

Japanese Language Learners' Motivational Types and Trajectory: Accounts from University Students in Australia

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Abstract

Self-determination theory (SDT) was developed to analyse the motivation behind human behaviours, but it has been adopted and utilised in language learning contexts in recent years. Past second language (L2) motivation studies utilising SDT have mostly focused on English as Foreign Language learning and significantly fewer studies have applied SDT to learners of other languages, including Japanese as a foreign language (JFL). Therefore, this study examined the motivation types of JFL learners and the major factors influencing their motivation, and how it changed during a university semester and a semester break. The study found that the students' motivational trajectory during the semester was relatively stable and that they were mostly driven by intrinsic motivation and identified regulation (goal-driven). The most prominent factors that influenced the students' motivation were learning content, teaching methods, and perceptions of competence and relatedness. As expected, all the participants were not motivated to study Japanese using formal content during the semester break although some of them maintained their motivation by engaging with informal or semi-formal Japanese learning content. The study carries implications regarding the pedagogical directions for improving tertiary students' motivation during the semester as well as the semester break.

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Mao, Z., and Kurata, N. (2024). Japanese Language Learners' Motivational Types and Trajectory: Accounts from University Students in Australia. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching [e-FLT]*, 21 (2), 258–277. <https://doi.org/10.56040/zmnk2125>

1 Introduction

In recent decades, the interest and volume of second language (L2) motivation research has greatly increased (Boo et al., 2015). This research has originated from settings where linguistics communities between different languages co-existed and members from these communities could interact (Ushioda, 2017). For example, Gardner and Lambert's (1959) study on L2 French learners in Canada was a pioneering study for L2 motivation research and its major finding of language aptitude and integrativeness as key motivation factors influenced many subsequent studies and

frameworks. Given the L2 communities available in this context, learners of French are likely to have opportunities to assume a positive attitude towards these communities, which shows their integrative orientation. However, the concept of integrative motivation seems to have lost some of its explanatory power due to its lack of applicability to several learning contexts. This includes English as a foreign language (EFL) where there are not many L2 communities available to which learners are interested to belong. Dörnyei (2005, 2009) thus proposed the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS), which expanded on Markus and Nurius's (1986) theory of possible selves, as integrativeness would be better explained by utilising learners' self-concepts. This system consists of three crucial concepts: the ideal self, ought-to self and learning experiences. These concepts have been used extensively in contemporary studies to analyse learners' motivation (e.g. Nakamura, 2019; Rowena et al., 2024; Sakeda & Kurata, 2016). However, an increasing number of motivation studies have found that the complex and multi-faceted nature of learners' motivation cannot be fully explained only by the L2MSS, thereby employing multiple motivational concepts, including integrative, instrumental and intrinsic motivation (e.g., Campbell & Storch, 2011; Kurata, 2021). Moreover, the majority of recent studies were conducted in East Asia, with a prominent focus of learning English as the target language (Boo et al., 2015), meaning that there is a lack of research regarding Languages other than English (LOTes).

Another prominent framework employed in L2 motivation research is self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985), which includes key concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. It has been shown to be useful in determining types of language learners' motivation (Joe et al., 2017), despite not being specifically developed for L2 motivation research (Sugita McEown et al., 2014). Its categorisation of motivation into various subtypes has enabled effective analysis of various motivational factors that can influence motivation. Compared with L2MSS, the SDT describes motivation in more detailed types and some motivation studies have successfully employed it in language learning contexts (e.g. cases of English as Foreign Language learners in Kreishan & Al-Dhaimat, 2013 and Wang et al., 2015). However, the theory has not been fully utilised in Japanese learning contexts, especially in longitudinal case studies. In this article, therefore, we will examine the nature of Japanese language learners' motivation at an Australian university and their motivational trajectory throughout a semester by drawing on SDT.

2 Theoretical framework

SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985) is associated with the performance of behaviours based on volitional choice and one's decision-making process regarding these choices. This exists on a continuum of motivation determined by autonomy, which refers to the level of one's personal sense of willingness and volition (Deci, 2004). The types of motivation described by the SDT with the continuum of autonomy are shown in Figure 1 below. Willingness and volition can derive from one's own interests, enjoyment or alignment with their internal values and can lead to autonomous motivation. On the other hand, behaviours which lack these characteristics are associated with controlled motivation, which are linked to a lack of choice as well as pressure and coercion (Deci & Ryan, 2015). Thus, motivation for behaviours exists on a range from active and volitional engagement to passive compliance, and at times, unwillingness to perform or engage with a specific activity (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Hence, three components were proposed for SDT: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Intrinsic motivation is related to one's inherent interest and enjoyment with regard to specific behaviours and activities (Ryan & Deci, 2020). If individuals perceive certain behaviours as interesting or enjoyable, they are inclined to perform these behaviours without external reinforcements (Deci, 2004). Extrinsic motivation is related to outcomes that are separate from behaviours and activities themselves, which are perceived as positive and desirable (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The purpose for engaging in extrinsically motivated behaviours is focused on the desirable outcomes, rather than inherent reasons based on the behaviours themselves.

Amotivation	Extrinsic Motivation				Intrinsic Motivation
Amotivation	External Regulation	Introjected Regulation	Identified Regulation	Integrated Regulation	Intrinsic Regulation
- Lack of competence and motivation - Lack of perceived value	- External contingencies - Reward and punishment e.g. behaviours with tangible rewards	- Attainment of pride - Avoidance of guilt and shame e.g. academic goals towards not failing	- Personal relevance and importance - Goal driven e.g. academic goals towards high achievement	- Congruence with own values - driven by the achievement of separable outcomes rather than seeking inherent interest	- Inherent interest and enjoyment e.g. hobbies
“I do not need to speak Japanese, so I can’t see the point of studying it.”	“I have to study Japanese as it is a compulsory subject at my school.”	“I want to prove myself to be competent in Japanese to my parents.” “I need to study Japanese so that I won’t fail this subject.”	“I chose to study Japanese as it is similar to my L1, which helps me to perform well in this subject.”	“I value the ability to speak a new language (such as Japanese) and interacting with new people”	“I love <i>kanji</i> (characters) and enjoy learning new grammar which is so different from my L1.”

Fig. 1. Types of motivation described by SDT, with continuum of autonomy (adapted from Sugita McEown & Oga-Baldwin, 2019, p. 5; Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 72.)

As SDT proposes motivation as a construct which exists on a continuum, extrinsic motivation is subsequently comprised of four subtypes: external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation and integrated regulation. These subtypes vary in degree of autonomy, with external regulation being the most controlled and integrated regulation the most autonomous. The explanations about these subtypes and their examples in Japanese learning contexts are shown in Figure 1. These examples are from the interview data of the current study. But we created the examples for integrated and introjected regulations as well as amotivation as there were no instances of these regulations in the data.

3 Literature review

As mentioned earlier, motivation research has a long history and it was dominated by Gardner’s

(1985) concepts of integrative and instrumental motivation. Due to their lack of applicability to various learning contexts, however, an increasing number of studies employ other concepts of language learning motivation, including Dornyei's (2009) L2MSS (e.g. Kormos et al., 2011; Nakamura, 2019; Sakeda & Kurata, 2016; Taguchi, et al., 2009). Moreover, some other L2 motivation researchers draw on the constructs of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and the above-mentioned SDT that originated from the psychology field (Deci & Ryan, 2015). In the following section, we will mainly review the studies that utilised these psychological constructs to analyse L2 learners' motivation with a particular focus on Japanese as a foreign language (JFL). In addition, those that examined L2 learners' motivational changes over time will be reviewed as the current study examines motivational trajectories of JFL learners.

Previous studies have found that learners are likely driven by autonomous forms of motivation, that is, intrinsic motivation. Kreishan and Al-Dhaimat (2013), for example, found that EFL learners at a Jordan university possessed high levels of intrinsic motivation and identified regulation, which is goal-driven (cf. Figure 1). Similarly, JFL learners at a Canadian university were also found to be predominantly driven by intrinsic motivation and identified regulation (Sugita McEown et al., 2014). These findings might not be surprising, as learners studying L2 at universities are likely enrolled through volition, rather than compulsion.

On the other hand, Tanaka (2013) investigated kanji (Chinese characters used in the Japanese writing system) learning motivation among L2 Japanese learners in Japan. The author did not find the learners' L2 motivation to be influenced by identified regulation. Intrinsic motivation and introjected regulation (which concerns the avoidance of guilt and shame) were positive and negative predictors of kanji proficiency respectively. Tanaka suggested that learners studying Japanese in Japan might inherently have perceived high levels of identified regulation prior to participation in the study due to their learning environment, where Japanese proficiency would be perceived as a necessity for learners to achieve their personal goals.

De Burgh-Hirabe (2019) found that the initial motivation for university students of JFL in New Zealand was due to their interest in Japanese popular or traditional culture, their desire to build personal connections with first language (L1) Japanese speakers or intrinsic orientation. At Australian universities, Northwood and Thomson (2012) found that students' interest in Japanese popular culture could influence their motivation to continue their Japanese learning beyond the initial stage. Interestingly, Mori and Takeuchi (2016) reported that some JFL learners at an American university were also motivated by the linguistic differences between Japanese and English. This suggests that L2 Japanese learners can be motivated through their inherent interest in the language itself. Thus, these findings suggest that intrinsic motivation is a predominant aspect of motivation for Japanese language learners (Sugita McEown et al., 2014).

However, past research has provided conflicting findings regarding changes in motivation during tertiary studies. On one hand, de Burgh-Hirabe and Feryok (2013) did not find a consistent trend in the motivational trajectory of JFL learners participating in an extensive reading programme at two high schools in New Zealand. They found that some students' motivation increased, while some students' motivation decreased and others' motivation remained at similar levels. However, it was not clear what factors affected each individual student's motivation toward L2 reading.

On the other hand, Wang et al. (2015) observed that EFL learners' motivation toward learning English vocabulary fluctuated during their 14-week study at a university in Taiwan. Observations of the learners' behaviour suggested that their motivation initially declined between weeks two and eight, but then increased during weeks eight to 14. However, it is important to note that these observed changes in motivation contradicted the learners' own self-reports, which claimed that their motivation remained similar during the 14-week period.

In addition, Campbell and Storch (2011) reported that the motivation of L2 Chinese learners at an Australian university fluctuated over the 12-week semester. These changes were associated with the learners' learning experiences and their perceived difficulty of the formal learning content in their university coursework. More importantly, the authors also observed that all participants expe-

rienced a decrease in motivation at some point during the semester, which was predominantly influenced by the lack of opportunities to use Mandarin outside of class.

The general picture that emerges from the above literature review is that intrinsic and identified regulation (goal-driven) are the two major aspects of language learners' motivation at the tertiary level and the intensity of their motivation tends to fluctuate during a university semester. However, research to date has not yet provided a complete understanding of the factors affecting this fluctuation nor how the motivation types change during and after the semester.

4 Current Study

Taking into account the research gaps identified above, this study investigated the motivational trajectory of JFL learners during a university semester and the semester break (a holiday period between semesters). The types of motivation, as defined by SDT, that were related to JFL learners' Japanese learning experience and the relevant motivational factors were analysed. More specifically, the relationship between these factors, types of motivation and motivational trajectory was studied. This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the predominant types of motivation that are experienced by JFL learners initially and during the semester and the semester break?
2. How does their motivation change during these periods?
3. What factors influence changes in their motivation?

5 Methodology

The current study employed a qualitative approach using a longitudinal case study. While most motivation research mainly relies on quantitative data, an increasing number of researchers highlight the necessity of a qualitative approach to examine the complex aspects of learners' motivation as well as contextual factors affecting their motivational changes, which are not addressed in quantitative research (Lamb, 2009; Mori et al., 2021; Ushioda, 2001). The current study thus aimed to contribute to the limited body of literature on JFL learners' motivational changes and their surrounding contexts through an in-depth analysis of interview data.

5.1 Research setting and participants

Japanese is one of the most popular LOTEs learnt and taught as an L2 in 133 countries around the world (Japan Foundation, 2023). This includes Australia, where the current study was conducted, as this country has the highest proportion of learners in the world; one out of 61 people study Japanese there. In Australia, Japanese has been supported by government-level promotion of LOTEs and other language programmes at schools, partly due to growing economic interest in Japan (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2010). As a result, most Japanese learners are in primary or secondary schools (Japan Foundation, 2023). But Japanese has also been one of the most popular LOTEs at Australian universities in the last three decades (Ohashi & Ohashi, 2023).

Six students from an Australian university, who were enrolled in different levels of Japanese language subjects, participated voluntarily in this study. However, one participant withdrew after the first interview, and thus their data were omitted from the study. As a result, five participants' data were included. The participants were all assigned pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Further information regarding the participants' demographic and Japanese learning history is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' demographics and Japanese learning background

Background information	Bianca	Cynthia	Aaron	Erika	Faulkner
Age	25	19	19	20	19
Gender	Female	Female	Male	Female	Male
Language background	Korean English	Mandarin English	Mandarin Cantonese English	English	English
Formal Japanese learning history	5 years Started in Year 9	6 years Started in Year 7	3 years Started in Year 9	7 Years Started in Year 6	2 months Started in university
Level of Japanese units	4 th year (Upper-intermediate)	3 rd year (Intermediate)	3 rd year (Intermediate)	2 nd year (Upper beginner)	1 st year (Beginner)
University criteria of Japanese units	Major	Minor	Major	Major	Undecided
Participation in online exchange ¹	No current participation Previous participation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Goals	JLPT ² N3 ³	Work or live in Japan for a period	JLPT N1	Able to communicate in Japanese	Able to understand Japanese
Experience in Japan	Three weeks Travel	Seven weeks Exchange and travel	14 days Travel	Four weeks School-related trip	N/A

¹An online exchange programme is offered by the university, which involves students engaging in weekly conversational meetings over the internet with a university student from Japan who is an L1 speaker of Japanese. Enrolment in this programme is voluntary and is unrelated to the university coursework.

²The Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) is a worldwide Japanese government-sponsored test to assess and certify the Japanese proficiency of non-native speakers (Japan Foundation & Japan Educational Exchanges and Services, 2024).

³The JLPT consists of five levels, from N1 to N5, in descending order regarding the difficulty and proficiency level. JLPT's website states that N1 represents "the ability to understand Japanese used in a variety of circumstances" while N5 refers to "the ability to understand some basic Japanese".

5.2 Procedure

Two semi-structured online interviews were conducted to identify the participants' motivational characteristics and trajectory during a 12-week teaching period of a university semester (between weeks four and eight of Semester 1) and the semester break between the teaching periods of Semesters 1 and 2. This study considered the semester break as part of the university semester to assess the students' motivational trajectory, as the development of the students' Japanese learning motivation after the teaching period had concluded remained important in order for them to maintain their motivation. Semi-structured interviews encouraged participants to convey responses that were relevant to themselves through accounts of their own learning experiences and behaviour (Edley & Litosseliti, 2010). Furthermore, participants were given the option to have the interview conducted in

either English or Mandarin to allow greater precision in their responses, and the responses were subsequently translated from Mandarin into English. The interview data were video recorded and fully transcribed for data analysis.

5.3 Data analysis

The interview questions were designed to elicit responses regarding the participants' own learning experiences and the contexts related to their Japanese learning motivation (see Appendix for these questions). This enabled comparisons to be drawn between each participant and distinguished key characteristics of their individual motivation and how motivational factors influenced them individually. These characteristics were coded in two stages.

In the first stage, the participants' comments that indicated reasons for their Japanese learning were assigned codes, including "interest in anime", "goals to perform well in class" and "sense of obligation to study Japanese as a major". In the process of assigning these codes to all the interview data, we added and revised the codes. In the next stage, more abstract codes utilising the relevant types of regulations as defined through SDT were assigned, such as "intrinsic motivation", "identified regulation" and "external regulation" respectively. This was done by subsuming similar codes from the initial coding. Furthermore, these codes were then organised based on time, where the participants' responses and characteristics were compared with others during the same time period and coalesced into patterns, such as "temporary decrease" and "low towards final assessment". Regarding the factors related to changes in their motivation, we repeated a similar process. That is, we first assigned codes, such as "engaging class discussion", "outdated textbook content" and "peer support" from the participants' accounts, which were then subsumed under more abstract codes, including "teaching methods and activities", "teaching materials/content" and "perception of relatedness".

In order to increase the reliability of the analysis, the first author conducted the analysis and then shared it with the second author. When discrepancies in our analysis occurred, we further discussed them until we reached an agreement. We repeated this process for all the coding related to participants' initial motivation and motivation during the semester and the semester break.

6 Findings

Since this study aimed to assess L2 Japanese learners' motivation trajectory across a university semester and the following semester break, the results are presented in sections relevant to the temporal settings of the semester.

6.1 Changes in motivation

6.1.1 Initial and early motivation

Initial motivation and early motivation in this study refer to the participants' motivation when they first started learning Japanese and at an early stage of their learning respectively. All participants, except Erika and Bianca, began learning Japanese out of volitional choice rather than as a compulsory subject. They initially engaged in learning Japanese because of their interest in and early exposure to Japanese popular culture, particularly *anime* and *manga*.

Excerpt 1

At first it was purely because I watched Japanese comics and cartoons and *anime*. (Cynthia, third-year intermediate student)

(When asked about reasons for starting to learn Japanese) I like reading *manga*, so I want to learn Japanese to read comics. (Falkner, first-year beginner student)

For Cynthia and Falkner, their motivation to start learning Japanese was representative of intrinsic motivation because their motivation was driven by their interest in and enjoyment of Japanese popular culture. Additionally, Aaron, a third-year student, was frequently exposed to the notion of Japan during his childhood. Aaron's father, who worked at a major Japanese car company in China, would often "mention Japanese people" during conversations with Aaron. This fostered his interest in the L2 (Japanese) community. In addition, Aaron's mother "bought *Doraemon manga* (a Japanese comic designed for children)" to help him learn Chinese characters. As a result, his regular interactions with his father about Japanese people and his exposure to Japanese-related content gave him a perception that it was "as if [he] was born in Japan".

For Erika, a second-year upper beginner student, her first exposure to Japanese was in a compulsory educational setting, which provided externally regulated factors. However, she was intrinsically motivated in her Japanese learning. Her responses reflected her enjoyment of learning Japanese and her interest in the language itself as she "just loved the characters", "loved it was different" and it "seemed like a cool language" for her to speak and she "just enjoyed talking it".

For Bianca, a fourth-year upper-intermediate student, her initial motivation did not stem from an inherent interest in the language or Japanese popular culture. During secondary education, she was offered German and Japanese and chose to study Japanese because she "thought Japanese is like structurally very similar to Korean". She also believed that she would be able to perform well academically. This reflects identified regulation, where her initial motivation for learning Japanese derived from her goal of high academic achievement. It contrasts with the other participants, who were predominantly driven by intrinsic motivation, fuelled by their interest in and enjoyment of the subject and Japanese popular culture.

We found that Bianca, Erika and Falkner were driven not only by the above-mentioned motivations, but also possibly by a combination of other motivational types.

Excerpt 2

I was asked if I wanted to continue doing [Japanese] in year 10 and I said 'yes' because I was doing relatively well[.] (Bianca)

I guess I was good at [Japanese] as well...I think that was a good motivator... (Erika)

I think it would be good if you're able to speak fluently in another language other than English and your mother tongue. [It will] help you have more opportunities to work to [at] many different places, and also make friends. (Falkner)

It is likely that Bianca and Erika's motivation for learning Japanese could also have been influenced by their past academic success and achievement in the subject. In addition, Falkner was motivated by his belief that learning Japanese could expand his future career opportunities and facilitate interactions with a broader linguistic community. These cases illustrate that aspects of identified regulation (i.e. identifying specific values from behaviours which are perceived as important or desirable) could also play a role in some participants' initial or early motivation to study Japanese.

6.1.2 Motivation during the semester

The students' motivation for learning Japanese during the semester was associated with different types of motivation, which will be discussed in this section.

Excerpt 3

So, I am enjoying [learning Japanese], like I'm enjoying learning new grammar. (Erika)

Yeah, [learning Japanese is] really enjoyable...it is interesting. (Falkner)

These participants often expressed interest in and enjoyment of learning new Japanese content. Cynthia, for instance, reported that Japanese is "one of [her] most enjoyable subjects" and that her enjoyment remained consistent during the semester. The importance of Japanese studies within their

university course structure also played a role in their decision to prioritise Japanese learning over other subjects, as illustrated in Excerpt 4 below.

Excerpt 4

To be honest, for me, the priority of my Japanese assessments was higher than my other units. Mainly because I enjoy it, and secondly also because it's my major, so there's more emphasis on it. (Aaron)

Like although Japanese right now I'm doing it as a minor, but I think I am prioritising it a lot[.] (Cynthia)

For Aaron and Cynthia, the Japanese unit requirement for their tertiary course further motivated them to study Japanese, as they needed to complete their academic pathway, a factor associated with identified regulation. But not all participants shared their view. Bianca mentioned that she enjoyed studying Japanese, but she was “only really happy [to] do it” because it was necessary for completing her major. During her free time, Bianca would “easily choose” to spend time on her hobbies rather than study Japanese. Thus, her obligation to study Japanese for her tertiary course requirement likely outweighed her inherent interest in the subject during the semester. This suggests that Bianca's motivation for learning Japanese might be primarily driven by external and identified regulation, supplemented by some aspects of intrinsic motivation.

Despite intrinsic motivation being prominent among all participants except Bianca, not all learning content was perceived as interesting and enjoyable. For example, Aaron expressed interest in the oral aspects of Japanese learning, saying that he found “listening and speaking [to be] very enjoyable”. However, when he was “studying for writing Japanese it wasn't as enjoyable”. He did not “enjoy learning about speech styles” either, as he perceived Japanese speech styles as “very tedious”.

The difficulty of the learning content also affected the participants' motivation. For example, when Erika “found a grammar pattern easier to use or understood it better”, she “enjoyed it more and vice versa”. This suggests that less difficult content helped Erika to build confidence, thereby enhancing her intrinsic motivation while more challenging content likely decreased her motivation. Other participants also reported changes in motivation related to the perceived difficulty of their assessments and final examinations although they experienced these effects differently.

Excerpt 5

It just didn't seem all that difficult, so I was not all that motivated to study for the final assessment. (Bianca)

I think, maybe I wasn't motivated [toward the final assessment] as I should've because, like I said, the content for me was a bit more easier (sic) than my other subjects[.] (Cynthia)

[My motivation for studying the Japanese final assessment] was still quite high, as in terms of the content there wasn't any areas that was very difficult. (Aaron)

The assignments are not really hard and heavy-loaded, it does not really lower my motivation. (Falkner)

Bianca and Cynthia expected the final examination to be less difficult, which seemed to lower their motivation. This did not align with their previously reported enjoyment of and interest in Japanese learning. Both seemed to have a strong sense of confidence in their Japanese proficiency and ability within the framework of the formal coursework. As a result, they might have deemed it less necessary to study for their final Japanese assessment. In contrast, although Aaron and Falkner also did not perceive the Japanese content as difficult, their Japanese learning motivation was likely unaffected.

Other than formal learning from the university coursework, some participants also engaged with informal Japanese learning beyond the classroom during the semester (cf. Reinders & Benson, 2017). For example, Cynthia felt that she “learn[ed] a lot of Japanese from watching Japanese shows” where she would “take a screenshot” of words she did not understand and to “note it down”.

Similarly, Aaron believed that his Japanese learning was mainly “done through watching dramas and entertainment programs without subtitles”. He also studied *kanji* by “remember[ing] them through song lyrics”. These informal Japanese learning behaviours, occurred as a by-product of personal hobbies and leisure, were most likely driven by intrinsic regulation.

6.1.3 Motivation during the semester break

Most participants reported having little motivation to study Japanese using formal learning resources during the semester break. However, some remained engaged with informal or semi-formal Japanese learning content. For Bianca, although her motivation for studying formal Japanese content was “considerably lower”, she maintained some motivation toward semi-formal learning content as she was “trying to study for [her] JLPT” (see the footnotes of Table 1 above). Her personal goal of achieving the N3 level of the JLPT likely drove her motivation during the semester break, reflecting identified regulation. Similarly, Cynthia and Aaron also engaged in informal Japanese learning during the semester break.

Excerpt 6

Right now, because it's holidays, I'm probably not studying Japanese as much. But like I said, I'm doing some self-study whilst watching dramas. (Cynthia)
Because I'm exposed to Japanese a lot in [my] daily life, so I wouldn't deliberately go study Japanese. (...) I've spent quite a lot of time [speaking with my Japanese friends to practise speaking Japanese]. (Aaron)

As mentioned earlier, Cynthia and Aaron's engagement with learning Japanese occurred as a by-product of their hobbies, such as watching Japanese media programmes and engaging in casual conversations in Japanese with friends. This suggests that their informal learning of Japanese was likely driven by intrinsic regulation. In contrast, Bianca's displays of autonomy were likely driven by more controlled forms of motivation, as evidenced by her extrinsic goal of JLPT achievement. For Erika and Falkner, their decreased motivation toward studying Japanese was mainly due to their lack of engagement with learning activities.

Excerpt 7

Very little [motivation right now]. (...) I guess because I had a really tough semester at university, and I just really wanted a break. (Erika)
Honestly, I think I've lost a lot of motivation. I don't have weekly assessments and classes and I feel kind of lost, I don't know where to keep practicing my Japanese. (Falkner)

Erika's decrease in motivation arose from her desire to distance herself from learning in general, rather than from a negative attitude towards Japanese learning specifically. In contrast, Falkner's decline in motivation was influenced by his uncertainty about how to continue learning Japanese without guidance. Unlike Aaron and Cynthia, he probably lacked the proficiency level and access to resources that could facilitate autonomous engagement in informal Japanese learning. Thus, it could not be determined whether Erika and Falkner's motivational types had changed, but their motivational intensity was notably lower during the semester break compared to during the semester.

6.1.4 Motivational changes from initial motivation to semester break

The motivation and trajectory of L2 Japanese learners during the semester can vary. For some learners, such as Bianca and Cynthia, it was clear that there was a temporary dip in their motivation toward their final assessment. Other participants also experienced changes in their motivation levels during the semester based on their perceptions of the learning content. However, all the participants'

motivation type, apart from Bianca's, remained predominantly intrinsic, as they continued to show interest in and enjoyment of learning Japanese. Bianca's motivation was both intrinsic and extrinsic, but it showed stronger aspects of external and identified regulation.

During the semester break, Bianca, Aaron and Cynthia appeared to maintain their motivation by engaging in semi-formal learning (such as preparing for the JLPT) and informal learning (such as watching Japanese dramas). Erika and Falkner, on the other hand, did not engage in learning activities. Erika's reason was fatigue after the "tough semester" while Falkner had no idea how to continue his Japanese learning independently.

6.1.5 Major factors influencing changes in motivation

As discussed, the most prominent factor affecting the participants' initial and early motivation was their interest in Japanese pop-culture. During the semester, additional factors contributed to changes in the type and level of Japanese learning motivation. Firstly, a primary factor was the students' formal Japanese learning content and materials. Bianca liked the content of her formal learning textbook, noting that she found "some of the readings in the book really fun". This positive perception increased her motivation levels and resonated with her intrinsic motivation. In contrast, Aaron considered the learning content "outdated" and "very official" and felt that it "doesn't suit younger learners as it doesn't include any materials that are trending relevant to this audience". He also found learning Japanese speech styles "tedious", which likely reduced his motivation levels temporarily. Therefore, the influence of learning content on motivation is partly dependent on students' perception of that content.

Secondly, the teaching methods and activities employed by teachers during classes were also reported to be relevant to changes in motivation.

Excerpt 8

[T]he discussions are pretty engaging, and they do really push us to speak to our peers...to talk about the topic that we're doing and have a little debate so that's really fun. (Bianca)
So right now, since we're doing [classes] online, we do a lot of breakout rooms to practise *kaiwa* (conversation). I think that's good because even though you're at home it gets you talking Japanese. (Cynthia)

[Getting] to talk to people in Japanese and having materials like actively answer the questions really boost my motivation [and] helps it stay steady. (Falkner)

These participants perceived engaging in Japanese conversations in class positively, as it allowed them to actively use Japanese and provided opportunities to speak and practise the language. Since participants across different levels of proficiency reported these positive perceptions, it suggests that teaching methods which promote active use of Japanese might help improve learners' motivation. However, not all aspects of the teaching methods that were adopted were perceived positively.

Excerpt 9

We're doing mostly like reading work but during this tutorial we would be asked to like read one sentence per person. And because our tutorial isn't small...so it takes a while for it come back to you. (Bianca)

Although her teacher provided students with reading opportunities, Bianca felt that it negatively influenced her motivation levels as she found it "pretty flat and kind of boring. The limited opportunities for active engagement during reading activities, coupled with long waiting times between turns, likely reduced her enjoyment and consequently her intrinsic motivation in those specific moments. Repetition as a teaching method also negatively affected other participants' motivation levels, as shown below in Excerpt 10.

Excerpt 10

One bad point would be the content is a bit repetitive across the three types of classes, the workshop, tutorial and then tutorial. I know that's for like revision purposes, [but] I think it becomes slightly a bit boring because they're sort of talking about the similar content. (Cynthia)

I think sometimes it can be repetitive[.] (...) I think repetition is good in the way that you continue consolidating what you know but at the same time you're not getting new examples to expand how the grammar could be used[.] (Erika)

Even though these participants understood the rationale for repetition in teaching, its excessive use might have caused them to become disinterested in learning Japanese. While repetition helps to consolidate previous learning content, it also limits exposure to new content, which may result in lower motivation levels.

Thirdly, participants' perception of relatedness to other people relevant to their Japanese learning also influenced changes in their motivation.

Excerpt 11

We have like a Facebook group chat, and we sometimes ask each other about assignment or about like expression. ...we have a somewhat close student community on Facebook. So, we always kind of support each other but without that support system I'm not too sure if I will be able to continue [studying Japanese] as well as I did for the semesters. (Bianca)

For Bianca, interactions with her peers provided support that helped maintain her motivation levels. In Cynthia's case, using newly learnt Japanese words or grammar to communicate with her language exchange partner, an L1 Japanese speaker, gave her a sense of accomplishment and she felt "more motivated to be able to express more stuff in Japanese". Similarly, Erika thought that having opportunities to communicate in Japanese with L1 speakers would enhance her motivation to learn Japanese.

Excerpt 12

Yeah, I think I would be more motivated to do more outside study if I was constantly talking to someone, because...I would want to make sure I was speaking well and communicating well. (Erika)

Such opportunities encourage learners to ensure that their Japanese proficiency is sufficient for engaging in meaningful conversations and they promote further engagement in Japanese related activities. Conversely, if it is impossible to develop relatedness during interactions with L1 speakers, it might hinder learners' motivation to learn Japanese beyond the classroom (cf. Campbell & Storch, 2011). For Bianca, conversations with L1 speakers during the online exchange programme felt "artificial". She described them as "really like forced" because she and her exchange partner "would have a [predetermined] topic [to] talk about each week and it was set". Furthermore, she "didn't really share common interest[s]" with her exchange partner and eventually "fell out of contact" with her partner. For other participants, their motivation was also influenced by their sense of relatedness to their teachers.

Excerpt 13

[The teacher] was really good at trying to talk to us individually about how we were going and just reassuring us. (...) It definitely encouraged me, it was really good motivation to keep trying and keep going and doing my best. (Erika)

I feel that it's a shame that I can't directly interact with my teachers. Although I would send emails to ask them questions, but I would want to have opportunities to have face-to-face interactions with my teachers. (Aaron)

Since Erika's teacher communicated with her individually, it provided Erika encouragement and assurances about her progress and ability in Japanese. This likely fostered a sense of relatedness and served as "good motivation to keep trying" while also catering to her need for perceived competence. Conversely, Aaron's motivation may have been hindered by the lack of individual face-to-face interactions with teachers due to online learning and hence the absence of opportunities to develop relatedness to his teachers.

7 Discussion

This study examined JFL learners' initial and early motivation, motivational trajectories during the semester and the semester break as well as the major factors influencing these trajectories. As discussed, the most prominent factor that influenced the participants' initial and early motivation was their inherent interest in Japanese culture. For Cynthia, Aaron and Falkner, their interest centred around Japanese popular culture. This finding is similar to those from past studies (de Burgh-Hirabe, 2019; Nakamura, 2018; Northwood & Thomson, 2012; Rowena et al., 2024). Conversely, Erika's initial interest was associated with her fascination with the Japanese writing system. This supports the findings of Mori and Takeuchi (2016), which suggest that differences between L1 English and L2 Japanese can motivate students to learn Japanese. For Bianca, her initial motivation was related to the perceived ease of learning Japanese due to similarities with her L1, Korean. She believed that she could perform well in Japanese, reflecting identified regulation. This is similar to Wen's (1997) findings, where some learners who could speak or understand a Chinese dialect (excluding Mandarin) were initially motivated to learn Chinese because they expected the classes to be less demanding than other subjects.

Interestingly, this type of regulation, one of extrinsic motivation (cf. Figure 1 above), was also found in Falkner's case (to expand future pathways) and Erika's case (her perceived competence in Japanese). Unlike other participants, these two learners' initial or early motivation was simultaneously autonomous (intrinsic regulation) and somewhat controlled (identified regulation). This contrasts with previous studies which found that participants showed mainly one type of regulation at an early stage but later exhibited a multi-layered motivation, such as adding an L2 ideal self (de Burgh-Hirabe, 2019; Kurata, 2021; Ohashi & Ohashi, 2023). A possible reason for the divergence of our findings from previous studies is that students at Australian schools are usually offered two or three LOTEs to choose from, which probably allows them to experience both external regulation due to the compulsory nature of the LOTE subjects as well as other forms of regulation such as identified regulation, as seen in Bianca's case. Additionally, within the multicultural or multilingual context of Australian society, where various ethnic or cultural communities co-exist, students often develop an interest in these communities and their (pop-)culture from childhood. This environment might help nurture their interest in future career pathways in the wider linguistic community as well, as exemplified by Falkner's interest in both manga and future employment using Japanese.

During the semester all the participants except for Bianca were predominantly driven by intrinsic motivation while Aaron and Cynthia were also driven by identified regulation. This aligns with findings from Joe et al. (2017) and Sugita McEown et al. (2014), where intrinsic motivation and identified regulation were found to be the most prominent types of motivation experienced by L2 learners. In addition, Aaron, Cynthia and Bianca maintained their identified regulation during the semester, even when they experienced temporarily decreased motivation. This parallels the findings of Noels et al. (2019), which indicated that L2 learners' identified regulation did not change during the semester and suggested that goal-related factors are unlikely to change over a period of few months. Given their strong initial intrinsic motivation, Aaron and Cynthia might possess high levels of both intrinsic and identified regulation, which could have helped sustain their motivation during the semester.

As discussed earlier, many motivational changes of the participants during the semester were often temporary and these changes were influenced by environmental factors. The obligation to meet

university coursework deadlines, the perceived difficulty of Japanese learning and personal preference for certain teaching styles and materials mostly had temporary effects on the participants' motivation during the semester. Although these changes in motivation in the current study were not as significant compared to Campbell and Storch (2011), there were similarities between the two studies. In their study, L2 learners' motivation was weakened or strengthened based on their perceived difficulty or lack of difficulty of the coursework content respectively. Furthermore, they also found that L2 motivation can be influenced by coursework assessments. One participant from Campbell and Storch's (2011) study reported a stronger motivation as a response to their experience of failure in their mid-semester assessment. This suggests that assessment results and students' reactions to them can influence motivation differently, thus emphasising the need to explore this facet of motivation development in future studies. In the current study, Aaron experienced a temporary decrease in motivation when learning Japanese content that he did not enjoy. Likewise, de Burgh-Hirabe and Fe-ryok (2013) found that changes in L2 reading content led to changes in learners' overall L2 reading motivation. This was dependent on the relationship between the students' inherent interests and the new reading content.

In addition, Bianca reported that her motivation decreased when she was unable to use Japanese outside of class. Conversely, Cynthia reported that her motivation improved when opportunities to use Japanese outside of class emerged. The former experience was also observed by Campbell and Storch (2011), where Chinese language learners' motivation also declined due to a lack of opportunities to use the language outside of class. This suggests that L2 use outside of class can have benefits in maintaining and enhancing learners' motivation. This claim also corroborates the finding of Kurata's (2021) study that revealed the positive impact of out-of-class L2 use on a Japanese language learner's motivation.

Despite temporary changes, all participants reported that their motivation remained mostly stable during the semester, which is similar to the findings of Wang et al. (2015). However, Wang et al. observed that their participants experienced a period of continued decrease in motivation, followed by a period of continued recovery in motivation during their study. The difference between the current study and their study could be due to the nature of the coursework. The current study focused on formal university coursework, whereas Wang et al. (2015) used a vocabulary learning task across a 14-week period, which was separate from the students' university coursework. Participants in the current study experienced high intrinsic and identified regulation toward their Japanese coursework, likely sustaining their motivation. In contrast, the participants from Wang et al. (2015) might have developed a perception of the importance of the learning tasks during their research, which could explain their motivation recovery. At the same time, Wang et al.'s (2015) finding regarding the discrepancy between the students' reported motivation and the observed motivation is acknowledged. Since the present study did not involve observation within its methodology, future studies should explore this discrepancy further.

During the semester break, the participants were unsurprisingly not motivated to study Japanese using formal content. However, this does not mean that they were entirely unmotivated. Bianca was driven by identified regulation as she prepared for the JLPT test while Cynthia and Aaron were motivated by their intrinsic interest in the Japanese popular culture. It is important to consider that students are naturally less inclined to study during the semester break if no obligations are present. Few studies have explored L2 learners' motivation during holiday periods. So the current findings offer qualitative insights into university students' L2 motivation outside formal learning. Specifically, we would like to highlight the importance of informal learning during the non-teaching period. This can be achieved by engaging with media programmes and preparing for external exams such as the JLPT.

The current findings regarding students' language learning motivation after the formal instruction period suggest that more autonomous types of motivation are more likely to be maintained. The lack of obligations mentioned by the participants is linked to elements of the university coursework, such as assessments and academic grades, that typically stimulate extrinsic and introjected regulation, but are not always present. Conversely, factors related to intrinsic and identified regulation

often originate from the students themselves and thus can resonate more regularly, providing more sustained motivation over longer periods.

The current study also discussed the participants' basic psychological needs pertaining to their Japanese learning motivation. These findings suggest that building relatedness with others, both inside and outside the classroom, can help maintain students' intrinsic motivation throughout a university semester. This aligns with the findings of Carreira (2012) and can also be applied to online teaching scenarios (Chen & Jang, 2010). This study also discussed the influences of students' perceptions of competence on their Japanese learning motivation. Participants indicated that optimally challenging content was important for satisfying their need for competence. However, this study also found that a strong perception of competence could negatively affect students' language learning motivation, a concept that has not been thoroughly discussed previously and warrants further investigation in future studies.

8 Pedagogical implications and future research

Based on the findings, this study offers some pedagogical implications at the tertiary level. Firstly, since all students experienced a decrease in motivation toward studying formal Japanese content during the semester break, it is crucial for teachers and educational institutions to address this issue. Given that tertiary education involves longer holiday periods, compared to primary and secondary education, helping university learners maintain their L2 motivation during these periods is especially important. Drawing on van Lier's (2004) definition of learning as an active and interactive process of perceiving and acting on affordances in different contexts, if learners have little L2 motivation over a long semester break, it will result in little or no engagement in this process, leading to no L2 learning and possibly decreased L2 proficiency. To prevent this, teachers could encourage students to pursue extracurricular JFL learning by engaging in activities that are directly related to their interests, such as reading or watching Japanese popular culture materials and preparing for external proficiency tests. However, teachers should also promote and provide guidance on effective learning strategies and resources that can be employed during these activities.

Secondly, students' motivation to learn Japanese is influenced by various factors, which can have positive and negative effects. Teachers should use learning content and materials that directly target their students' interests and adopt teaching methods that allow students to actively engage in their classroom learning. This includes providing authentic opportunities for students to communicate with their peers and teachers in Japanese. These opportunities should also be available beyond the classroom, as Japanese usage outside of the class can further maintain and enhance learners' motivation (cf. Kurata, 2021). This will allow students to improve their perception of competence through regular practice as well as build a sense of relatedness with L1 speakers and/or other L2 learners, thereby improving motivation. However, it is important for teachers to be careful when developing the students' perception of competence. They should endeavour to provide content that is optimally challenging to support students' intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2015). Current findings suggest that students can become complacent and lose their motivation if they do not perceive the assessments as challenging enough.

The current study has contributed to the existing body of motivation research for L2 learning, especially for JFL learning, by addressing a gap concerning motivational trajectories over a learning period. It provided insights into how JFL learners' motivation changed during the semester and the semester break. While their motivation remained relatively stable, it was also temporarily influenced by various factors and circumstances. In addition, the current study found that the most predominant types of motivation experienced by JFL learners were identified regulation and intrinsic motivation.

However, limitations were present within the current study. Firstly, as participation was voluntary, it is likely that the participants were inherently more motivated than the general cohort. Secondly, the evaluation of the students' motivation relied solely on interviews with no other methods for assessing motivational changes. Thus, future research should utilise multiple sources of data collection, such as observation and diary entries.

Future research should further explore learners' motivation during the semester break. Although the current findings indicated that decreased motivation during the semester break was mainly linked to formal Japanese content, future studies should investigate learners' motivation toward informal (such as exposure to anime and manga) and semi-formal forms (such as studying for a language proficiency test) of Japanese learning during the semester break. Given that university students have longer holidays than primary and secondary school students, it is important for teachers to ensure that JFL learners remain motivated during the semester break.

It is hoped that the current findings will assist teachers and educational institutions in developing strategies to foster the positive development of language learners' motivation and ultimately improve their overall learning experience and outcomes.

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Appendix

Semi-structured interview questions:

Interview 1 (conducted during the semester)

When did you start learning Japanese? (If before university) What was the coursework structure like (hours of classes per week)?

Were there any periods where you stopped learning Japanese before you started studying at university (semesters/years)? How was your motivation to start learning Japanese after that period of hiatus?

Why did you start learning Japanese initially? What things prompted you to start? (If started before university) What things and why did you decide to continue studying Japanese?

Were you influenced by anyone who prompted you to start learning Japanese (family, friends)?

How do you feel about learning Japanese in Australia? (If applicable) How does that compare to learning Japanese in Japan? (If applicable) How does that compare to learning Japanese in your country? Is your motivation different?

How important do you perceive the ability to fluently use Japanese to be?

What are your friends and family's attitudes towards your Japanese study?

Are you enjoying learning Japanese right now (this semester so far)? Did you feel your enjoyment changed (fluctuate) over the last few weeks?

During this semester, did you ever feel more motivated to study Japanese or feel less motivated? (Could you describe to me why it happened? What things made you feel more or less motivated?)

How do you feel about your motivation to study Japanese right now? How does that compare to the start of the semester?

How do you approach studying Japanese? What materials do you use? Do you study by yourself or with friends? How often do you study Japanese? (on a consistent basis or is there an element of cramming?)

When you encounter problems or obstacles whilst you are learning Japanese, do you actively seek help from other people? Who do you seek help from (friends, classmates, teachers etc.)? How do they help?

What are your thoughts regarding the learning activities and materials used in class? How do you feel about your Japanese classes? What aspects do you prefer and what aspects do you not prefer? Do you think they affect your motivation to study Japanese?

Do you have set goals for learning Japanese this semester? (To pass or is it to achieve a specific grade; or is your goal less tangible and more, achieving a level that is based on personal accomplishment?) How motivated are you in accomplishing these goals?

What are your long-term goals for learning Japanese? (To work in Japan; possess as a skill etc.)

How important do you perceive your Japanese language unit compared to your other units you are currently studying? (More or less) Would you prioritise certain units over others?

How do your assessment marks (grades, results) affect your motivation to study Japanese?

How often do you use Japanese right now? How much are you exposed to Japanese content such as Japanese music, movies, drama, anime etc.?

Do you have Japanese friends whom you communicate with regularly? If so, how often do you communicate with them and how much Japanese do you use with them? How does that affect your motivation?

How motivated do you feel about studying Japanese for the rest of the semester (until the exams)?

Interview 2 (conducted during the semester break)

Did you enjoy learning Japanese last semester? Did your enjoyment change (fluctuate) during the semester?

Did you consistently study Japanese throughout the entire semester?

During last semester, especially during the busy periods (like the last week of semester and during exams), how motivated were you to study Japanese?

How is your motivation to learn Japanese now compared to during last semester? Higher or lower? Are you motivated to study Japanese right now? What keeps you motivated? If not very motivated, can you tell me why? (lack of incentive?)

Are you studying Japanese right now? Referring to using textbooks, maybe online exercises or extracurricular classes, a more traditional sense of 'studying'. If so, how often?

Are you currently using Japanese to communicate with other people? If so, how often? How often are you interacting with Japanese? (listening to Japanese music, watching Japanese movies, drama, anime etc.)

Would you be continuing to study Japanese next semester? Why or why not? (Because of course requirement; want to continue studying)

How motivated are you to study Japanese next semester? How did (would) your grade from your last semester's Japanese language unit affect your motivation to continue studying?

When you finish your Japanese language units, how motivated do you see yourself to continue studying Japanese? Do you see yourself continuing your studies in Japanese after you complete your course or after you graduate?