

Motivational Dimensions in Language Learning: A Case Study of Vocational College Students Choosing Japanese Language Stream

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Abstract

Motivation is still taken into consideration when ones apply to a minor in a study program with limited seats. The present study explores students' motivational dimensions for choosing Japanese language stream which has limited quota in an Indonesian vocational college. Based on responses from 43 first-year students choosing Japanese stream, it was found that 'personal goals' dominated the list of motivational dimensions. In contrast, no student expressed 'external pressures/incentives' as their motivation. Following screening process conducted by the study program, 'personal goals' maintained its position as the most frequently expressed motivation. Moreover, 'academic interests' appeared as the motivational dimension which did not change in number following screening process. These results demonstrate the attraction of the internship program in Japan promoted by the study program in recent years.

Keywords: *motivation; motivational dimension; vocational college; Japanese*

1. Introduction

Motivation is still taken into consideration in many recruitment processes, be it in job recruitment (Seely, 2005; Woolley & Fishbach, 2018) or university admission (Fernández-Gil, 2015). Expressing motivation, thus, has a pivotal role to impress others so that one can be accepted in the recruitment process. Despite the necessity to impress the board of recruiters, taking their perspectives of what may impress them could be challenging (Waytz, Schroeder, & Epley, 2014). A study undertaken by Woolley and Fishbach (2018) explore on how expressions of intrinsic motivation tend to be underestimated. Intrinsic motivation is characterized by the action done for the sake of doing the action itself or no outcome is expected as the basis of the action nor motivates the action (Fishbach & Choi, 2012; Kruglanski et al., 2018). They found that people tended to underestimate intrinsic motivation, discouraging them from expressing their intrinsic motivation during job interview. In fact, such expressions of motivation is deemed pivotal when students applying to a major in second languages (L2).

The present study explores how the expressions of interests of Indonesian university students when applying to a foreign language stream in Applied Foreign Language study program of Universitas Diponegoro was taken into consideration to the decision-making process. The study program offers a unique learning experience in which the students have

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the opportunity to learn two foreign languages, i.e. English and Japanese, simultaneously. However, at the end of their first year, the students are required to decide a foreign language as the focus of their study of the following years (Reswari, 2020). This was done by choosing the foreign language stream: English or Japanese. Due to the limited number of teaching staff in Japanese language, the study program required the students to indicate their interest in the stream they choose and the motivation behind the decision. Nevertheless, their expression of interest was not the only aspect taken into consideration to pass the students to a specific language stream. There is a screening process in which the study program also takes the students' score and performance in the past two semesters into consideration.

A similar study conducted by Reswari (2020) on the motivation of students when choosing the foreign language stream at the same site provides useful basis for the present study. The previous study demonstrated that when students decided whether to choose English or Japanese stream, they considered the level of difficulty of the respective languages, career opportunities, and personal interests such as in the culture or in the linguistic aspect of the respective languages. However, the previous study was conducted when online learning during COVID-19 pandemic was implemented. Thus, it may not depict the current situation in which the learning is done offline, where the number of seats, rooms, and teaching resources are more taken into consideration. Furthermore, the screening process started to be implemented in 2023, making several factors to be taken into consideration. The screening process is done to make sure the number of students enrolling in each stream corresponds to the number of teaching staff in the stream. At the time the present study was conducted, the ratio of homebase teaching staff of English compared to Japanese was 3:1, respectively. Hence, the focus of the present study was on the student's expressed motivation to further their study to Japanese language stream, offering limited seats.

To better understand the students' motivation in choosing English or Japanese stream, the present study adopts motivational dimensions in L2 learning proposed by Ushioda (2001). The motivational dimensions can be categorized into three major clusters, including actual learning process, external pressures/incentives, and integrative disposition. Actual learning process covers motivational dimensions like language-related enjoyment/liking, positive learning history, and personal satisfaction. The second dimension, external pressures/incentives, stands alone as a cluster and a dimension, offering a wide range of external factors which may affect ones to learn L2. Then, integrative disposition includes such motivational dimensions as personal goals, desired levels of L2 competence, involving language-intrinsic goals, academic interest, and feeling about the target language country or community. When compared to other studies on motivation (e.g., Fishbach & Choi, 2012; Kruglanski et.al., 2018), the first and the third clusters can be categorized as intrinsic motivation while the second one is extrinsic motivation. In the present study, these motivational dimensions will be used to identify the students' motivation for choosing Japanese language stream. Furthermore, the present study also explored which motivational dimensions might impress the screening board and how the decision of the screening was made.

2. Methods

Following Ushioda (2001) and Reswari (2020), the present study used qualitative method in which the data were collected using an online form posing open-ended questions about students' motivation for choosing their respective streams. The sample group consisted of 86 students who were at the end of their first year. The data were screened to obtain students'

responses expressing interests in Japanese language stream. These response were then read thoroughly to identify the students' motivation by using Ushioda's (2001) clusters of motivational dimensions. The calculation of the motivational dimensions should be treated as an illustration of the most expressed motivations rather than as part of the data. After seeking for a consent from the study program, the researchers also joined and observed the screening process of the students' foreign language streams. It was noteworthy that the study program announced to the students that their expressions of interests would be used as the basis of their language stream later. The information that their grade of the previous year concerning the respective foreign language courses would be taken into consideration was also shared. However, the students did not obtain information about the quota for each foreign language stream. The researchers took note of some points of consideration and the decision made during the meeting. The observation was undertaken to understand which motivational dimensions deemed effective to the students' success in passing the screening process to their desired language streams. Furthermore, the study program's decision-making process was also explored to better understand the dynamics of the screening process yielding a fair result for the students.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Motivational Dimensions in Choosing Japanese Stream

Based on the students' responses, it was found that 43 students or a half of the sample chose Japanese language stream. Following a thorough reading process, their expressed motivations could be described in Table 3.1. It should be noted that a response might contain more than one motivational dimension. Thus, the count of expressed motivation does not equal to 43.

Table 3.1. Motivational dimensions of students in choosing Japanese stream

Clusters	Dimensions	Count
Actual learning process	Language-related enjoyment/liking	11
	Positive learning history	5
	Personal satisfaction	9
External pressures/incentives		0
Integrative disposition	Personal goals	15
	Desired levels of L2 competence	13
	Academic interest	4
	Feeling about target language country or people	10

The table above indicates that the cluster of integrative disposition tends to be mentioned more frequently by the students when they expressed their motivation for choosing Japanese language stream. To be more specific, 'personal goals' outnumbered other types of motivational dimensions. The expressed motivation included the goal of working or taking internship in Japan. This finding is different from Reswari's study (2020) in which only

students choosing English language stream mentioned career opportunities as the reason behind their choice. In the present study, the personal goals of working or taking internship in Japan seemed to be supported by the fact that the study program has already sent some students to do internship in that country, and most of whom were of Japanese stream. Thus, the students who were about to choose their stream might be inspired by the action.

Furthermore, the second most expressed motivation was also of integrative disposition, i.e. ‘desired levels of L2 competence.’ Most students indicated that they wanted to enhance their Japanese language skills so that they could be more fluent or communicate in Japanese without any problems. However, most students did not indicate the level of Japanese they would like to achieve, such as N2, N3, or N4 of Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT). Some students who mentioned the desired level of L2 competence related their arguments with their personal goals such as to communicate in a workplace because they wanted to work in Japan or to travel easily in Japan without any language barrier. No student mentioned ‘external pressures/incentives’ in their expressed motivation. It should be noted that all clusters other than the second one demonstrate intrinsic motivation. The finding indicates discrepancy from that of Woolley and Fishbach (2018)’s study in which intrinsic motivation tended to be underestimated.

3.2 Screening Process of Japanese Language Stream

As indicated above, the number of students choosing Japanese language stream was not proportional to the number of the teaching staff. This required the study program to screen the students so that it could make the number of the students proportional with that of the teaching staff. To ensure a seamless and convenient learning experience, the study program decided to keep the number of students for the Japanese language stream to 31. This means that there were 12 students who would not pass the screening for the Japanese stream.

Based on the observation during the meeting of screening students for Japanese language stream, it was found that the study program took several aspects into consideration. First, the students’ motivation in the expressions of interests. Second, they included the students’ achievements which were reflected from the scores in courses related to English and Japanese in the past two semesters. If a student got better scores in more courses related to English, they would be directed to English language stream. On the other hand, if one got better scores in more courses related to Japanese, they would be included into the Japanese stream. The choice of involving the students’ achievement was to ensure the students’ academic success in learning Japanese. As many of the students started learning Japanese from the college, it might be challenging for them to learn it. It is different from English, which has been taught since elementary school in most parts of Indonesia (Sulistiyo et al., 2019).

Lastly, the screening process involved the lecturers’ commentary on students’ performance during the class activities in each course. The students’ performance, which was more qualitative, was different from the students’ achievements, which tended to be quantitative-based. The data on their performance was collected through the lecturers’ notes and comments. When there were some students with comparable interests and academic achievements chose the Japanese stream, their class performance was taken into consideration as the last resort to decide the students’ streams. Interestingly, the last factor involved in the screening process was not expressly announced to the students due to its complex nature, i.e. comparing one’s students’ performance to the others’ based on the lecturers’ commentaries.

Following the screening process, the motivational dimensions of the accepted students for the Japanese stream were recalculated. Table 3.2 shows the change in number of motivational dimensions of the students accepted to Japanese stream. Most motivational

dimensions changed in number, except for ‘academic interest.’ Looking at the document of their scores, the students who expressed academic interest passing the screening test were all high achievers in Japanese language courses. Thus, academic interests seemed to correspond with the students’ academic achievements. Both factors were taken into consideration by the screening board.

Table 3.2. Motivational dimensions of students accepted to Japanese stream

Clusters	Dimensions	Before Screening	After Screening
Actual learning process	Language-related enjoyment/liking	11	8
	Positive learning history	5	4
	Personal satisfaction	9	8
External pressures/incentives		0	0
Integrative disposition	Personal goals	15	11
	Desired levels of L2 competence	13	8
	Academic interest	4	4
	Feeling about target language country or people	10	4

The motivational dimension with huge decline is ‘feeling about target language country or people.’ In Table 3.1, this dimension was expressed by 10 students but only 4 of them passed the screening. It seems that this dimension did not impress the screening board much. According to the observation of the discussion, the lecturers believed that having a positive feeling toward the L2 country or communities is not necessarily in line with the L2 achievements. In other words, there is a belief that this motivational dimension is not sufficient to allow students to learn better in the target language.

Despite the change in number, ‘personal goals’ maintains its position as the top motivational dimension among the list of students accepted to the Japanese stream. Apparently it does not only impress the screening board but it is also reflected in the students’ academic achievement and class performance. The desire to work in the country of the target language has been recorded in several studies to account for students’ motivation to learn foreign languages (Yu & Downing, 2012; Fitriani, 2017). This is related to better financial situation expected from having the L2 competency or from the work in the L2 country. As in the context of Indonesian students, the economic situation in Japan tends to be more stable with higher GDP than that in Indonesia (International Monetary Fund, 2023). This seems to be the reason behind their interest in working or doing internship in Japan. The attraction of working or doing internship in Japan seems to be supported by students of the third and fourth year in the study program who are taking internship in Japan. The study program provides opportunities for students to do internship in Japan by collaborating with an academic institution from Japan.

4. Conclusions

The present study explored the motivational dimensions of vocational college students for choosing Japanese language stream. It was found that ‘personal goals’ dominated the list of motivational dimensions expressed by the students. This finding is different from a similar study conducted by Reswari (2020) at the same site a few years ago, in which similar trend was demonstrated by students choosing English stream instead of Japanese stream. Such tendency to work overseas was supported by the recent collaboration between the study program and an academic institution from Japan which resulted in wider opportunities for the students to do internship in Japan. On the other hand, ‘external pressures/incentives’ did not emerge in any of the students’ expressions of interest. However, it should be noted that during the screening process of Japanese stream, academic achievements and classroom performances outweighed the students’ expressed motivation. The data of the present study is limited to the expressed motivations of the students. The future research on similar issue may consider using interview to obtain deeper insight on the students’ motivation. Furthermore, socio-economic situation can be taken into consideration to enrich the discussion.

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