A Qualitative Examination of Relatedness Needs in Japanese EFL Classrooms and Task Motivation

Toshie Agawa, Research Institute for Language Education, Seisen University, Tokyo, Japan

Abstract

The aims of this paper are to (a) examine the relatedness needs of Japanese university EFL learners, and (b) make suggestions on how instructors could organize group work in their classes. Self-determination theory postulates that, the more individuals' relatedness needs are fulfilled, the more they are intrinsically motivated. However, some Japanese EFL motivation studies show mixed results regarding the causality. In this study, 24 Japanese university students participated in an interview. They were asked if their relationship with their classmates would influence their motivation to engage in tasks in an EFL classroom. The results indicated that, (1) when learners have not become well acquainted with their classmates in or out of class, becoming connected with them may enhance their motivation; conversely, when learners have already built good relationships with their classmates out of class, it may have different impacts on their in-class motivation, depending on the characteristic of the relationship; (2) learner motivation may improve when a given task that entails collective responsibility with other classmates; and (3) already motivated learners may prioritize competence and/or autonomy needs over relatedness needs. The author suggests that instructors assess classmates' relationships and alter the ways they form groups and enhance positive goal interdependence among group members.

Keywords: self-determination theory, relatedness needs, Japanese university EFL learners

In second language acquisition (SLA) research, second/foreign language (L2) learners' motivation is one of the most abundantly investigated areas (for a review, see Lasagabaster, Doiz, & Sierra, 2014; Uebuchi, 2004). In the 1950s, Robert Gardner and his associates initiated investigations into the role of attitude and motivation in L2 learning within socio-educational framework research (e.g., Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Lambert, 1972). This line of research focused primarily on general motivational components of integrative and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation is characterized by learners'

willingness to integrate into the target language community and culture. Instrumental motivation, in contrast, refers to a more practical reason for learning an L2 – namely, to gain social and/or economic rewards through L2 achievement. Although Gardner and his associates argued that integrative motivation was a predictor of L2 acquisition (e.g., Gardner, 2000; Gardner, Lalonde, & Moorcroft, 1985), some researchers (e.g., Dörnyei, 1990; Kurahachi, 1994; Lamb, 2004; Yashima, 2000) raised the issue that integrative motivation might not be relevant for EFL learners because they have little direct exposure to a community or culture of native speakers of the L2 and, therefore, are unlikely to have a clear target language community or culture.

In subsequent motivation research, self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2002) became one of the most influential theories. SDT is an established, large-scale theory originally used to explain human motivation in general. The versatile nature of the theory has enabled researchers in various domains (e.g., sports and physical activity, religion, health and medicine, and virtual environment) to use SDT to look into people's motivation in different situations. In addition to being versatile, SDT is one of the most empirically tested motivational theories and has been verified in various contexts (Deci & Ryan, 2008). L2 motivational research field is no exception: SLA researchers have applied the framework to the language-learning context, which helped unfold L2 motivation processes (Noels, 2003). SDT studies have been conducted in many countries, including Japan (e.g., Agawa & Takeuchi, 2017; Hiromori, 2006a; Jones, Llacer-Arrastia, & Newbill, 2009; Noels Pelletier, & Vallerand, 2000). In recent years, the field of L2 motivational research expanded rapidly, and several new perspectives, such as the L2 motivational self system (e.g., Dörnyei, 2009), complex dynamics systems theory (e.g., Dörnyei, MacIntyre, & Henry, 2015), and directed motivational currents (e.g., Dörnyei, Henry, & Muir, 2016), were proposed. Nevertheless, SDT has remained one of the most commonly used theoretical frameworks in L2 motivational studies (e.g., Komiyama & McMorris, 2017; McEown & Oga-Baldwin, 2019; Noels, Vargas Lascano, & Saumure, 2019; Ockert, 2018; Robson & Hardy, 2018).

SDT postulates that the more individuals' innate needs of relatedness, autonomy, and competence are fulfilled, the more their behavior is intrinsically motivated. However, some quantitative questionnaire studies have indicated a marginal or even negative impact of the relatedness need satisfaction on L2 motivation (e.g., Agawa & Takeuchi, 2016a; Hiromori, 2006b). This study re-examines the relationship between Japanese EFL learners' motivation

and the fulfillment of their need for relatedness by using an emic, qualitative approach. The study also offers suggestions on how instructors could organize group work in their classes to maximize relatedness and hence motivation.

Background of the Study

Self-determination theory

In SDT, motivation resides along a continuum among intrinsic motivation at one end, extrinsic motivation in the middle, and amotivation at the other end (see Figure 1). Intrinsic motivation refers to the motivation to engage in something because the action itself is enjoyable and satisfying whereas extrinsic motivation is a drive to do something for an independent outcome (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Deci and Ryan (2000) postulated four regulations within extrinsic motivation, depending on the degree of internalization involved in the action: integrated, identified, introjected, and external regulations. As their labels suggest, integrated regulation is the most self-determined form of regulation, whereas external regulation is the least autonomous. Placed at the opposite end of the scale from intrinsic motivation is amotivation, a state of no regulation/motivation.

SDT presupposes the existence of three basic psychological needs: the needs for relatedness, autonomy, and competence. This theory offers different types of motivation and degrees of regulation to show how we can be motivated, depending on how much our needs are satisfied. Thus, the more individuals' innate psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled, the more their behavior is intrinsically motivated.

Needs for relatedness refer to "feeling connected to others, to caring for and being cared for by those others, [and] to having a sense of belongingness both with other individuals and with one's community" (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 7). In the English learning setting, these needs can be translated as wanting to connect with classmates and the teacher as well as engage in English learning cooperatively with classmates and the teacher (Hiromori, 2006a).

Needs for competence refer to people's desire to feel "effective in one's ongoing interactions with the social environment and experiencing opportunities to exercise and express one's capacities" (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 7). Applied to the English learning setting, they are interpreted as individuals' desire to be able to understand and make themselves understood in English based on their capability and confidence to complete English assignments and tasks successfully (Hiromori, 2006a).

Finally, needs for autonomy are defined as individuals' desire for "being the perceived origin or source of one's own behavior" (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 8). Deci and Ryan further explain that autonomy pertains to acting from interest and integrated values; thus, "when autonomous, individuals experience their behavior as an expression of the self, such that, even when actions are influenced by outside sources, the actors concur with those influences, feeling both initiative and value with regard to them" (p. 8). In other words, the definition of autonomy needs should entail two aspects – namely, (1) actors have a choice and take responsibility for their own behavior, yet (2) actors do not exclude influence from outside sources. Bearing these in mind, Agawa and Takeuchi (2016b) defined needs for autonomy in the Japanese EFL context as the learners' "desire to engage in learning in and outside of classes upon understanding and concurring on the value of learning" (p. 7).

Self-determination theory: SDT

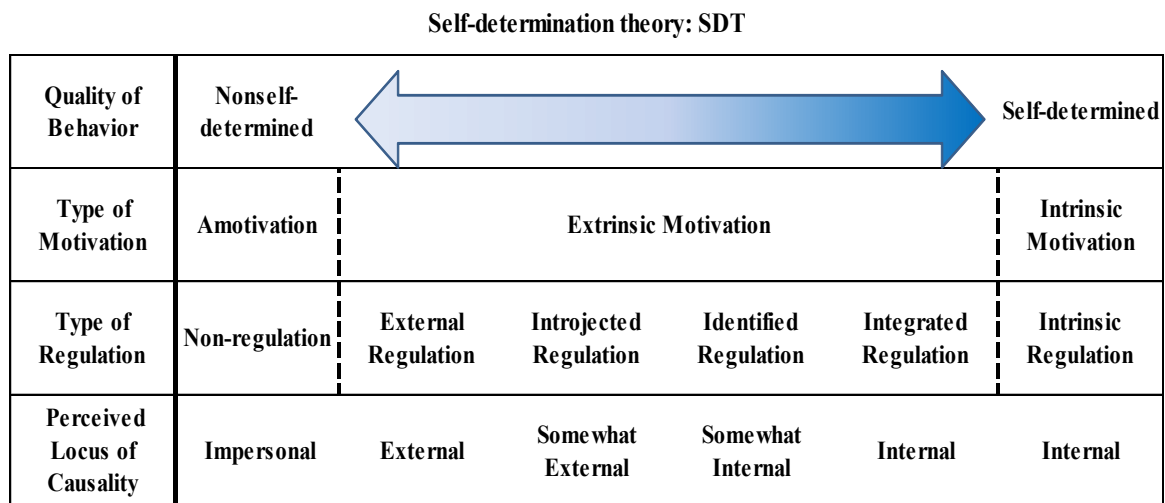| Quality of Behavior	Nonself-determined	←			→	Self-determined
Type of Motivation	Amotivation	Extrinsic Motivation				Intrinsic Motivation
Type of Regulation	Non-regulation	External Regulation	Introjected Regulation	Identified Regulation	Integrated Regulation	Intrinsic Regulation
Perceived Locus of Causality	Impersonal	External	Somewhat External	Somewhat Internal	Internal	Internal

Figure 1. The Self-determined Continuum, With Types of Motivation, Types of Regulation, and Locus of Causality. Adapted from Deci and Ryan (2002, p. 16).

Research based on SDT in the Japanese EFL context

A strong emphasis has been placed on English in the Japanese formal educational setting; it is one of the three main subjects in junior and senior high schools, a main subject for almost all university written entrance exams. At the tertiary education level, almost all universities require English language courses for at least first- and second-year students, regardless of their majors. However, students are not always willing to learn English; some students even experience demotivation when learning it (Agawa & Ueda, 2013; Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009; Yamamori, 2004). Given such circumstances, EFL learners' motivation is of great interest to many researchers and practitioners in Japan, and more knowledge on this

matter has been actively sought. Several motivational studies have dealt with SDT in the Japanese EFL context, as this theory offers a clear, integrated framework for language learning motivation research.

Several studies have been conducted to seek evidence of SDT's reliability and validity in the Japanese EFL context. For example, Honda and Saku (2004) and Carreira (2012) used a scale originally developed in Canada (i.e., Language Learning Orientations Scale – Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, and Amotivation Subscales) to examine whether SDT is applicable in the Japanese EFL classroom. Based on the factor analysis and correlational analysis results, both studies confirmed a self-determination continuum. Similarly, Robson and Hardy (2018) found evidence of the validity of an SDT-based questionnaire that they developed to measure out-of-class English learning motivation of Japanese university students.

Some studies have probed the causality in the association between need fulfillment and motivation. For example, Hiromori (2006a) collected questionnaire data from university students and used a structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis to confirm the causal relationship between the fulfillment of innate needs and motivation as hypothesized in the theory. Similarly, Agawa and Takeuchi (2016a) also ran an SEM on questionnaire data and generally confirmed the causal relationships between the three psychological needs and L2 motivation; however, the impact of relatedness needs satisfaction remained somewhat trivial. Specifically, the influence of relatedness on L2 motivation reached a significant level on identified regulation only, but not intrinsic motivation, external regulation, or amotivation.

From a pedagogical viewpoint, several studies have sought to determine if pedagogical interventions to fulfill English learners' three basic needs improve their L2 motivation. Several studies, such as Agawa and Takeuchi (2017), Dei (2011), Hiromori (2006a, 2006b), Ockert (2018), and Tanaka and Hiromori (2007), demonstrated that satisfying the innate needs could generally enhance English learners' self-determined forms of motivation (i.e., intrinsic motivation, integrated, and identified regulations). Upon a closer look, however, some of them only partially endorsed the causality between relatedness and L2 motivation. For instance, Dei (2011) found somewhat different results in two groups of students: fast learners and slow learners.[1] Dei used pedagogical interventions that were designed to fulfill junior high school students' psychological needs. After the treatment period, both fast and slow learners gained feelings of being connected with their peers and the teacher in their English classes. However, only the slow learners' intrinsic motivation was

significantly increased. Yet, at the same time, Dei found a positive and significant correlation between relatedness and intrinsic motivation among both groups. In conclusion, he supported the importance of good student–student and teacher–student relationships, which may play significant roles in enhancing students' motivation to learn English.

Hiromori (2006a, 2006b) carried out pedagogical interventions in university English classes and measured their influence on students. The overall results indicated that the interventions successfully fulfilled the innate needs of learners, thereby enhancing their L2 motivation. However, a closer examination revealed a negative correlation between relatedness needs satisfaction and intrinsic motivation among highly motivated learners. Combining the quantitative results with written comments from students, Hiromori (2006a, 2006b) claimed that learners who have already developed motivation can engage in learning on their own and, thus, do not need to collaborate with others.

Tanaka and Hiromori (2007) used an intervention called the group presentation activity to investigate its effectiveness in satisfying university students' needs and improving their intrinsic motivation. They pointed out that relatedness needs satisfaction functions differently depending on the levels of learner motivation. They argued that relatedness is important for L2 learners with low motivation but not for others. In other words, learners with low motivation could be more intrinsically motivated when they feel connected with their classmates. On the other hand, for L2 learners who are moderately or highly motivated, relatedness has little impact on their intrinsic motivation.

Results of previous studies, which have mostly been conducted quantitatively by using a psychometric tool, have suggested a more complex relationship between relatedness needs fulfillment and motivation of Japanese EFL learners than the linear cause-and-effect one postulated by SDT. Understanding the complex phenomenon calls for scrutiny by using an emic, qualitative approach. As pair and group work is widely used in Japanese EFL classrooms, this matter needs to be probed to enlighten practitioners about better managing their classes as well as enable researchers to uncover some complex aspects of Japanese EFL learners' motivation.

Method

Purposes of the study

This study aims to investigate the causality between relatedness and Japanese EFL learners' motivation by using an emic, qualitative method. This study also aims to provide some pedagogical suggestions based on the results of the investigation.

Participants

Twenty-four university students in Japan participated in the interview study after providing written consent. All of them received information on the background and summary of the research, possible demands on participants,[2] and the researcher's contact information. They agreed to participate in an interview and allow the content of their interviews to be audio-recorded.

In an effort to ensure that participants represented the population of Japanese university students, interviewees were chosen from academically varied universities (i.e., extremely competitive schools: University A, middle-range schools: University B, and easy-to-get-into schools: University C) with different majors (e.g., English, law, Japanese, medicine, and psychology). The schools were categorized into three types based on the schools' *Hensachi*, which is a scale widely used in Japan that gives a measure of the difficulty of entering a university. It is an indicator that shows a university's position among others. For example, a score of 50 *Hensachi* indicates an average difficulty, whereas above 50 means higher than average and below 50 means lower than average. As English is a main subject for almost all university written entrance exams, *Hensachi* of a university may indicate its students' English level. Indeed, all participants in the most proficient group of English learners were from University A, falling in the B2 (Independent User) level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001). On the other hand, most participants in the group of the least proficient students in English, the A2 (Basic User) level of CEFR, were from University C. All participants were required to take at least one English course at their university, which is the case at almost all, if not all, universities in Japan.

Fourteen out of the 24 participants were recruited by the author. She made a list of former students she wanted to ask to participate in the study, and then contacted them to see if they would be interested in participating. As for the remaining nine participants, the author asked her friends, who were also TESOL researchers/practitioners at a Japanese university, to recruit participants. When asking her friends, the author told them that she would like to interview students with certain characteristics, such as students who are highly, moderately, and marginally motivated to learn English. In this way, the author could make sure to interview highly motivated, moderately motivated, and marginally motivated English learners from each type of university.

Of the 24 participants, 12 were males and 12 were females. To ensure anonymity,

all participants were assigned codes and were thereafter referred to using these codes. The codes indicated participants' university, L2 motivation level, and gender. The first letter in the code (A, B, or C) shows the characteristics of the participant's university, the second one (H, M, or L) illustrates the level of his/her L2 motivation, and the last letter in the parentheses indicates gender (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Participants' Characteristics and Their Codes

Motivation	Participant Code		
	University A	University B	University C
High	AH1(m)	BH1 (m)	CH1 (m)
	AH2 (f)	BH2 (f)	CH2 (m)
	AH3 (f)	BH3 (f)	CH3 (f)
Moderate	AM1 (m)	BM1 (m)	CM1 (m)
	AM2 (m)	BM2 (m)	CM2 (f)
	AM3 (f)	BM3 (f)	CM3 (f)
Low	AL1 (m)	BL1 (m)	CL1 (m)
	AL2 (f)	BL2 (f)	CL2 (f)

Note: A = University A; B = University B; C = University C; H = highly motivated; M = moderately motivated; L = little motivated; (m) = male; (f) = female

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 24 participants to examine the connection between the relatedness needs fulfillment and L2 motivation. Two questions were asked of all participants. The first question was used to gradually introduce the main topic (i.e., question 2) to the participants rather than abruptly shifting to narrowly focused points at the very beginning of the interview. The second question probed the relationship between L2 motivation and the relatedness needs fulfillment. If the participants responded to the first question with answers to the question planned to be asked later, the interviewer did not ask the subsequent question to avoid redundancy. All the interviews were carried out by the author of this paper in participants' native language (i.e., Japanese). The participants were encouraged to elaborate on their answers with explanations and examples. The translations of the two questions are as follows:

1. What motivates or demotivates you to learn English?

2. When/If you have good relationship with other classmates in an English class, how does/will it influence your motivation to learn English?

Each interview was administered in a face-to-face manner in a quiet room and took approximately 30 to 40 minutes. All the contents were audio-recorded, with participants' written consent, for subsequent analysis.

Data analysis

The audio-recorded interview data were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist who was instructed to transcribe the files verbatim. The transcribed data were examined to excerpt and code parts related to relatedness needs satisfaction and L2 motivation. The coding consisted of four steps. First, the author read the transcript a few times. Second, she used a highlighter to mark parts that seemed to be related to relatedness needs fulfillment and L2 motivation. Third, she wrote her interpretation of each excerpt. In the final step, she put similar types of excerpts together to form a category. The third and fourth steps were repeated until the author believed that the categorization had been completed. In addition, following Seale (1999), the excerpts and interpretations were returned to the informants for member validation (i.e., participants checked that the researcher's coding and interpretations accurately represented what they meant in the interview). After going through the interactive process, the excerpts were translated into English for result presentation. The author of this paper translated the excerpts; the translation was then checked by a native speaker of English who had basic knowledge of SLA. In the process of translation, it became clear that some implicit information given in Japanese needed to be articulated in the English version. This was mainly due to the structural feature of the Japanese language, where speakers often omit the subject, object, and/or other parts of sentences. In order to obtain message clarity and flow in the English version, some supplementation was given, which is noted in parentheses at the beginning and end of the statements.

Results and Discussion

The interview results showed some factors that may affect Japanese university EFL learners' motivation. First, the analysis illustrated that students' existence or non-existence of out-of-class relationships with their classmates may influence their task motivation in the

classroom. Second, the structure of a group task may have an impact on group members' motivation to engage in the task. Finally, it was indicated that already motivated learners may prioritize competence and/or autonomy needs fulfillment over relatedness needs fulfillment. These results are discussed in detail in the following subsections.

Students' relationships with classmates

Non-existence of out-of-class relationship. An analysis of the interview data showed that, when Japanese EFL learners have not become well acquainted with their classmates in or outside of class, becoming connected with their classmates may improve their motivation to work on a task given in the classroom. Twelve out of 24 participant students told the interviewer that they would be motivated to learn English by becoming well connected with their classmates[3]. For example, one student told the interviewer that she had been unable to work well with classmates in the past, which caused her to hate English classes. However, she believed that a good relationship with her classmates would have enhanced her motivation to learn English.

> [CL2 (f)]: I didn't like English classes when I was in junior high school because I was not good at working in a group. But I can easily imagine that I would have enjoyed (learning) English very much, if I had been able to get along with the group members. I could have felt a sense of achievement too.

Seven students voluntarily and explicitly suggested that, when they are not well acquainted with classmates either in or out of class, their motivation to work on an English learning task would improve. Seven out of the 24 students may seem like a small and marginal number; however, they responded in this way without being asked about the non-existence of out-of-class relationships. Specifically, the interview questions did not mention either the existence or non-existence of out-of-class relationships.

> [CM2(f)]: Say I meet some classmates only in class but I get to know them better in group work. Then I would think that I need to work decently well and feel like working hard because I wouldn't want to cause them trouble.

> [AM2 (m)]: If a student is put in a group of people who s/he doesn't know at all, I

think the student will work decently well. (For example,) we shouldn't slack off when we attend a lecture at a different university[4] or when we are with students from other universities.

Both CM2(f) and AM2 (m) indicated that they should work and perform decently well in class when they are put together with students who they do not know well or at all. This may be because they would not like to be judged negatively by the way they behave and/or perform, which is the only source of evaluation of their characteristics that their classmates have. As postulated by SDT, people have a desire to develop good relationships with others. What differs from the SDT postulation is that, for CM2(f) and AM2 (m), their needs for relatedness rather than the fulfillment of them would function as a motivating factor to work on an English learning task.

The analysis of the interview excerpts shows that, in some cases, students would be motivated to learn English as a result of becoming well connected with their classmates (i.e., relatedness needs satisfaction). In other cases, students would be motivated to work on an English learning task so that they would be able to be perceived as a decent person by their classmates.

Existence of out-of-class relationship. SDT postulates that, the more individuals' relatedness needs are satisfied, the more they are intrinsically motivated. This may lead one to assume that a good relationship among classmates enhances the intrinsic motivation of EFL learners in the classroom. However, 13 participants presented evidence that contradicts this assumption. Amongst the 13 participants, four mentioned the existence of out-of-class relationships. The remaining nine participants' interview results will be discussed in the motivated learner and relatedness section.

BL2 (m) and CH3 (f) pointed out that when they have already built a good relationship with some classmates out of class, cooperating with those friends in class may have little impact on their motivation to engage in learning tasks in the classroom:

[BL2 (m)]: I registered for the English course where we did group work. The group members had been close to each other before the course started, and I don't think it changed our motivation to learn English.

[CH3 (f)]: Good friends register for the same course, so I don't think relationships

among classmates and the motivation to learn English are connected.

It goes without saying that individuals belong to different communities and social groups at the same time. Naturally, Japanese university students are most likely to belong to several communities and social groups simultaneously, such as a community/social group of classmates, friends, club members, and co-workers at a part-time job. When a classmate already belongs in a student's out-of-class community/social group, the student does not feel the need to build a new group in class. Indeed, when a student takes an English course with friends from a close-knit, out-of-class social group, s/he does not worry much about being accepted by classmates because s/he already has good friends in class. In other words, his/her needs for relatedness are already satisfied and, thus, the student may not feel the need to satisfy them further.

The other two students revealed that relatedness needs fulfilled out of class may negatively influence a learner's motivation to engage in classroom tasks. AM2 (m), who told the interviewer that students would work decently well if placed in a class of strangers, went on to share his perception of what was occurring in the English class where he had been placed together with his good friends.

> [AM2 (m)]: I am a good friend with X and Y, who are smart and proud of
> themselves and look down on students such as Z, who raises his hand all the time
> in class. I think I am influenced by X's and Y's attitudes.

> [AM2 (m)]: For some students, it is not cool to do their best in class, and it is
> highly possible that their attitudes interfere with teachers' class management.

> [AM2 (m)]: It is considered the coolest when someone is sloppy in class but does
> good on the exams, so everyone tries to attain that.

Some may argue that the emotional bond between students is not sufficiently strong at college, but this does not seem to be the case for AM2 (m)'s university.

> [AM2 (m)]: Now that we are in the third year, students in the same peer group are
> quite close to each other…. My friends and I are so close that we feel relaxed being

together [even in class].

AM2 (m)'s testimony here shows that, even at a tertiary level, the emotional bond between friends can be strong. It should also be noted here that AM2 (m) said earlier that if a student is in a group of people who s/he does not know at all, s/he will work decently well. However, in the case where friends bond with each other, he articulately illustrated that a student may prioritize the relationship that s/he had out of class. In such a case, students' relatedness needs fulfilled out of class may undermine learners' motivation to engage in tasks. This may pose a challenge to an English instructor, as AM2(m) correctly pointed out in the interview.

One possible way to tackle this problem is forming groups with classmates who have not yet become well acquainted with one another. As illustrated in the last subsection, students tend to work decently well when placed with classmates they do not know well or at all. This way of forming groups should also be effective for breaking up a clique into individuals so that they cannot spread a dull atmosphere and disturb motivated learners. In addition, forming a group comprised of different types of members is what cooperative learning (CL) specialists recommend. For example, Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (2006) argued that mixing students who have difficulties concentrating on a classroom task and who are keen in one group can often help the former students engage in a task. To form groups that have more diversity, Johnson et al. suggested that the teacher assign groups; when students are given an opportunity to choose their group mates, they tend to form groups with students who have similar characteristics (e.g., grades, gender).

Collective responsibility and motivation

The analysis of the interview data showed that the structure of a group task may impact group members' motivation to engage in the task. BM2 (m) illustrated how having collective responsibility with his group mates improved his motivation to work on a group task:

> [BM2 (m)]: I tried to understand the meaning (of the text) and looked in (a dictionary) when I didn't understand. Without my part, we couldn't understand the whole story. Group work is effective (in increasing motivation) in such a situation.

> [BM2 (m)]: When group mates are getting along with each other, I wouldn't want

to cause them trouble. If they are motivated to do a task, that will influence my motivation.

BM2 (m) felt that he and his group members needed each other in order to complete the group task successfully. This kind of perception is defined as positive interdependence by CL researchers and recognized as a key component of successful group work (Johnson et al., 2006; McCafferty, Jacobs, & Iddings, 2006). In a positively interdependent situation, a goal is set in such a way that it cannot be attained unless everyone in the group contributes and successfully plays an imperative role. Such a structure encourages group members to work cooperatively, which enhances their motivation to work on a task. BM2 (m)'s experience provides evidence that positive interdependence among group members helps improve learner motivation.

Motivated learners and relatedness needs

Nine out of 18 highly and moderately motivated students claimed that a good relationship with classmates would have neither a positive nor negative impact on their motivation:

[AH1 (m)]: I am learning English because I have a vision. It doesn't matter what my classmates are doing. I'm learning English because I want to.

[AH2 (f)]: I don't compare myself with other classmates very much. I feel more satisfied now with how much better I can do than I did before. So I don't care about other classmates too much. I am aware that I just have to work harder than others, so I keep working.

Both AH1 (m) and AH2 (f) had a clear vision related to attaining a high proficiency of English—namely, becoming a doctor who works globally. They had internalized the value of learning English. To them it did not matter whether or not their classmates were working hard in class; it was more important for AH1 (m) and AH2 (f) to improve their English so that they could realize their goal. In other words, highly motivated and autonomous learners may prioritize competence and autonomy needs over relatedness needs.

In a similar vein, another student pointed out that working on a learning task is

more important for him than building/maintaining relationship with his classmates.

> [AM1(m)]: Not relationships with others, but a given task influences my motivation. I would work on a task regardless of whether it is group work or individual work.

Hiromori's (2006b) study found a negative correlation between relatedness needs satisfaction and intrinsic motivation among highly motivated learners. Hiromori claimed that learners who have already developed motivation can engage in learning on their own and, thus, do not need to collaborate with others. Similarly, Tanaka and Hiromori (2007) argued that relatedness needs satisfaction is not very important for highly and moderately motivated L2 learners, but it is for the poorly motivated. The finding of the current study confirms both claims of these studies.

Given the results and implications of the current as well as previous studies, it is suggested that instructors use different approaches so that they can accommodate different relatedness needs of students with different levels of motivation. For example, instructors can use both cooperative group work and individual work in the same class. When using a group task, instructors should design a moderately challenging task for learners. As the assigned goal is something that is unattainable alone but attainable by working together with group mates, learners—including highly motivated ones—would understand the value of cooperation and have a sense of competence upon successful completion of the task. Similarly, Theobald (2006) recommended that instructors design a project in which every student in the small group must complete an assignment and then combine the results to achieve a greater goal. She argued that showing students how they can reach a major common goal by everyone accomplishing their own task may enhance students' motivation (p. 51).

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine relatedness needs of Japanese university EFL learners and subsequently make suggestions on how instructors can organize group work in their classes. The results of this interview study present some interesting points. First, the analysis showed that, when Japanese university EFL learners are not acquainted with their classmates in or out of class, becoming connected with classmates may improve their motivation to work on an English learning task in the classroom. The results are twofold. First, when students do not have any friends in class but have just made one, the fulfillment of their relatedness needs

may promote their motivation to work cooperatively with the new friend on a task. Second, when students do not have any friends in class, their relatedness needs (i.e., desire to be perceived as a decent person by their classmates) can be a motivator to work reasonably well on a task in the classroom.

The second point that the current study revealed is that, when learners have already built a good relationship with some classmates out of class, having those friends in the same classroom may have little or even a negative impact on their motivation to engage in a classroom task. The existence of out-of-class relationships may have little impact on students' task motivation because their needs for relatedness are already fulfilled; therefore, they do not function as a motivating factor to work harder on a task. The existence of an out-of-class relationship may even have a negative impact on students' task motivation when they prioritize their preexisting relationship with friends who do not put effort into classroom tasks. It is suggested that instructors assign groups consisting of classmates who are not well acquainted with each other. In addition, groups should consist of different types of members.

Third, the current study confirmed that positive interdependence among group members may improve Japanese university EFL learners' task motivation. In order to foster a sense of positive interdependence in groups, instructors should set a shared goal that all group members need to contribute equally to achieve.

Finally, some evidence has shown that highly and moderately motivated learners may prioritize their needs for competence and/or autonomy over relatedness. To accommodate the different relatedness needs of learners with different levels of motivation, instructors should use different types of tasks in an EFL classroom. Also, it is suggested that instructors design a moderately challenging group task for learners so that they understand the value of cooperation and have a sense of competence upon successful completion of the task.

The emic, qualitative approach enabled this study to offer some insights into the complex nature of relatedness needs of Japanese university EFL learners and their connections with L2 task motivation. Quantitative approaches have not provided such insights. However, the small number of participants inevitably limits the generalizability of the current study's results. To address this limitation, a large-scale quantitative study should be conducted to seek validity evidence of the current study's results. Moreover, it would be interesting to examine the complex nature of relatedness needs of L2 learners more broadly, beyond Japan. SDT postulates three innate needs that are universal. Although the needs

themselves are universal, perceived needs support may be varied across cultures (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Investigating the complexity within the universality of SDT may benefit both researchers and practitioners.

Regarding pedagogical implications of this study, it offered several suggestions to increase Japanese university students' motivation in the EFL setting. However, as the examination of the pedagogical suggestions is outside the scope of this study, an empirical study is required to investigate their effectiveness. Another possible focus for a future study would be the quality of the relationship between EFL learners and the instructor and its connection with EFL learners' motivation.

Notes

[1.] The Society Testing English Proficiency (STEP) test was used to identify fast learners and slow learners.

[2.] Time demands and possible discomfort that might be caused in the interview were outlined.

[3.] One of the 12 participants, AM2 (m), told the interviewer that his motivation to engage in an English learning task would change depending on the state of his out-of-class relationship with his classmates.

[4.] AM2 (m) attends a medical school where students tend to become very close to each other because of the relatively small number of enrollees and the style of course offerings in the department. This is the reason he mentioned a possible case being that he and his schoolmates attend a lecture with people whom they do not know.

Acknowledgment

References

Agawa, T., & Takeuchi, O. (2016a). Validating self-determination theory in the Japanese EFL context: The relationship between innate needs and motivation. *The Asian EFL Journal, 18,* 6–32.

Agawa, T., & Takeuchi, O. (2016b). A new questionnaire to assess Japanese EFL learners' motivation: Development and validation. *ARELE (Annual Review of English Language Education in Japan), 27,* 1–16. doi.org/10.20581/arele.29.0_1

Agawa, T., & Takeuchi, O. (2017). Pedagogical intervention to enhance self-determined

forms of L2 motivation: Applying self-determination theory in the Japanese university EFL context. *Education & Technology, 54,* 135–166. doi.org/10.24539/let.50.0_App1

Agawa, T., & Ueda, M. (2013). How Japanese students perceive demotivation toward English study and overcome such feelings. *JACET Journal, 56,* 1–18.

Carreira, J. M. (2012). Motivational orientations and psychological needs in EFL learning among elementary school students in Japan. *System, 40,* 191–202. doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2012.02.001

Council of Europe. (2001). *The common European framework of reference for languages.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior.* New York, NY: Plenum Press.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination behavior. *Psychological Inquiry, 11,* 227–268. doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (Eds.). (2002). *Handbook of self-determination research.* Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2008). Facilitating optimal motivation and psychological well-being across life's domains. *Canadian Psychology, 49,* 14-23. doi: 10.1037/0708-5591.49.1.14

Dei, Y. (2011). Pedagogical intervention to enhance EFL students' motivation: An attempt based on self-determination theory. *Journal of Kansai University Graduate School of Foreign Language Education and Research, 10,* 1–19.

Dörnyei, Z. (1990). Conceptualizing motivation in foreign-language learning. *Language Learning, 40,* 45–78. doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1990.tb00954.x

Dörnyei, Z. (2009). The L2 motivational self system. In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (pp. 9–42). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Dörnyei, Z., Henry, A., & Muir, C. (2016). *Motivational currents in language learning: Frameworks for focused interventions.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Dörnyei, Z., MacIntyre, P. D., & Henry, A. (Eds.). (2015). *Motivational dynamics in language learning.* Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation.* London: Edward Arnold Publishers.

Gardner, R. C. (2000). Correlation, causation, motivation and second language acquisition. *Canadian Psychology, 6,* 29–47. doi.org/10.1037/h0086854

Gardner, R. C., Lalonde, R. N., & Moorcroft, R. (1985). The role of attitudes and motivation in second language learning: Correlational and experimental considerations. *Language Learning, 35,* 207–227. doi:10.1111/j.1467-1770.1985.tb01025.x

Gardner, R. C., & Lambert, W. E. (1972). *Attitudes and motivation in second language learning.* Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Hiromori, T. (2006a). *Gaikokugo gakushusya no doukizuke wo takameru riron to jissen* [Theory and practice to improve foreign language learners]. Tokyo, Japan: Taga.

Hiromori, T. (2006b). The effect of educational intervention on L2 learners' motivational development. *JACET Bulletin, 43,* 1–14.

Honda, K., & Saku, M. (2004). A study of the relationship between intrinsic/extrinsic motivation and Japanese EFL learners' proficiency. *Osaka Kyoiku Daigaku Kyoka Kyoikugaku Ronshu, 3,* 37–48.

Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Smith, K. A. (2006). *Active learning: Cooperation in the college classroom* (3rd ed.). Edima, MN: Interaction Book.

Jones, B. D., Llacer-Arrastia, S., & Newbill, P. B. (2009). Motivating foreign language students using self-determination theory. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 3,* 171-189. doi.org/10.1080/17501220802358210

Kikuchi, K., & Sakai, H. (2009). Japanese learners' demotivation to study English: A survey study. *JALT Journal, 31,* 183–204. Retrieved from http://jalt-publications.org/recentpdf/jj/2009b/art3.pdf

Komiyama, R., & McMorris, A. (2017). Examining international students' motivation to read in English from a self-determination theory perspective. *The CATESOL Journal, 29,* 61–80.

Kurahachi, J. (1994). Individual differences in second language learning. *Japanese Journal of Educational Psychology, 42,* 227–239. doi.org/10.5926/jjep1953.42.2_227

Lamb, M. (2004). Integrative motivation in a globalizing world. *System, 32,* 3–19. doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2003.04.002

Lasagabaster, D., Doiz, A., & Sierra, J. M. (2014). *Motivation and foreign language learning: From theory to practice.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

McCafferty, S. G., Jacobs, G. M., & Iddings, A. C. D. (2006). *Cooperative learning and second language teaching.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

McEown, M. S., & Oga-Baldwin, W. L. Q. (2019). Self-determination for all language learners: New applications for formal language education. *System, 86,* 1–11. doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2019.102124

Noels, K. A. (2003). Learning Spanish as a second language: Learners' orientations and perceptions of their teachers' communication style. In Z. Dörnyei (Ed.), *Attitudes, orientations, and motivation in language learning* (pp. 97–136). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Noels, K. A., Vargas Lascano, D. I., & Saumure, K. (2019). The development of self-determination across the language course: Trajectories of motivational change and the dynamic interplay of psychological needs, orientations, and engagement. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 41,* 821–851. doi.org/10.1017/S0272263118000189

Noels, K. Pelletier, L. G., Clément, R., & Vallerand, R. J. (2000). Why are you learning a second language? Motivational orientations and self-determination theory. *Language Learning, 50,* 57-85. doi.org/10.1111/0023-8333.00111

Ockert, D. (2018). Using a tablet computer for EFL positive self-review: Increases in self-determination theory-based learning motives. *CALCO Journal, 35,* 182–199. doi.org/10.1558/cj.32185

Robson, G. G., & Hardy, D. J. (2018). Applying measurement of situational self-determination theory to use of a self-access centre at a Japanese university. *International Education Studies, 11(4),* 1–14. doi.org/10.5539/ies.v11n4p1

Seale, C. (1999). Quality in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 5,* 465–478. doi.org/10.1177/107780049900500402

Tanaka, H., & Hiromori, T. (2007). Eigo gakushusha no naihatsuteki dokizuke wo takameru kyoikujissentekikainyu to sonokouka no kensho [The effects of educational intervention to enhance intrinsic motivation of L2 students]. *JALT Journal, 29*, 59–80

Theobald, M. A. (2006). *Increasing student motivation: Strategies for middle and high school teachers.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press

Uebuchi, H. (Ed.). (2004). *Dokizuke kenkyu no saizensen* [The forefront of motivation research]. Kyoto: Kitaoji Shobo.

Yamamori, K. (2004). Chugaku 1nensei no 4gatsu niokeru eigo gakushu ni taisuru iyoku wa dokomade jizoku suruka [Durability of the will to learn English: A one-year study of Japanese seventh graders]. *Studies in Educational Psychology, 52,* 71–82. doi.org/10.5926/jjep1953.52.1_71

Yashima, T. (2000). Orientations and motivation in foreign language learning: A study of Japanese college students. *JACET Bulletin, 31,* 121–133.