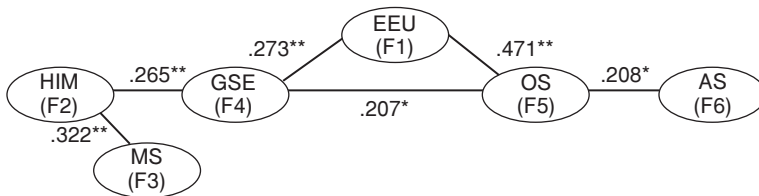


Figure 1. Correlations between Extracted Factors

The results revealed two findings. In order to enhance motivation in learning English, Japanese learners need to enjoy English. For example, they can communicate with non-Japanese in English. In addition, using English relates to emotion. It is important for learners to properly control their emotion such as shyness and anxiety. On the other hand, communicating with native English speakers could be an enjoyable activity for learners. It is pleasant for them to make themselves understood in English. If they do not hit upon a word they want to say, they can look it up in a dictionary and then they can acquire it: the noticing or triggering function of output (Swain, 2005). Output strategy could result in further increasing motivation to learn English.

The other finding is that gaining a stimulus could lead to enjoying English. Here, we can claim that learners make good use of instrumental

motivational strategy as a stimulus for learning English. For example, learners try to improve the TOEIC scores to get a good job and to enter a higher-level university. It is a good example of the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle that Shewhart developed in 1924 (as cited in Best & Neuhauser, 2006). Learners make a plan for how they study and when they take the TOEIC test to fulfill their purposes. Then, they execute (do) the plan and check if they could follow that plan. As a result, they can improve what they could not accomplish. It is important to review their performance objectively. Metacognitive strategies are related to instrumental motivation.

4.2.1 Responding to Research Question 1

The factor analysis yielded six factors: Factor 1 – Strategies to Enjoy English Use, Factor 2 – Strategies to Have Instrumental Motivation, Factor 3 – Metacognitive Strategy, Factor 4 – Strategies to Gain a Stimulus to English Learning, Factor 5 – Output Strategy, and Factor 6 – Affective Strategy. These six factors indicate what type of motivational strategies Japanese learners of English use.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics

4.3.1 Frequently Used Strategies

Figure 2 indicates frequently used strategy. The most frequently used strategy was “I do something for a change” (item 12). The second was “I listen to or watch my favorite English music, films, and dramas” (item 26). The third was “I watch English films” (item 4). Other strategies were “I sing English songs” (item 27) and “I associate English learning with my hobby” (item 28).

By using strategy item 12, learners controlled their feelings to refresh and relax themselves and then they summoned up their motivation. By employing items 26, 4, 27, and 28, learners enjoyed English through English music, films, and dramas as a hobby. These things motivated EFL learners so that they could entertain themselves in English. In short, these worked as refreshing treatments for enhancing motivation.

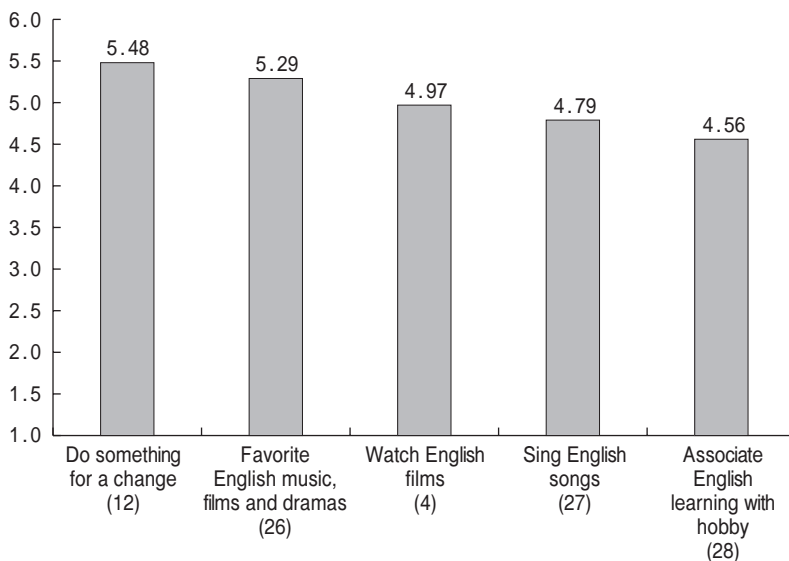


Figure 2. Frequently Used Strategies

The three strategies — listening to English music, watching English films and singing English songs — were easy to use and available in the EFL Japanese context. These strategies contribute to encouraging and maintaining motivation in learning English. It would be essential for EFL learners to acquire these convenient strategies.

4.3.2 Less Frequently Used Strategies

Figure 3 shows less frequently used strategy. “I have a native friend

who speaks English” (item 19) was the least frequently used strategy. The second was “I keep a diary in English” (item 1) and the third was “I go to an English conversation school” (item 2). “I make a small bet on something about English learning with my friends” (item 20) and “I keep notes about the difficulties of English learning” (item 7) followed.

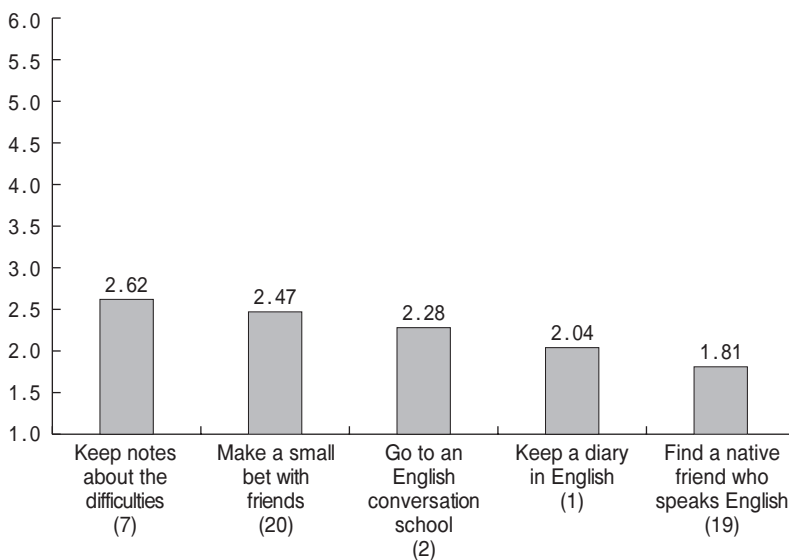


Figure 3. Less Frequently Used Strategies

Item 19 shows that Japanese female college students found it difficult to make friends with non-Japanese. It is considered that they had few chances to come across non-Japanese. That is, it is fairly difficult for EFL learners to change the environment by themselves. In addition, items 2 and 20 contain problems regarding money: spending money was an unfavorable strategy to enhance motivation. Furthermore, a lot of patience and effort were needed to keep a diary in English or to take notes about English learning. In short, changing the circumstances, making effort and

using money were not attractive strategies for Japanese college students. In the end, it would be reasonable for Japanese EFL learners to employ available strategies in the present situation such as using English movies, music, and TV or radio dramas rather than changing their surroundings. Japanese learners of English can be involved with English atmosphere in Japan by watching English movies or dramas. In other words, authentic materials such as English movies, music and dramas bring integrative and intrinsic motivation. Although extrinsic motivation such as parent's reinforcement or encouragement have a temporal positive effect on learners, intrinsic motivation is better than extrinsic motivation (Deci & Flaste, 1995). Intrinsic motivation makes learners keen to study English and then they would be willing to keep learning for years, which eventually causes successful learning. Authentic material is the key to summon and keep English learning motivation.

4.3.3 Responding to Research Question 2

Japanese learners were likely to use available strategies in the present situation using English movies, music, and TV or radio dramas for refreshing and relaxing themselves when they lost their motivation to keep learning English. These strategies enhance integrative and intrinsic motivation for learning English.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Findings

The following are the main findings of this study:

- (1) Factor analysis yielded six factors: Factor 1 – Strategies to Enjoy English Use, Factor 2 – Strategies to Have Instrumental Motivation,

Factor 3 – Metacognitive Strategy, Factor 4 – Strategies to Gain a Stimulus to English Learning, Factor 5 – Output Strategy, and Factor 6 – Affective Strategy.

- (2) The strategies were correlated with each other, with the correlation between Factor 1 and Factor 5 as the highest. There was also a significant correlation between Factor 1 and Factor 4. In addition, significant correlations were found among Factor 2, Factor 3 and Factor 4. Moreover, Factor 5 was correlated with Factor 6. These reveal that an output activity such as communicating with native English speakers would be beneficial for learners to increase their motivation.
- (3) As a general tendency, the most frequently used strategy was the one to change their moods and strategies to enjoy English such as listening to English music, watching English films and singing English songs. It would be necessary for EFL learners to utilize these familiar strategies. On the other hand, the least frequently used strategy was the one that would cost a great deal in an EFL context – going to English conversation school. Moreover, learners tended to avoid the strategy that was relatively difficult to employ in an EFL context – having a native friend. Although some strategies are not easily employed, it is important to know that there exist effective strategies for low-motivated EFL learners in order to enhance their motivation.

5.2 Limitations of This Study

The limitations of this study are as follows:

- (1) All the participants were female college students, and the majority of them belonged to the English Department. This factor likely affected

the results of this study. For further study, it is important to collect data from a larger variety of participants — students from different departments as well as male participants.

- (2) We have to acknowledge the limitations of using the questionnaire. As the participants simply read the questions and responded to them, there is a potential for the participants to misinterpret the questions. In addition, there is no way to tell how truthfully they responded to each question. Applying triangulation research design for further studies is required. That is, it is desirable that an interview or observation should be implemented.

6. Implications

The results of this study report that there are beneficial strategies Japanese learners of English can employ to summon up motivation in an EFL context. One of the best strategies is that learners come in contact with authentic materials outside the classroom. The key to success that learners must have is a positive feeling towards English. For example, when they are lacking motivation, they can listen to English music or watch English films. Moreover, they can find it pleasant to communicate with native speakers of English and make themselves understood in English, which was a low frequently used strategy in this study. Above all, teacher should have their students realize how significant and advantageous it is to keep learning English in the age of globalization. The teacher as well as parents plays a crucial role in giving learners various perspectives. Thus, these strategies mentioned above are essential for language learners but some of them would be difficult for learners to utilize in an EFL environment. Although further studies will be required to

investigate how teachers can provide EFL learners with authentic materials, teachers need to have the courage to adopt a new approach that enhances intrinsic motivation.

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Appendix A

Motivational Enhancement Strategy Inventory (MESI)

(英語の学習動機を向上させる方略に関する質問紙)

Part A

1. 英語で日記を書く
2. 英会話スクールに通う
3. 外国人と英語を話す
4. 英語の映画を観る
5. ネイティブスピーカーの授業を受講する

Part B

6. 英語の勉強をしばらく止めてみる
7. 英語学習で困っていることをノートに書き出す
8. 自分の英語学習の方法を考え直す

9. 何のために英語を学んでいるか考える
10. 英語学習でやる気が上がらない理由を考える

Part C

11. 自分にご褒美を与える
12. 気分転換をする
13. 英語学習を楽しもうとする
14. 自分で自分を励ます
15. 気に入った場所（カフェなど）で英語の勉強をする

Part D

16. 負けたくないライバルを自分の中に作る
17. 英語学習で自分にアドバイスをしてくれる人を探す
18. 英語を使わなければいけない環境に身を置く
19. 英語が話せる恋人を作る
20. 英語学習に関して友だちと小さな賭けをする

Part E

21. 一講義の授業料分を考えて、頑張ろうと思う
22. 英語のテスト（TOEIC など）で良い成績を取ろうとする
23. 英語が話せるとかっこいいと思いつむ
24. 親の期待にこたえる
25. 英語ができると就職に有利だと思いつむ

Part F

26. 好きな洋楽を聴いたり、好きな洋画やドラマを観る
27. 英語の歌を歌う
28. 英語学習と趣味をリンクさせる
29. 海外旅行に行く計画を立てる
30. 英語のネイティブ（スポーツ選手、芸術家）に興味を持つ