

〈Research Report〉

Motivating Young Japanese EFL Learners

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Cambridge Dictionary defines motivation a number of ways: enthusiasm for doing something; the need or reason for doing something; willingness to do something.

Indeed, how well a task is performed depends on that enthusiasm and willingness to do something. If someone wants to do something, they are more likely to do that project or assignment, and do it well, than a person who does not want to do the same task but is required to because of an outside influence.

Take a child who sees the Rankin Bass or Peter Jackson movie of *The Hobbit* for example. He or she watches the movie and says to his or her parents, “Is there a book? I want to read *The Hobbit*.” That student is more likely to enjoy reading the book than the student who is told by their teacher to read *The Hobbit* as a class assignment. The initial interest or motivation exists in the first student because they have context from having seen the movie and an intrinsic desire to expand on or continue the story.

The second student has no idea what the story is about and may or may not be interested after reading the summary on the back of the book. Further, they may have an Affective Filter (Krashen, 1977) in place, as they may not like reading, or have a learning disability or language deficiency. It may be as simple as not liking the fantasy genre.

Motivating children can be a challenging task, but if done properly will reap great rewards for the student over the course of learning the English language.

This paper will seek to answer the following questions:

How can you motivate young learners to study English using both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation?

And, perhaps more challengingly and importantly,

How can you maintain young learners motivation over time, from elementary school into their junior high school and high school years?

LITERATURE REVIEW

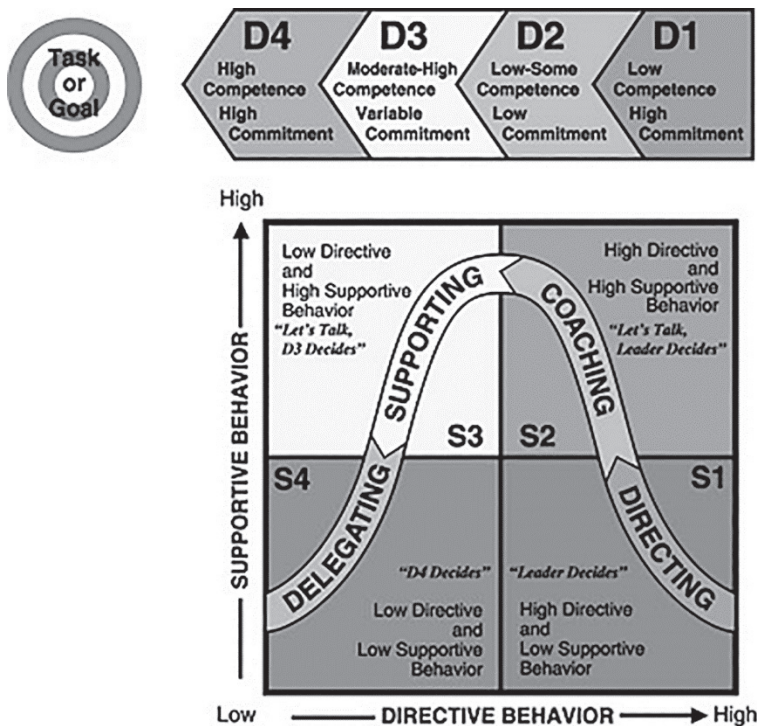
First we will look at Ken Blanchard's Situational Leadership II model (Blanchard, 1985), which will then be applied to young learners developmental levels and how teachers and the community respond to and aid the student in studying English.

Blanchard's model explains developmental levels with the terms "competence" (ability, knowledge, and skill) and "commitment" (confidence and motivation). Each developmental level relates to someone's experience with a particular task, both relating to how well they are able to perform a function and how motivated they are to perform that function.

Blanchard states: "Four combinations of competence and commitment make up what we call 'development level.'" They are:

- D1 – Enthusiastic Beginner: Low competence with high commitment
- D2 – Disillusioned Learner: Low/middling competence with low commitment
- D3 – Capable but Cautious Performer: High competence with low/variable commitment
- D4 – Self-reliant Achiever: High competence with high commitment

This model is commonly illustrated by the following diagram:



This model is useful for anyone in a mentor or leadership capacity to recognize where a subordinate is in their training and experience level. They are then able to provide guidance and support appropriate for that level.

It is easy for a child to enter into the Enthusiastic Beginner category. They may see something on television, or in person, such as a baseball game, and become quickly interested in the sport. They show their enthusiasm to their parent(s) and soon they are given the equipment to play the sport: a glove, a ball, and a bat.

Children may experience English in the same manner. The language is new and fresh to them, and depending on the way the language is presented or the lesson is instructed, may be seen as exciting, or as a welcome break from their regular lesson schedule. Others may view it as “playing games in English.” In any of these cases, students are (hopefully) excited to experience the language and look forward to it on a regular basis.

These forms of extrinsic motivation may be what initially engages the children in learning the language, though they are very important. How does one get students to buy into the program when everything they experience is new?

Creating and maintaining this “wow factor” is important for young learners to continue their enthusiasm towards the sport or the language. Establishing a reward system for doing well on an assignment creates additional external motivation for learning the language. While parents and educators are able to understand external pressures such as MEXT requirements and school policies, the children want to experience learning. It is up to parents and educators to create the desire for children to learn in an English environment.

The Disillusioned Learner is possibly the most important development level, as it is the turn in which motivation plays an important role.

The child playing baseball experiences how difficult it is to catch a ball, hit the ball, run to first base to beat a throw, or track down a hit in the outfield. This low competence may lead the child to give up the sport, and resentment from the child in the form of time spent and the visible reminders of the glove and ball may be painful. The parent may resent having invested time and money into their child’s interest, even if they do not outwardly express it to the child.

In English lessons, the child will inevitably find it difficult to express themselves in the foreign language. The frustration caused by not being able to communicate may lead them to give up studying the language or develop an Affective Filter (Krashen) or barrier to learning the language.

This is more likely to occur later on, when students become fully aware of how classes function and encounter grammar-based lessons with assessment criteria that focuses on right and wrong and test results. The students may not get the opportunity to express themselves and begin to see the language as unnecessary for their future. This is supported by the Possible Selves Theory (Markus & Nurius,

1986) which will be discussed later in this paper. Indeed, many students in Japan do not see English as useful for them, and do not want to study the language.

Yet, there are other students who enjoy seeing good test results and supplement their studies with English conversation school or the plethora of content available on the internet such as videos on YouTube.

This is the most critical stage for the coach or teacher to provide support to the student so that they avoid the pitfalls mentioned above. In baseball, the child repeats fielding over and over until he is able to catch or field the ball. Batting practice allows the child to work on timing and hitting the ball.

In English, repetition and pattern practice are important as the teacher guides the child through learning the language. Routines are set up so that even when new vocabulary is introduced the same language structures are being used, even if they are not being taught explicitly.

Take for example, a lesson in which pets are being taught:

“What’s this?”

“It’s a cat.”

“What’s this?”

“It’s a dog.”

The same grammatical structure can be applied to almost any object. The students learn and are able to use the structure through controlled practice. They will often learn the question as well, and are able to ask each other, not only for practice in class, but as a rudimentary example of a conversation.

The Capable but Cautious Performer in Stage Three experiences various degrees of motivation and an increasing level of ability. Once the child has moved out of the D2 stage, they have removed many barriers to learning and begin again to explore the environment on their own and learn according to their own desires.

The child realizes through experience and coaching that the ball can be hit with proper timing and a correct angle, even if they cannot fully express those concepts. They experience spatial awareness of the game and understand that they must quickly run to catch up to the ball and pattern recognition helps them determine trajectory for both catching the ball and throwing it.

Studying a language is no different. As a child learns phonics, they become able to read and explore the language as it relates to their own interests. They may choose to read level-appropriate books in their favorite fantasy or science fiction genres. Basic games in English might be played, or cartoons watched. As the world opens up to the child, their motivation returns and brings them into the final stage.

The self-reliant achiever has high commitment and high competence and has a willingness to work hard on their own to achieve their goals.

The baseball player has experienced winning and losing and knows what needs to be done to succeed.

They run or take practice swings outside of practice, or watch game video to analyze the game, engaging in mental practice.

The English learner has experienced a wide range of grammar and mistakes and can correct themselves at times. They seek out material that interests them to continue their language studies.

This is most often seen in students who have studied abroad and experienced the language in an ESL environment. They have the experience of being able to express themselves and being understood by someone in a real conversation.

In order to maintain student motivation, teachers, parents and mentors must be aware of students' current abilities and progress so they can instruct and direct them properly.

MARKETING

Studies of supermarkets in the United States have shown that placing cereal boxes at or just above eye level is ideal for visibility and leads to increased purchases. (Musicus et al., 2015.) They feature smiling cartoon characters such as Cap'n Crunch or Tony the Tiger who look downward at just the right angle to make it appear that they are looking directly at the children.

This hard sell placement is aided by commercials aired during cartoons. The characters are usually placed in active, humorous settings and further increase the desire for the product.

This desire for the product, or motivation, is something that can be harnessed for the marketing of English lessons.

Using popular characters such as those from the Sesame Street television show or Snoopy from the Peanuts comic strip is one way to do this. The children may be familiar with these characters from television or other media, and the realization that they can study English—in which these characters were originally set—may increase motivation to study the language. This can be frequently seen in bookstores with textbooks in a variety of disciplines featuring Snoopy, AKB 48, or more recently the Frozen Story Collection (Step into Reading), or, for Korean learners, the Learn! KOREAN with BTS Book Package.

The use of popular characters and music stars is an excellent way to increase the spread of language and possibly increase fanbases.

Even the use of “cheap pops” in class helps to keep class fresh and children interested. If a teacher is teaching a lesson about pets and includes a random flashcard of Pikachu or Yokai from Yokai Watch, children will immediately protest and say that those characters are not pets. Then the teacher can expand the language into “Pikachu is not a pet” and beyond, maximizing the language potential for the lesson.

POSSIBLE SELVES

Moving beyond the initial D1 “honeymoon” phase, it is time to look at how to move beyond the extrinsic motivation and into intrinsic motivation.

Much as the baseball player pictures himself hitting the ball when he is not physically practicing, or a dancer practicing a dance routine in his or her head, possible selves allows a person to picture what they would like to be in the future and what steps they need to take to reach that goal.

Markus and Nurius first discussed the concept of Possible Selves in 1986. Their model states that there is a link between cognition and motivation, allowing people to visualize what they could become in the future and the steps necessary to achieve that goal. They also point out that people are aware of what they are afraid of, which may prevent them from achieving their possible selves.

The highly motivated student, whose main goal is to study abroad, will be exposed to a country or culture through the language, then perform their own research into how to achieve that goal of studying abroad. If the ALT is from Australia, the student might use Wikipedia or YouTube to gain more information about the country. Then they will look into study abroad programs and continue to study English until they succeed at his or her goal of studying abroad.

Other students may have relatives who have lived or are living abroad in another country, and a visit to that country as extrinsic motivation provides the spark which leads to wanting to live or study abroad themselves.

Just like the student who says “I want to be a teacher when I grow up,” or a doctor, or a pilot, the student sits down with an advisor and plans the steps necessary to become his or her possible self.

Take the student that wants to be an international pilot. That student determines that English is necessary to communicate with the crew, passengers, ground staff, and other workers in the countries that are serviced by the airlines they want to work for. The student studies mechanical engineering so that they understand how the plane operates. The student studies physics to determine vectors and acceleration to be able to fly the plane on course and take off and land, even in the event that instrument readings are imprecise.

Mastering a language, however, is not as clear a goal. To determine their possible selves, students must first reach initial possible selves by studying abroad.

Such goals may be: “I will study English to study abroad. I will go to Canada because I like Canadian culture. I will come back to Japan and go to an international university to continue to study English and improve further.”

The students also ask themselves some very important questions:

Where do I want to study? – Possibly motivating

What are the benefits of studying abroad? – Motivating

Am I going to be lonely not seeing my friends and family for so long? – Demotivating

Some of these questions, when turned into actual experiences, cause the student to face culture shock.

Kalervo Olberg (1954) first created the notion of culture shock. A person experiences this when moving from one environment to another, and consists of four phases: Honeymoon-Negotiation-Adjustment-Adaptation. This has been studied many times, and affirmed again by Olberg in 2009.

This is a similar experience to Blanchard's developmental level phases. The initial excitement of studying abroad, when everything is new and fresh, is the Honeymoon phase (D1). After a while, this excitement wears off and the student enters the Negotiation phase (D2). Things are not the same as Japan—the convenience stores are different, they start to miss friends and family, and there is no Japanese food readily available.

The student gradually adjusts (D3), either by accepting the differences and learning how to deal with them, or by shutting down and avoiding exposure until it is time to go home. In such cases they find other Japanese friends and insulate themselves in a miniature bubble of their own language or culture, never really entering the D3 Adjustment phase.

Learning to accept these differences and how to cope with them gradually leads to Adaptation (D4), and the student can manage tasks in their second language. Having experienced these hardships makes the students stronger and realize what steps will be needed to achieve their next possible selves in the university or career phases of their lives.

Unfortunately in 2020, most study abroad programs were cancelled or postponed due to the Coronavirus Pandemic. External factors such as this are unpredictable and can impact motivation, causing students to enter or remain in the D2 phase for an extended period of time.

PROLONGED D2–D3 PHASE

According to the US State Department's Foreign Service Institute, Japanese is a Category 5 language and takes 88 weeks (or 2200 hours) to achieve a functionally native level (Minardi, 2019.) Assuming the numbers are the same for a Japanese learner studying English, one would need to study 42 hours and 20 minutes per week to achieve native ability in one year. Such total immersion programs exist, but are usually not feasible for a regular student due to time or financial constraints. Students must study their other required courses as well, and English conversation schools can run upwards of \$3000 per contract.

This naturally leads to a prolonged learning phase and an extended time in the D2 phase, further increasing the possibility for students to lose motivation, especially if they fail to see progress with the language.

The question is, how can English progress be measured? Tests such as the TOEIC are standardized

and the written test does not measure verbal communication. Further, test scores may fluctuate as much as 50 points depending on the student and the circumstances on the day the test is taken. Still, an increase in TOEIC score is as valid a measure as any to show that student ability is or is not improving.

Can fluency be measured by the number of vocabulary words known? A student may learn 1000 English words, but the meaning is unimportant if they are unable to use the vocabulary accurately in context. Many study books isolate vocabulary words and teach them only in one or two contexts, limiting the functionality and ability for the student to learn to use the language to its full extent.

Another way to measure English progress is through speech and debate competitions. Every year, Josai International University holds a high school speech competition in which students present a speech. Winning a competition or receiving a trophy are tangible factors students can achieve to show progress with the language and maintain or increase their motivation level.

Hikaru Nakamura, a chess Grandmaster, illustrates this point well. He says,

The trophies you win at Nationals are like four feet tall, and it's just way too much...I think it's a great ploy by the organizers 'cause like if your son or your daughter, let's just say they're nine years old, and they win this gigantic five-foot trophy, they're going to be like, "Mommy, daddy, I want to keep going and playing in these chess tournaments...I want to win a trophy." It's a great sales pitch.

The parallels between the rewards for sports competitions and English competitions could not be more clear. This extrinsic motivation is necessary in the prolonged D2 phase to keep students interested in learning the language, as well as making their support group of parents, teachers and others aware of how much the student has progressed and how far he or she still has to go to master the language.

Even the students who do not win the sports competitions or English competitions may be motivated to try harder, improve their English, and compete again the following year.

FALSE LEVELS

One must also note that not all students may not be easily identified as being in a particular English developmental level.

A "false beginner" is a student who has experience with the language and may speak the language somewhat, but for some reason cannot progress to the next level. They learn vocabulary and phrases from movies or music and are able to use them within their level, but lack other basic vocabulary or grammar.

Similarly, a student may have the confidence of a D3 learner because their communicative ability is strong, but consistent fossilized mistakes means their grammar is stuck at a D2 level.

Students may not be aware of the extent (or lack) of their progress with the language; it is up to the community to provide every opportunity to assist the student. Teachers need to know where a student's

developmental level is so they can use Situational Leadership to instruct, direct or coach the student in a manner that meets their needs. Being aware of student strengths and weaknesses and adjusting their lesson plan or providing supplemental material allows the student to progress.

TEENS: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN YOUNG LEARNERS AND ADULT LEARNERS

Moving beyond possible selves, as students continue their language studies in junior high school and even senior high school, it is important to be aware of the fact that they are young adults. This means that while they need to be treated with respect as you would adults, they also need “edutainment” options to maintain their interest in a specific course period. More intellectual games should be included as a break between regular study activities to continue to teach the language in context as well as having the benefit of maintaining their motivation.

These students should be moving into the D3 phase, and will be capable of self-motivation and finding material they are interested in on their own for further study outside of class.

APPLYING THE MODEL

Using Situational Leadership II and considering each development level, one can theorize each level and a student’s ability as in the chart on the following page.

D1 learners—very young learners, and beginners of all ages, will tend to make more mistakes with the language, needing more correction. They may be highly motivated through either extrinsic or intrinsic forces, but need to spend a lot of time with the language to learn the basics.

As a student continues to study the language, they will move through the D2 and D3 phases, gaining confidence with their communicative and grammatical ability, making fewer mistakes, and will be able to expand their learning on their own, with less direction and more suggestion from their instructors.

It takes a long time to develop into a D3 or D4 speaker of English, and it is even harder to analyze or self-analyze where a student is on a fluency level. It falls upon the educators to be acutely aware of student progress and to direct them on how to improve as they continue their studies through elementary school and into junior high school and beyond.

One should also note that primary education in a language occurs from birth and a learner will have experienced 13+ years of study throughout kindergarten, elementary, junior high, and high school. One cannot expect to master English in a short amount of time considering how long it takes to learn a first language.

<p>D3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Students need motivation to study certain topics -are intrinsically motivated to study topics that interest them on their own -can use grammar and vocabulary to an extent and communicate but need to learn advanced language -need to be coached in the language -may be aware of mistakes they make with the language but may not be able to self-correct 	<p>D2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Students need a lot of support and motivation from teachers and community to continue to study -extrinsic motivation through rewards may be necessary -face difficulty with grammar, vocabulary, and/or communication -need to be instructed in the language -are unaware of mistakes they make with the language and need to be corrected
<p>D4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students create their own motivation to study -can research missing grammar and vocabulary on their own -do not need to be coached in the language but are welcome to any increased exposure -are aware of mistakes they make with the language and can self-correct or find the correct answer on their own 	<p>D1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Student motivation is high due to interest in the language or “honeymoon phase” -have little to no grammatical and vocabulary knowledge and little to no communicative ability -need a lot of instruction in the language -will make many mistakes and need to be corrected frequently

CONCLUSIONS

They say it takes a village to raise a child, and for a child studying English that saying is just as appropriate. Students need a team of educators and family who understand the needs and goals of the student and can coach them and motivate them through extrinsic rewards until the student develops their own reason or purpose for studying the language.

Once a student has gained intrinsic motivation they should be strong enough with the language to continue learning on their own through the myriad of educational materials available, by taking outside

language courses to complement their core curriculum, or by studying abroad.

Educators, working within a strong program, need to know how to motivate each of their students as they progress through developmental phases and assist them in discovering their possible selves in order to maximize their motivation and potential for language learning.

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