

Revisiting the Approaches for Exploring Students' Drive in Japanese Studies

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Abstract. Japanese Studies undergraduate programs offer students an engaging curriculum that provides a deep understanding of the Japanese language and culture. A degree in Japanese Studies equips students with valuable skills that are relevant in various fields, making it a popular choice worldwide. College students' motivation is a critical factor in academic success and has been extensively studied in education. The paper aims to review the existing theories related to study motivation, language acquisition, study abroad drives, and motivation, then to consider the approaches and details that we could prioritize for investigating the motivations and drives of students majoring and minoring in Japanese Studies in universities.

Keywords: drive, Japanese Studies, motivation, framework, theory

Introduction

The study of the Japanese language and culture remains attractive as Japan continues to be a popular destination for study abroad, tourism, and business. Many universities over the world offer undergraduate programs in Japanese Studies. Within these programs, undergraduate students study not only the Japanese language, but also focus on the language, culture, history, politics, economy, and society of Japan. Students who graduate from such a program will not only be proficient at the four basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing but also obtain the skills necessary for the future labor market such as business communication, translation, and interpretation, language teaching skills among others. These programs are typically offered at universities and colleges around the world, with many students choosing to pursue a major or minor in Japanese Studies. These programs offer the opportunity to learn the Japanese language, which is a complex language with a unique writing system, making it a challenging subject of study. In addition to language study, Japanese Studies programs also explore various aspects of Japanese life and culture, including literature, art, music, cinema, religion, philosophy, and politics. Students may also have the opportunity to study abroad as exchange students in Japan, allowing them to experience Japanese culture firsthand and improve their language skills in an immersive setting. The knowledge and skills gained through a Japanese Studies program can lead to a variety of career paths, including international business, diplomacy, translation and interpretation, education, journalism, and more. Graduates with a degree in Japanese Studies possess a valuable set of skills that are relevant in a globalized world.

According to the Modern Language Association, which tracks language enrollments in institutions of higher education in the US, Japanese is the fifth most studied language, with 68,801 enrollments, a 3.1% increase since 2013 (MLA, 2016). There were 7,580 undergraduate students studying the Japanese language and literature in US colleges and universities in 2019. Similarly, in the UK, there were 1,175 students enrolled in Japanese studies undergraduate programs in the 2019-2020 academic year (HESA, 2021).

Students who choose to pursue a major in the Japanese language are often motivated by a variety of factors, including a passion for the language and culture, a desire to gain a competitive edge in the global job market, and an interest in pursuing graduate studies in related fields, and a possibility of study in Japan. One of the primary motivations for majoring in the Japanese language is a passion for the language and culture. Japanese is a fascinating language, with a rich history, grammar, and vocabulary, and Japan is a country with a unique cultural heritage that has captured the imaginations of people all over the world. By studying the Japanese language in-depth, students can deepen their understanding of this fascinating culture and develop a lifelong appreciation for its history, art, and customs. It can also open up opportunities for going to Japan for graduate studies (Tran & Jin, 2021). Another key motivation for majoring in the Japanese language is the desire to gain a competitive edge in the global job market. Japan is a major player in the global economy, with many industries, such as technology, finance, and tourism, offering exciting career opportunities for those who are fluent in the language. Many Japanese companies have strong ties abroad, creating a demand

for local employees who can speak Japanese. Mastering business Japanese is essential for future employment in a Japanese company (Horii, 2011; Inai, 2012). In 2022, we investigated international students who arrived in Japan two years after the COVID-19 outbreak for enrolling in a Japanese language school. The respondents reported high instrumental drives such as gaining a degree, skills, and long-term jobs in Japan. These results imply a high need for finding employment in Japan as a main motivation for studying Japanese (Tran, 2023).

The paper aims to review the existing theories related to study motivation, language acquisition, study abroad drives, and motivation, then to consider the approaches and details that we could prioritize for investigating the motivations and drives of students majoring and minoring in Japanese Studies in universities. Then we discuss the factors that influence students' interest and commitment to learning, including personal, social, cultural, and educational aspects that we may choose to investigate in our further attempts.

Review of Theoretical Frameworks

The basic theoretical framework behind the motivation to study a foreign language and culture is complex and multi-dimensional, encompassing psychological, social, linguistic, and economic theories. In addition to that, the motivation to study abroad is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, making it a multi-disciplinary field of study. Here we briefly review the theories that we may take into account for designing our future study direction.

One of the most well-known theories in this context is the *Socio-Educational Model* of Second Language Acquisition, which proposes that motivation is a critical factor in second language learning. According to this theory, motivation is influenced by various factors such as attitudes towards the target language and culture, perceived competence in the language, and the value placed on language learning (Atay & Kurt, 2010; Hummel, 2012).

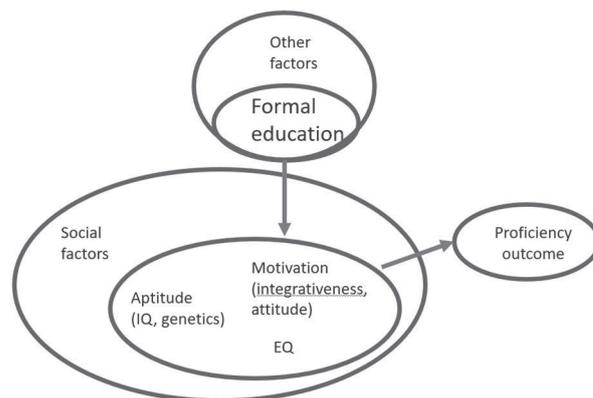


Figure 1. Socio-educational framework (by authors based on Gardner's model)

Instrumental Motivation suggests that individuals are motivated to learn a language because they see a practical benefit in doing so (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991). For example, a person may study Japanese because they plan to work or study in Japan, or because they are interested in Japanese pop culture and want to consume media in its original language. *Integrative Motivation* (Gardner, 2001) emphasizes that individuals are motivated to learn a language because they are interested in the culture and society associated with that language. For example, a person may study Japanese because they are fascinated by the history, art, or literature of Japan, or because they want to travel to Japan and communicate with locals.

Self-Determination Theory is a psychological framework that helps explain motivation in language learning. The theory suggests that individuals are driven by the need to satisfy three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In the context of language learning, this means that learners are more likely to be motivated if they have a sense of control over their learning, feel competent in the language, and have social connections to the target language and culture (Chirkov et al., 2007). The *self-determination theory* is also used to examine the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that drive students to study abroad (Yue & Lu, 2022).

Flow Theory suggests that individuals are motivated to engage in activities that challenge their skills and provide a sense of "flow," or a state of focused immersion and enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989). For example, a person may study Japanese because they find the language challenging and enjoy the process of learning new vocabulary and grammar structures. There are roles of *genetic factors* in language aptitude or learning ability. Let's take an example of research evidence that found that genetics can account for foreign language learning ability (Horst & von Koss Torkildsen, 2019).

Several theoretical frameworks are also used in the study abroad research to understand the motivation and decision-making process of students who choose to study abroad. One commonly used framework is the *push-pull model* (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), which suggests that students' decision to study abroad is influenced by both push factors (negative aspects of their current situation) and pull factors (positive aspects of studying abroad). The push-pull model is also a useful framework to explain the motivations and decision-making process of individuals who choose to study abroad. In this context, push factors are negative aspects of an individual's current situation that push them to seek an alternative in a foreign country, such as limited opportunities for academic or personal growth, dissatisfaction with the education system, or a desire for adventure and new experiences. On the other hand, pull factors are positive aspects of studying abroad that attract individuals towards it, such as the opportunity to learn a new language, cultural immersion, exposure to different academic perspectives, and international career opportunities. The push-pull model suggests that both sets of factors need to be considered when analyzing the decision-making process of students who choose to study abroad. The model provides a useful framework to understand the complex decision-making process of students who choose to study abroad and can inform policies and practices to enhance international education opportunities.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the *Accommodation Theory* proposes that individuals are motivated to learn a foreign language in order to reduce social distance and improve communication with members of a different linguistic and cultural group (Gallois et al., 2005; Giles & Powesland, 1997). This theory emphasizes the importance of social and cultural factors in language learning motivation. Another framework is the *theory of planned behavior* (Schnusenberg et al., 2012), which suggests that students' intentions to study abroad are influenced by their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

Additionally, the *social cognitive career theory* is used to explain students' motivation to study abroad as a result of their career goals and aspirations (Wang & Lent, 2022). The *Expectancy-Value Theory* (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000) provides a good framework for investigating an individual's motivation, which claims that individual choice, persistence, and performance can be explained by their beliefs about how well they will do and the extent to which they value the activity. This fills the gap that the push-pull model does not provide to investigate study abroad motivation (Yue & Lu, 2022).

These frameworks provide researchers and practitioners with means to better understand the study motivation, and the factors that influence students' drives and the decision to study Japanese Studies and to choose to study abroad.

Discussions

The field of Japanese Studies is a fascinating area of study that can be approached from a variety of perspectives. Undergraduate students who major in Japanese Studies may have a wide range of motivations for pursuing this subject, and understanding those motivations is an important task for educators and researchers to foster and support their academic career path.

Motivation is a significant factor that drives individuals to pursue their goals and objectives. For undergraduate students studying Japanese Studies, motivation is critical in achieving their academic and career aspirations. As such, investigating the various categories of motivation is essential in understanding the factors that influence their academic performance, career choices, and overall success. Here we suggest several categories of motivation that undergraduate students majoring or minoring in Japanese Studies should be investigated.

The first category of motivation that should be investigated is *intrinsic motivation*, which refers to the drive that comes from within a person. Undergraduate students pursuing Japanese Studies might have an innate interest in the Japanese language, culture, and society, which motivates them to pursue their studies in the field. Such students may be self-driven, enthusiastic, and passionate about their studies, leading to higher academic performance, a deeper understanding of the subject, and better career prospects. The second category is *extrinsic motivation*, which refers to the drive that comes from external factors, such as rewards, recognition, and other incentives. Undergraduate students studying Japanese Studies might be motivated by the prospect of securing a high-paying job in Japan after graduation. Alternatively, they might be motivated by the prospect of receiving scholarships or other academic awards. The third category is *social motivation*, which refers to the drive that comes from the need to connect with others or gain approval from others. Undergraduate students pursuing Japanese Studies might be motivated by the prospect of impressing their peers or gaining the approval of their parents or teachers. The fourth category is academic motivation, which refers to the drive that comes from the pursuit of academic excellence. Undergraduate students pursuing Japanese Studies might be motivated

by the desire to excel academically, gain deeper insights into the field, and achieve their full academic potential.

Understanding the sources of intrinsic motivation and of academic motivation in Japanese Studies students can help educational institutions design programs that foster academic excellence, provide appropriate academic support, and promote the pursuit of knowledge, leading to better academic outcomes and better career prospects. Understanding the sources of extrinsic motivation and social motivation in Japanese Studies students can help educational institutions design programs that offer appropriate incentives to encourage higher academic performance, and more significant interest in the field, promote social interaction, networking, and collaboration, leading to better academic outcomes and improved career prospects.

Motivation is a key factor in academic success, and it has been studied extensively in various fields of education. However, designing a study on the motivation of college students majoring in Japanese Studies poses several challenges. The definition and measurement of motivation can vary depending on the theoretical framework and approach taken by researchers. Some studies focus on intrinsic motivation, while others consider extrinsic factors such as grades, rewards, or peer pressure. Therefore, a clear and well-defined operational definition of motivation must be established before conducting the study. Secondly, cultural differences and language barriers can be an issue in studies involving non-native speakers of Japanese. Understanding the unique experiences and perspectives of these students can provide valuable insights into their motivation, but it also requires careful consideration of cultural and linguistic nuances. Thirdly, the diversity of the sample population can pose a challenge to ensuring the study's validity and reliability. Japanese Studies programs attract students from different backgrounds, with varying levels of proficiency in the Japanese language and different goals and expectations. Therefore, a careful selection of participants and sampling procedures should be employed to ensure representativeness and minimize bias. In addition, the study should consider the multidimensionality of motivation and its various components, including attitudes, beliefs, values, goals, and expectations.

After considering the theoretical frameworks and available literature, the authors consider several approaches to that could be used to investigate the motivations of undergraduate students majoring in Japanese Studies. Regarding methodology, both qualitative and quantitative approaches could be

applied for different purposes of investigation. As qualitative tools are more effective to investigate individual motivations, the authors consider conducting individual interviews, focus group discussions, analyzing students' work, etc. Conducting interviews allows researchers to explore a student's motivations in more depth and to gather more detailed information than is possible with a survey. Researchers can conduct one-on-one interviews with students or group interviews with multiple students. Interviews can be structured or unstructured, and they can be conducted in person or remotely. Focus groups are similar to group interviews, but they are more structured and aim to generate discussion and debate among participants. Focus groups can be useful for exploring the shared motivations and experiences of a group of students. Researchers can use a variety of techniques to facilitate discussion, such as presenting hypothetical scenarios or asking participants to respond to visual stimuli. Another approach is to analyze student work. This could include essays, projects, or presentations. By analyzing the content of these assignments, researchers can gain insight into what aspects of Japanese Studies are most meaningful to students and what motivates them to engage with the subject. Researchers can also identify patterns and trends in the content of the work to develop a deeper understanding of the motivations of students in Japanese Studies.

For quantitative data collection and analysis, at first choice we consider conducting cross sectional survey because of its resource-saving advantages. Survey on questionnaires poses a common method used in educational research to collect data from a large number of respondents. Researchers can design a survey that includes questions about the students' background, their interests, and their motivations for studying Japanese Studies. Surveys can be distributed online or in person, and they can be anonymous or include identifying information. In favor conditions, longitudinal survey or even follow-up cohort could be considered because of its advantages to specify the causal relationship among other advantages. Another approach is to use mixed-methods research. This approach combines multiple methods, such as surveys, interviews, and content analysis, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the motivations of undergraduate students majored in Japanese Studies. A comprehensive approach that incorporates different measurement tools and techniques can provide a more nuanced understanding of the factors that influence student motivation in Japanese Studies. Researchers can use the strengths of each method to compensate for the limitations of the others, which can lead to a more nuanced and detailed understanding of the subject. Regarding the subjects, besides the students themselves,

the parents, relatives or friends could be involved as additional sources of information. Basically, face to face is preferred, but investigation could also be conducted online depends on the time and budget availability.

Conclusion

Overall, Japanese Studies undergraduate programs from various universities offer students a diverse and engaging curriculum that allows them to gain a deep understanding of Japanese language and culture. Students with a degree related to Japanese Studies have a valuable skill set that is relevant in a wide range of fields, making it a popular choice among students around the world.

Motivation is a critical factor in the success of undergraduate students majoring or minoring in Japanese Studies. Understanding the different categories of motivation that drive students in this field can help educational institutions design programs that promote academic excellence, foster intrinsic motivation, offer appropriate incentives, promote social interaction, and collaboration. Ultimately, understanding and promoting motivation among Japanese Studies students can lead to better academic outcomes, higher career prospects, and a deeper understanding of the Japanese language, culture, and society.

Understanding the motivations of undergraduate students majored in Japanese Studies is an important task for educators and researchers. Designing a study on motivation in Japanese Studies is a complex and challenging task that requires careful consideration of various factors, such as the definition and measurement of motivation, cultural and linguistic differences, sampling procedures, and the multidimensionality of motivation. Addressing these challenges can help ensure the validity and reliability of the study's findings and contribute to a better understanding of the factors that shape student motivation in this field. By using a combination of approaches such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, analyzing student work, and mixed-methods research, researchers can gain a deeper insight into what motivates students to pursue this subject or what could be the motivation for study abroad and career in the future. This understanding can inform curriculum development, teaching strategies, career support, study abroad support and other aspects of Japanese Studies education.

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