

***Intrinsic Motivation in the EFL School Context:
A Retrospective Study of English Learning
Experiences in Japanese Elementary Schools****

Yoshiyuki Nakata

Hyogo University of Teacher Education, Japan

The present paper aims to investigate how pupil's intrinsic motivation to learn English changes with age, as they progress from lower to higher grades in elementary schools. It attempts to do so by exploring the perceptions held by 213 first-year junior high school students of their English learning experience in Japanese elementary schools. Specifically, the foci in this study are: (1) to explore different patterns in the development of intrinsic motivation with regard to the length of English learning experiences in elementary school; (2) to clarify a typology of English learning experiences in elementary schools with reference to the development of intrinsic motivation; and (3) to investigate qualitative changes of intrinsic motivation. Results show that three elements of *enjoyment*, *willingness to continue learning*, and *meaningfulness* do not necessarily refer to three discrete aspects of intrinsic motivation, but are rather intertwined each other.

Key words: intrinsic motivation, elementary school, EFL

* All children enter first grade at age six. Elementary school classes are large, about thirty-one students per class on average, but higher numbers are permitted. Students are usually organized into small work groups, which have both academic and disciplinary functions. Discipline also is maintained, and a sense of responsibility encouraged, by the use of student monitors and by having the students assume responsibility for the physical appearance of their classroom and school.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elementary_schools_in_Japan)

INTRODUCTION

Without doubt, motivation to learn English is a fundamental prerequisite for children's success in learning English (e.g., Coleman, Galaczi, & Astruc, 2007; Dörnyei, 2001; Wu, 2003). What does intrinsic motivation mean in the EFL school context? How can we motivate elementary school children to learn English? Or how can we help them to sustain their intrinsic motivation to learn English? The answers to these questions should not remain elusive, but should be supplied on the basis of empirical evidence available to other researchers and practitioners to follow up. Being fully aware of the difficulty of attempting to explore such a complex matter as intrinsic motivation (especially in the case of elementary school children due to their cognitive immaturity) and the paucity of empirical research data on these points, the present study attempts to fill the gap. The present paper, however, does not aim to establish one overall definition but rather aims to clarify further different possible dimensions of intrinsic motivation in a way that is reasonable and plausible for practitioners. In this paper I hope to shed light on these important questions by clarifying further what might be meant by "intrinsic motivation" in the EFL school context.

INTRINSIC MOTIVATION AND THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

In his classic article *Motivation reconsidered: the concept of competence*, White (1959) postulated the notion of *effectance motivation*—"a feeling of interest which often sustains us well in day-to-day actions, particularly when things we are doing have continuing elements of novelty" (p. 323). This is undoubtedly of central importance for child development and thus has been a starting point for subsequent studies of intrinsic motivation.

Despite its complex multifaceted nature (e.g., *mastery, intrinsic pleasures, individual differences*; see Reiss, 2004), intrinsic motivation has long been investigated in the field not only of educational psychology but also of

second/foreign language learning. Among the studies of the last decade, Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory of intrinsic motivation has gained impetus among a wide spectrum of people in second and foreign language education (e.g., Dörnyei, 2001; Noels, 2001, 2009; Noels, Pelletier, Clément, & Vallerland, 2000; Wu, 2003). Probably, no one would argue against the following assertions of their theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985): "They [Children] are unendingly curious, and they want to see the effects of their actions. Children are intrinsically motivated to learn, to undertake challenges, and to solve problems" (p. 11). And probably nor with their further claim: "To achieve self-determination, one must provide informational structures, ones that provide choice and competence feedback in the absence of pressure for specific performance" (p. 268).

However, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence and many vignettes from the EFL classroom to suggest that Deci and Ryan's thesis is significant but accounts only for part of the whole of intrinsic motivation, and therefore is, in a very real sense, limited in its practical applications. The school context, for example, is concerned at least, it is full of constraints and commitments from the curriculum and the institution, as is explicitly argued by Brophy (2004, pp. 13-14): (1) School attendance is *compulsory* and curriculum content and learning activities are selected primarily on the basis of *what society believes students need to learn*, not on the basis of what students would choose if given the opportunity to do so; (2) Teachers usually must work with *classes of 20 or more students* and therefore *cannot always meet each individual's needs*; (3) Classrooms are *social settings*, so that failures often produce not only personal disappointment but public embarrassment; and (4) Students' work on assignments and performance on tests are *graded*, and periodic reports are sent home to their parents. Put in a nutshell, the school context in many countries (including Japan) does not necessarily provide the required conditions of autonomy for the self-determination theory to be applicable.

From a practitioner's point of view (particularly that of teachers in EFL school contexts), it seems that the self-determination theory of intrinsic

motivation, rather narrowly interpreted within the framework of the self-determination continuum (from *amotivation*, several stages of *extrinsic motivation* to *intrinsic motivation*; Ryan & Deci, 2002, p. 16), cannot fully comprehend the whole picture of intrinsic motivation—at least to the point where they can make sense of it. As desirable as it might be, there are certainly severe practical limitations if one attempts to rely solely on this aspect of intrinsic motivation in the foreign language learning context of the school. For example, for teachers, there is nothing wrong with not necessarily giving students total freedom of choice or unlimited fun activities, but instead following the curriculum content in their lesson. Not surprisingly, no matter how much students may like or dislike the subject, they have to learn what they are supposed to learn in the classroom at school; for a teacher, at least in principle, has to teach his/her students what he/she is supposed to teach in the classroom.

What is more, as Reiss (2004) argues, intrinsic pleasure is not necessarily a common characteristic of intrinsic motivations. In fact, there are cases when they are not necessarily pleasurable, as is vividly illustrated by his following lucid account:

Whether pleasure is experienced depends on a person's motivation; for example, mountain climbing can be pleasant when one desires physical exercise but unpleasant when one is tired and desires rest. Thus, it is not mountain climbing per se that is pleasurable but the potential the activity holds for sustaining motives, such as the motive for physical activity or the motive for achievement. (p. 191)

The same holds true for language learning; it depends on how learners view the value of such activity for their own language development. In particular, this is detrimental to EFL learners whose contact with native speakers of English are infrequent.

Brophy (2004) argues there are two aspects of intrinsic motivation. One is the affective quality of students' engagement in an activity—the degree to which they enjoy or derive pleasure from the experience (i.e., *enjoyment*).

The other is its cognitive aspect—the degree to which they find participation in the activity to be self-actualizing, competence-enhancing, or otherwise meaningful and worthwhile (i.e., *meaningfulness*). Learners must be motivated both affectively and cognitively so that their intrinsic motivation is internalized by them (Nakata, 2006, forthcoming; Ushioda, 2008). Brophy's view is in accordance with Ushioda's (2008, p. 21) at least in that intrinsically motivated learning is neither simply "learning for the sake of learning" nor simply "learning for fun and enjoyment" (i.e., *enjoyment*), but rather "learning for the feeling of personal satisfaction, personal challenge, and personal skill development" (i.e., *meaningfulness*). This is essentially identical to the idea of the *continuing impulse to learn* (Oldfather & Dahl, 1994, p. 142) characterized by intense involvement, curiosity, and a search for understanding as learners experience learning as a deeply personal and continuing agenda (i.e., *willingness to continue learning*). Intriguingly enough, Deci (1992), while stressing the importance of autonomy supportive environment in the school context, argues: "the children's interest, intrinsic motivation, and self-determination with respect to school-related activities lead to optimal educational outcomes" (pp. 65-66).

Intrinsic motivation, by analogy with the existing literature to date and many voices from practitioners in the EFL classroom, might be underpinned by the following three dimensions: *enjoyment*, *meaningfulness* and *willingness to continue learning*. On this basis, the present paper constitutes one attempt to investigate both affective and cognitive aspects of the development of intrinsic motivation proposed by Brophy (2004) and thereby to grasp the nature of intrinsic motivation more comprehensively. There is a high degree of likelihood that the development of such motivation will be more evident in primary school classroom than at any other institutional levels (see Bronson, 2000). It is for this reason that primary school children were considered to be appropriate as the participants of the present study.

RESEARCH GOALS

The general purpose of this study is to investigate how pupils' intrinsic motivation for learning English changes with age, as they progress from lower to higher grades in elementary schools. The first goal is to explore different developmental patterns of intrinsic motivation with regard to the length of English learning experiences in elementary schools. The second aim is to clarify a typology of English learning experiences in elementary schools with reference to the development of intrinsic motivation. The third purpose of the present study is to investigate qualitative changes in intrinsic motivation.

METHOD

Given the research purpose and the inherently subjective nature of *experience*, it seemed logical to employ a multiple point retrospective panel design (de Vaus, 2001), in which the information about the past is dependent on respondents' recall of past events, but by which we can inquire into the respondents' inner responses to their previous language learning experience at several different stages (see Appendix).

There is room for debate and disagreement over the reliability of the data elicited retrospectively by having respondents recall their learning experiences for the difficulty of obtaining valid and reliable data (e.g., de Vaus, 2001; Dörnyei, 2007; Featherman, 1980). Admittedly, data elicited retrospectively is inherently subjective in nature and thus does not always reflect reality.

In recent years, however, there have appeared growing calls among several researchers (Abbas, 2002; de Vaus, 2001; Featherman, 1980) to emphasize the advantages of this design: (1) its constant frame of reference over time (Featherman, 1980); (2) its intactness free from sample attrition (Featherman, 1980); and (3) its cost-effectiveness (Featherman, 1980; Hayashi, 2005). In

this, de Vaus (2001) made an intriguing remark,

The problems with this sort of design [multiple point retrospective panel design] for these sorts of matters are obvious. There will be a great deal of distortion (deliberate and otherwise) in those recollections. Not only will people not be able to recall accurately how they felt, but we know that recollections of past experiences are interpreted in the light of subsequent events and experiences. All that these sorts of design would tell us is how people construct their past. But this problem is not grounds to condemn all retrospective studies. When dealing with certain events, quite good and reliable information can be obtained about the sequence of past events – especially if they are significant events in the person's life. From these accounts of the sequence of past events we can reconstruct their 'careers' and in so doing solve some of the problems of temporal order so necessary to developing causal attributions. ... This retrospective design is most reliable when we are dealing with memorable events. (pp. 127-128)

Likewise, Bruner (1994) goes so far as to claim that what is crucially important to us is to learn how learners perceive their previous learning experiences: the turning points of their learning history. There is no doubt that affective factors like learners' motivation are influenced by their previous language learning experiences, and that the current state of their motivation is the results of their accumulated language learning experiences—the ups and downs of their motivation.

Given such accounts of this methodology, it is perhaps reasonable to consider that the research literature on primary English education, particularly in the EFL school context (including Japan), could potentially be further amplified if we were to employ this research method. But how do we investigate such a difficult issue? One may argue that any quantitative studies employing retrospective research design tend to iron out idiosyncrasies inherent in each learner's language learning experience. However, many such studies, if not all, can help to reveal a number illuminating patterns of learners' perceptions of their previous language learning experiences, and can thereby potentially provide us with insightful practical implications.

Moreover, the result drawn from such quantitative studies can further be complemented by qualitative data; they together can help uncover the complex nature of learners' English learning experiences in elementary schools and the dynamic aspect of intrinsic motivation. It is for this reason that the present study collected and analyzed the participants' qualitative data as well as their quantitative data.

Participants

The original participants were 224 Japanese first-year students in junior high schools, who were drawn from two pilot junior high schools attached to a college of education in Japan (whose mission and educational context are very similar), on the basis of the assumption that many of them have a relatively long and similar experiences of learning English (five or six years, most probably in the attached pilot elementary schools)¹. Those questionnaires found to be either improperly filled in or incomplete were eliminated from the sample. Furthermore, for the purpose of this study, data relating to students whose learning of English was interrupted along the way (for periods up to a year) was also excluded from this study. This left 213 as a final sample, as is shown in Table 1.

In the field of primary English language education study, collecting credible data has often been a major source of concern, since children may not be cognitively mature enough. In the case of retrospective study like this, it is thus advisable that we ask participants to recall their experience of not too distant past. It was assumed that the participants in this study would respond to the questionnaire (both of the closed section and the open-ended section) better than students in other junior high schools, since many of them, if not all, had had a fair amount of experience of filling in various

¹ In Japan, although the new course of study implemented in 2002 allowed individual schools to introduce "foreign language activities" under the broader rubric of advancing international understanding, the frequency and ways in which they introduce such activity vary tremendously from school to school (Goto, 2004; Honna & Takeshita, 2005).

questionnaires in their elementary school². Considering all this, it seemed logical to presume that the first-year grade junior high school students (in the pilot schools attached to a college of Education in Japan) was the reasonable and inevitable option as the participants of this survey study.

TABLE 1
Distribution of the Participants

Sex:	Starting year of learning English		
Males	101	First-year grade (elementary school)	81
Females	112	Second-year grade	61
		Third-year grade	34
		Fourth-year grade	19
		Fifth-year grade	8
		Sixth-year grade	2
		First-year grade (junior high school)	8
Total	213	Total	213

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed after piloting the original version with another group of junior high school students and intense discussions with four secondary school teachers and one pre-service teacher of English about its possible modification. Upon due consideration of the participants' age (first-year grade students in junior high school) and their limited capacity of recalling their previous English learning experiences, in developing the questionnaire, every attempt was made to make the questionnaire as simple as possible so that first-year students in junior high school could answer it without difficulty. Moreover, Questionnaire Items 4 and 5 were underlined in order that they could appropriately describe their English learning experience in their elementary school (see Appendix).

The first section asks demographic questions such as gender, the starting year of learning English, the length of time of previous English learning. The

² Indeed, the respondents, those in Group B in particular, provided us with a certain amount of their comments in the open-ended section.

second section comprises twenty-one closed-questionnaire items arranged in a 5-point *Likert* scale format, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. More concretely, this consists of seven sets of the same three questionnaire items (1. *Learning English was enjoyable*, 2. *I was willing to continue learning*, and 3. *Learning English was meaningful to me*) for each year from their first year of learning English up to the present (the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth years of elementary school, and the first year of junior high school). In developing this part of the questionnaire, due consideration was paid to the wording (1. “*tanoshii*” (i.e., fun or enjoyment), 2. “*manabi tsuzuketai*” (i.e., sustained impetus), 3. “*yarigai*” (i.e., worthwhile, meaningful) in order that the respondents could discern each concept. Basic to these three questionnaire items, however, was the assumption that, in principle, the three aspects represented in these questionnaire items constitute the whole picture of intrinsic motivation. Though each aspect constitutes a different aspect of intrinsic motivation, all of them come from within the self.

The final section is seven sentence-completion-type open-ended questions (e.g., *When I was learning English in my first year of elementary school, ...*) with three double-spaced lines provided for each year from the first year of learning English up to the present. The following is an English translation of the instruction given in this section: *When you look back on your English learning experiences, under what circumstances did your motivation to study English increase and under what circumstances did you lose motivation? Use an episode in providing your answer.* The third section of the questionnaire was developed on the basis of Ikeno (2002) and Nakata (2003, 2006).

Procedure

In advance of the survey, the participants were informed that their responses would never be used for their course grades. The questionnaire survey was administered using regular class periods at the end of the first semester in July 2007 under the careful instruction of their homeroom teachers (i.e., their understanding of the questionnaire items). The participants

were asked to rate their three types of intrinsic motivation on a five-point *Likert* scale for each year from first year of learning English up to the present, and were instructed to write an account of their motivating and demotivating experiences of learning English. Respondents were asked to provide answers in Japanese, their first language.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Preliminary Analysis

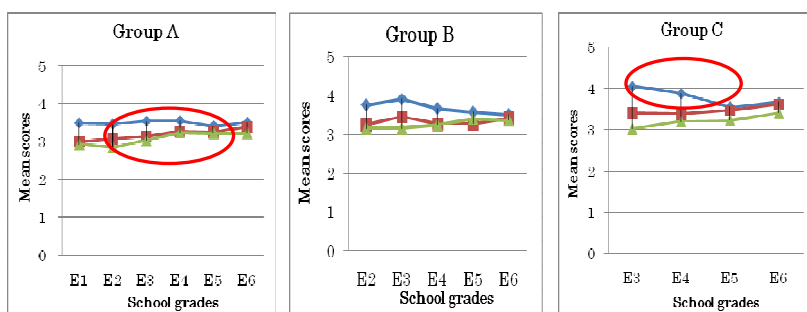
Owing to the small sample size, data relating to students who started learning English from their fourth, fifth and sixth grades was excluded from this phase of analysis, leaving 176 (see Table 1) as valid: the students who started learning English from their first grade (Group A); the students who started learning English from their second grade (Group B); the students who started learning English from their third grade (Group C). The mean (M), the standard deviation (S.D.) of each type of motivation (*enjoyment*, *willingness to continue learning* (WCL hereafter), *meaningfulness*), and Cronbach's alpha for each grade are shown in Table 2. The overall Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was 0.95 with individual sections ranging from 0.86 to 0.93. The three graphs in Figure 1 illustrate time-wise change of three types of intrinsic motivation (*enjoyment*, *WCL*, *meaningfulness*) for each group.

Three types of dimensions of intrinsic motivation for each group were submitted to repeated measures one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and were performed with *Bonferroni* corrections to compare the differences. As a consequence, the significant differences ($p < 0.001$) were found in all different types of intrinsic motivation for all groups and the three pairs were proved to be significantly different ($p < 0.05$) (see Table 3). Group C's *enjoyment* tends to decrease after two or three years of learning English, while Group A's *meaningfulness* increases gradually as their grade progresses (see Figure 1).

TABLE 2
Descriptive Statistics for 176 Participants

Year grade	Item number	Three dimensions	Cronbach's alpha	Group A (n= 81)		Group B (n =61)		Group C (n= 34)	
				M	S.D.	M	S.D.	M	S.D.
E1(first -year grade)	Q1	Enjoyment	0.90	3.49	1.24				
	Q2	WCL		3.00	1.13				
	Q3	Meaningfulness		2.94	1.15				
E2(second -year grade)	Q4	Enjoyment	0.89	3.47	1.23	3.72	1.23		
	Q5	WCL		3.07	1.1	3.23	1.2		
	Q6	Meaningfulness		2.85	1.15	3.03	1.29		
E3(third -year grade)	Q7	Enjoyment	0.92	3.54	1.18	3.74	1.28	4.06	1.1
	Q8	WCL		3.15	1.11	3.34	1.22	3.41	1.18
	Q9	Meaningfulness		3.04	1.16	3.13	1.31	3.03	0.94
E4(fourth -year grade)	Q10	Enjoyment	0.93	3.56	1.2	3.69	1.25	3.88	1.09
	Q11	WCL		3.27	1.08	3.36	1.25	3.38	1.16
	Q12	Meaningfulness		3.23	1.21	3.3	1.33	3.21	1.01
E5(fifth -year grade)	Q13	Enjoyment	0.92	3.42	1.24	3.57	1.3	3.56	1.16
	Q14	WCL		3.26	1.13	3.3	1.3	3.47	1.13
	Q15	Meaningfulness		3.22	1.14	3.36	1.34	3.24	1.05
E6(sixth -year grade)	Q16	Enjoyment	0.86	3.51	1.27	3.54	1.46	3.68	1.32
	Q17	WCL		3.4	1.25	3.46	1.41	3.62	1.26
	Q18	Meaningfulness		3.22	1.24	3.43	1.44	3.41	1.02

(E=elementary school, M = mean, S.D. = standard deviation)



(◆ Enjoyment; ■ WCL; ▲ Meaningfulness)

FIGURE 1

Time-wise Change of Three Types of Intrinsic Motivation for Each Group

TABLE 3
Summary of Repeated Measures One-way ANOVA and Post Hoc Bonferoni's Test

		Repeated measures one-way ANOVA	Post hoc (<i>Bonferoni's</i> test) results
Group A	<i>Enjoyment</i>	$F(1, 80) = 886.16^{***}$	
	<i>WCL</i>	$F(1, 80) = 925.83^{***}$	
	<i>Meaningfulness</i>	$F(1, 80) = 788.58^{***}$	E4>E2*, E5>E2*
Group B	<i>Enjoyment</i>	$F(1, 60) = 636.48^{***}$	
	<i>WCL</i>	$F(1, 60) = 562.83^{***}$	
	<i>Meaningfulness</i>	$F(1, 60) = 457.96^{***}$	
Group C	<i>Enjoyment</i>	$F(1, 33) = 460.69^{***}$	E3>E5*
	<i>WCL</i>	$F(1, 33) = 381.01^{***}$	
	<i>Meaningfulness</i>	$F(1, 33) = 475.57^{***}$	

***p<.001, *p<.05

TABLE 4
Correlation Matrix

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17																	
	Q2 1.64**																																
		Q3 1.56**	.75**																														
			Q4 1.84**	.53**	.50**																												
				Q5 1.57**	.77**	.72**	.74**																										
					Q6 1.51**	.65**	.80**	.66**	.87**																								
						Q7 1.75**	.51**	.46**	.80**	.65**	.60**																						
							Q8 1.44**	.63**	.58**	.61**	.79**	.73**	.76**																				
								Q9 1.49**	.60**	.72**	.57**	.74**	.83**	.67**	.78**																		
									Q10 1.68**	.49**	.42**	.72**	.61**	.55**	.86**	.72**	.67**																
										Q11 1.50**	.57**	.52**	.62**	.69**	.65**	.72**	.83**	.70**	.80**														
											Q12 1.53**	.52**	.63**	.61**	.69**	.73**	.69**	.74**	.83**	.77**	.84**												
												Q13 1.51**	.35**	.35**	.60**	.52**	.51**	.73**	.69**	.63**	.79**	.72**	.71**										
													Q14 1.35**	.47**	.31**	.45**	.51**	.50**	.63**	.74**	.62**	.67**	.79**	.69**	.81**								
														Q15 1.52**	.50**	.47**	.57**	.57**	.62**	.69**	.73**	.74**	.70**	.74**	.77**	.85**	.84**						
															Q16 1.45**	.31**	.31**	.44**	.37**	.44**	.60**	.54**	.53**	.67**	.61**	.61**	.83**	.72**	.77**				
																Q17 1.32**	.38**	.18	.39**	.35**	.35**	.51**	.55**	.48**	.58**	.63**	.53**	.74**	.81**	.73**	.81**		
																	Q18 1.46**	.42**	.31**	.41**	.43**	.42**	.56**	.53**	.56**	.62**	.64**	.65**	.76**	.77**	.82**	.82**	.81**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Bold-faced type: Pearson Product-moment Coefficient (*r*) is more than 0.8.

The result of *Correlation Analysis* revealed that the correlations between all questionnaire items (except the one between Questions 3 and 17) were proved to be statistically significant at the 0.01 level (see Table 4). Most notably, the strong correlations between these three elements ($r =$ more than 0.8, $p > 0.01$) were found at fifth-year and sixth-year grade (see Q13–Q18 in Table 4).

Given the research results and the literature review (Brophy, 2004; Nakata, 2006, forthcoming; Oldfather & Dahl, 1994; Ushioda, 2008), it is reasonable to consider that three types of motivation as a whole constitutes intrinsic motivation (*enjoyment, WCL, meaningfulness*) in the school context. It is probable – even likely – that all three types of motivation need to be brought into play in order to give learners sustained impetus in their efforts to meet curricular goals as well as to develop their intellectual curiosity about language learning.

Learner Group Profiles

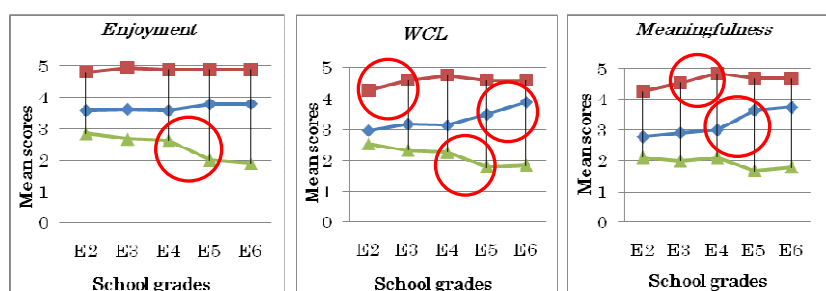
For the purpose of classifying the participants into clusters on the basis of similarities in their motivational transitions, cluster analysis was performed using three types of intrinsic motivation (*enjoyment, WCL, meaningfulness*) across grade level as attributes. Cluster analysis is an analytical tool for grouping individuals who are maximally similar to each other and different from members of other groups on the basis of the participants' pattern of scores or responses (Rosenberg, 1984). More specifically, I used *hierarchical clustering*³ which is considered appropriate to be used when data sets are smaller in number (e.g., focus group lists), employing Ward's clustering method with squared Euclidean distance. This statistical analysis was conducted using *SPSS 11.5J* (2003).

The procedure for participant group selection was as follows: (1) they were chosen from groups of more than fifty participants (this condition excludes

³ Hierarchical clustering creates a hierarchy of clusters represented in a tree structure called a *dendrogram* (Everitt & Dunn, 1991).

Group C from this analysis); and (2) they were chosen as a result of several attempts at cluster analysis of both of Groups A and B, on the basis of the number of participants in each cluster, and their distinctive and interpretable characterization in terms of the central concept – intrinsic motivation. In this, on the basis of a tree-diagram, the four-cluster solution (N = 16, 31, 7, 27), was considered the best fit for Group A, while the three-cluster solution (N = 23, 19, 19) was considered most appropriate for Group B.

In the light of these factors, it was considered reasonable to choose Group B (n = 61), whose starting year of learning English was second-year grade at elementary school, as participants in this phase of analysis. The different typologies of time-wise change for each factor (*enjoyment*, *WCL*, *meaningfulness*) are presented in Figure 2.



(◆ Cluster 1: 23 students; ■ Cluster 2: 19 students; ▲ Cluster 3: 19 students)

FIGURE 2

Time-wise Change of Three Types of Intrinsic Motivation for Group B

In order to examine whether the differences in different types of intrinsic motivation at different levels are statistically significant or not, the *Kruskal-Wallis* test⁴ was performed with *Bonferoni* corrections to compare the differences among the three groups. As a consequence, the significant differences ($p < 0.01$) were found in all different types of intrinsic motivation

⁴ Kruskal-Wallis test, the non-parametric alternative to one-way ANOVA, was used because some data of the questionnaire items were found not to be normally distributed.

at all different levels and all pairs (except the one of Clusters 1 and 3 (E2, *WCL*)) were proved to be statistically different. In addition, in order to look more closely at the dynamics of each dimension (*enjoyment*, *WCL*, *meaningfulness*), each group's features were investigated by the *Wilcoxon signed-rank test*⁵ and significant differences ($p < 0.05$) were found on Cluster 1's *WCL* (E5–E6) and *meaningfulness* (E4–E5), Cluster 2's *WCL* (E2–E3) and *meaningfulness* (E3–E4), and Cluster 3's *enjoyment* (E4–E5) and *WCL* (E4–E5) (see circles in Figure 2).

The profiles shown in these figures reveal that there is considerable variety among the clusters with reference to the three different aspects of intrinsic motivation. In overview, participants in Cluster 2 seemed to possess the most advanced form of intrinsic motivation in all its aspects, for they exhibited high *enjoyment*, high *WCL*, and high *meaningfulness* consistently throughout five years of learning English at elementary school. Unfortunately, participants in Cluster 3 represents the worst-case scenario in that their intrinsic motivation started to decline as they accumulated their English learning experience, echoing once again the existing literature (Coleman, Galaczi, & Astruc, 2007; Koizumi & Matsuo, 1993; Rogers, 1969) that the child's intrinsic motivation, in many cases, is pretty well dampened by the time he/she has spent a number of years in school. Most intriguing were the participants of Cluster 1. Embedded in this group are significant increases in *WCL* and *meaningfulness* at the fifth and sixth grades, as distinct from *enjoyment*, which increased less steeply, implying that the cognitive aspect of intrinsic motivation served to reinforce an enjoyment-driven intrinsic motivation and thereby substantially enhanced their overall intrinsic motivation. What is more striking was the fact that at the fifth and six grades, *meaningfulness* was enhanced first and then *WCL* followed, indicating a possibility that learners decide to make an effort to learn language continuously only after they find their own meaning in language learning.

⁵ Wilcoxon signed-rank test, the non-parametric alternative to the paired samples *t*-test, was used because some data of the questionnaire items were found not to be normally distributed.

Learner Profiles

Following the previous phase of analysis, to look beneath the surface of the quantitative data or, more precisely, to delve into previous English learning experience at elementary school deeply ingrained in each individual learner's mind, one extract for each clustering group, as the most representative sample, has been provided in this paper. The extracts were selected from the respondents' written comments in the open-ended section of the questionnaire, on the basis of the following two criteria: (1) they were chosen from those considered the most representative for each clustering group, and (2) they were chosen from those containing sufficient written comments in both quantity and quality. The sample selection procedure was as follows: (1) two graduate students and the present author were instructed to choose three extracts from each clustering group based on the aforementioned criteria, while looking at the graphs (Figure 2); (2) the ones chosen by at least two then became the possible candidates (Cluster 1: Questionnaire No. 11, 38; Cluster 2: Questionnaire No. 43, 76, 92; Cluster 3: Questionnaire No. 6, 90) and (3) the final decision was made by the present author.

In addition, for the purpose of grasping their English learning experience at elementary school more holistically and its effect on their subsequent English learning, their comments in the section for the first grade of junior high school are also provided as ancillary data.

Most of the extracts below (Learners A, B, and C) were translated by the present author. However, the translation of the underlined parts below (underlined by the present author) relating to *affect*, which were considered difficult for the present author alone to do, was made after discussion with two secondary school teachers; for the same word in Japanese is likely to have a different meaning in each context. For example, "tanoshii" in Japanese could be interpreted in many different ways such as *fun*, *enjoyable*, *interesting*, *meaningful*, and *valuable* in each context.

An Excerpt from the Clustering Group 1 (Learner A)

As is often the case, Learner A's first year of learning a foreign language was full of brightness and excitement, not knowing that there might be some hardships ahead of her. As she accumulated experiences of learning English, however, she began to show her emotional reaction to each activity more explicitly. While she found game activities enjoyable, she disliked memorizing vocabulary. In her third and fourth grades, she seems to have been bored with the same old routine of English lessons, and to have been desperately looking for challenging tasks. Fortunately, however, she experienced the joy of learning English and that piqued her curiosity about learning a foreign language in her fifth grade. As we see from the last part of her testimony below, her English learning experience at elementary school helped determine her to take an English qualification exam in the first grade of junior high school, and her success in the exam further helped her goal-directed and self-determined pursuit of learning English. Even more striking were the underlined words that provide some illuminating insight into the qualitative changes of intrinsic motivation (from *enjoyable* to *meaningful*). At present, she is aflame with curiosity about learning English at junior high school.

Second-year grade: Because it was my first time learning English, I just felt like "I want to learn English by all means." I tried to say all the English words and phrases I had learned in the lesson.

Third-year grade: I was beginning to feel bored with the same old routine of English lessons.

Fourth-year grade: I found learning English enjoyable only when engaging in game activities. Other than that, however, memorizing vocabulary was boring and I hated that. Just like in my second-year grade, repeating the same old routine of the English lesson was too much of a bother.

Fifth-year grade: I came to understand the reason why we learn English. This

became clearer to me especially when I was able to speak English. Therefore, I came to find learning English meaningful.

Sixth-year grade: There were ample opportunities to watch phonics videos in the English lesson. I was able to learn English enjoyably.

First-year grade in junior high school: I set my goal of learning English: "I will take a STEP test." Because I passed the fourth grade of the STEP test, I found English study stimulating and challenging, and came to feel that I wanted to learn English more and more. Surprisingly, having felt like "I want to pass the exam," I could naturally engage in a workbook day after day despite my previous unmotivated feeling about learning English. (translation and underline mine)

All things considered, it is plausible to assume that, thanks to her English learning experience in elementary school, she came to create a virtuous cycle in learning English. The qualitative changes of her intrinsic motivation, to a greater or a lesser extent, delineate a picture of her future as a foreign language learner.

An Excerpt from the Clustering Group 2 (Learner B)

Learners A and B share some similarities in their elementary school English learning experience. One example illustrating this is that Learner B was motivated to learn English at first and then became less motivated. Except for English learning in her third year grade of elementary school, her motivation to learn English was consistent throughout six years of learning English, as is shown by the underlined words. Another is that she favoured song activity over memorizing vocabulary.

As far as her learning style is concerned, however, there are enough grounds to assume that she is more bodily or kinesthetic-oriented than interpersonal-oriented (see Reid, 1995). She is rather reserved and thus reluctant to communicate with others or speak in public. At first sight, there may something paradoxical about her comment in the sections relating to the

fifth and sixth grade. However, my view is that there must be something behind the scene. For example, the quality of her English learning experiences of phonics, along with some changes of phonics activity as to *what* and *how*, might have been changed over the two years.

Second-year grade: I enjoyed expressing anything in English and singing English songs. However, I did not like concentrating on the study of English, remaining seated.

Third-year grade: It was a lot of fun that we together sang English songs expressively. My motivation to learn English, however, declined because it was difficult for me to communicate with different people.

Fourth-year grade: Learning English was fun, especially when we sang the song containing funny words and expressions. I hated memorizing vocabulary.

Fifth-year grade: It was an enjoyable activity when we went out of the classroom and practised expressing things in English. Phonics activity was boring because we did that so many times.

Sixth-year grade: I hated translating Japanese speech into English and presenting it in public. I got interested in learning English by using phonics.

First-year grade in junior high school: Having studied English with a new teacher and new colleagues, I found English lessons enlightening. My motivation of learning English has never decreased after entering junior high school. (translation and underline mine)

Now that she has become a junior high school student, she is enjoying the honeymoon period of learning English once again. At present, she has a great deal of curiosity about learning English. Viewed from another perspective, however, this may be a sign indicating that she has been bored with learning English at elementary school and therefore has been looking for the opportunity to learn English formally at junior high school. In essence, her English learning experience in elementary school was a mixed picture of sunny and dark skies.

An Excerpt from the Clustering Group 3 (Learner C)

Most of the time throughout six years of English learning experience from the second year of elementary school to the present, she has been unmotivated. This is evidenced by the relatively small volume of his comments in this section of the questionnaire, as is often the case with low achievers, and in fact many of the responses in this clustering group (Cluster 3) were identical to her. The truth of the matter, as she describes in his own lucid terms, was that she had been bored and unmotivated to learn English in elementary school. Throughout five years of learning English in elementary school, she has been left in the dark without much guidance from the teacher to help understand *what* or *why* she is learning and perhaps how she can tackle her problems and come to learn English better. Fortunately, however, given lessons in her native language Japanese, she seems to be relieved because he understands English lessons better.

Second-year grade: I just did exactly what the teacher instructed us to do.

Third-year grade: I just sang songs without understanding their meaning as we listened to them.

Fourth-year grade: I saw some English alphabets and wrote them.

Fifth-year grade: I did not understand what the teacher said because he/she spoke not only in Japanese but also in English.

Sixth-year grade: I did not understand English at all because the teacher spoke only English.

First-year grade in junior high school: I came to feel it easier to learn English, since the teacher is Japanese. The American teacher also talks to us in Japanese. I will do my best for the vocabulary quiz. (translation mine)

In all likelihood, she is rather teacher-dependent, waiting for the teacher's instruction (and perhaps, more importantly, the teacher's help).

A closer investigation of these three individual learners' English learning

experiences reveals three unavoidable issues. For one thing, upon closer scrutiny, it became obvious that there exists a wide variety of learning styles. Secondly, while it is clear that phonetics and songs are powerful tools for motivating learners, it is also clear that repeating the same old routine can be boring for them. One final point is that the ebb and flow of learners' intrinsic motivation is largely dependent on the quality of English learning experiences, specifically for those who are as yet in their developmental stage of intrinsic motivation.

The best-case scenario in this respect is Learner A who has succeeded in finding a meaning in learning English and in changing the quality of her intrinsic motivation in a positive light. On the other hand, the worst case was Learner C who failed to find a meaning in learning English and was thereby unmotivated for most of the time of learning English in elementary school, perhaps without enough support from teachers.

All too often in primary language classrooms, phonics and song activities are viewed as most effective. However, the findings suggest that these cannot necessarily be a panacea for everyone for all developmental stages. For example, Learner B's comment may well imply that we teachers should not attribute their demotivation to the type of activity alone in the name of phonics, but instead endeavour to think about how appropriately we should implement the activity or use tasks (e.g., writing or story-telling) to tap the cognitive aspect of their intrinsic motivation, taking the stage of learner development into consideration. This does not, in my view, deny the effect of recreational activities such as phonics or songs on child motivational development; but it is rather to imply that teachers must provide their pupils with motivational experiences so as to help them continue their language learning, leading to subsequent language learning experiences which are fruitful and meaningful to them (see Reiss, 2004).

Rogers (1969), while recognizing the fact that pupils intrinsic motivation is likely to be dampened after two or three years of learning at school, advocates that it is still potentially present in learners, and thus stresses the necessity of discovering what challenges are real for a young person and of

providing the opportunity for him/her to meet those challenges. Likewise, from a pedagogical point of view, Bronson (2000) argues, “positive and responsive feedback from others and the provision of tasks appropriate to their level of skill (so they can experience both challenge and success) appear to support primary school children’s belief in their own cognitive competence and control” (p. 140). In fact, it has been demonstrated by a longitudinal study (Wu, 2003, p. 502) that the intrinsic motivation of young foreign language learners can be aroused from the early stage of learning by creating a supportive learning environment and intervening effectively in the learning process. It was also found in the UK survey (Coleman, Galaczi, & Astruc, 2007) that declining motivation is a slightly less worrying phenomenon where the school environment supports language learning.

CONCLUSION

The general research goal of the present study was to investigate how pupils’ intrinsic motivation for learning English changes with age, as they progress from lower to higher grades in elementary schools. The basic premise underlying this article is that, given the school context, students need to be motivated not only affectively but also cognitively, for otherwise their intrinsic motivation cannot be sustained over five or six years of learning English at elementary school. It is also argued that three discrete aspects of *enjoyment*, *willingness to continue learning* and *meaningfulness* constitutes intrinsic motivation.

It is true to say that the study sheds some light on elementary school children’s language learning and the developmental process of intrinsic motivation and provides some evidence for this. Yet, it is premature to confirm, solely based on this research result (with the limited number of the participants), the developmental process of their intrinsic motivation. Future research should contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between the affective and cognitive aspects of intrinsic motivation by relying

on more than a questionnaire, as was the case in the present study, which employed a retrospective method in the light of previous English learning experience. There is a potential for a quantitative study employing either repeated cross-sectional design or simultaneous cross-sectional design to validate the findings of this present study further. A qualitative study employing interviews could be a promising avenue for research to spell out the linkage between the cognitive and affective aspects of intrinsic motivation in even greater detail.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study was supported in part by The Joint Graduate School (Ph.D. program), Hyogo University of Teacher Education, for a Joint Research Project (Project G).

THE AUTHOR

Yoshiyuki Nakata (Ph.D., Trinity College Dublin) is an Associate Professor of English language education and of the Joint Graduate School in Science of School Education at Hyogo University of Teacher Education, Hyogo, Japan. His research interests include language learning motivation and teacher/learner autonomy in the Japanese EFL context.
Email: nakata@hyogo-u.ac.jp

REFERENCES

- Abbas, T. (2002). A retrospective study of South Asian further education college students and their experiences of secondary schools. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 32(1), 73-89.
- Bronson, M. (2000). *Self-regulation in early childhood: Nature and nurture*. New

York: Guilford Press.

- Brophy, J. E. (2004). *Motivating students to learn* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Bruner, J. (1994). The “remembered” self. In U. Neisser & R. Fivush (Eds.), *The remembering self: Construction and accuracy in the self-narrative* (pp. 41-54). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Coleman, J. A., Galaczi, Á., & Astruc, L. (2007). Motivation of UK school pupils towards foreign languages: A large-scale survey at Key Stage 3. *Language Learning Journal*, 35(2), 245-280.
- de Vaus, D. (2001). *Research design in social research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum.
- Deci, E. L. (1992). The relation of interest to the motivation behavior. In K. A. Renninger, S. Hidi, & A. Krapp (Eds.), *The role of interest in learning and development* (pp. 43-70). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Teaching and researching motivation*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Featherman, D. L. (1980). Retrospective longitudinal research: Methodological considerations. *Journal of Economics and Business*, 32(2), 152-169.
- Goto, Y. B. (2004). What level of English proficiency do elementary school teachers need to attain to teach EFL? Case studies from Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38(2), 245-278.
- Hayashi, H. (2005). Identifying different motivational transitions of Japanese ESL learners using cluster analysis: Self-determination perspectives, *JACET Bulletin*, 41, 1-17.
- Honna, N., & Takeshita, Y. (2005). English language teaching in Japan: Policy plans and their implementations. *RELC Journal*, 36(3), 363-383.
- Ikeno, O. (2002). Motivating and demotivating factors in foreign language learning: A preliminary investigation. *Ehime University Journal of English Education Research*, 2, 1-19.
- Koizumi, R., & Mastuo, K. (1993). A longitudinal study of attitudes and motivation in learning English among Japanese seventh-grade students. *Japanese Psychological Research*, 35(1), 1-11.
- Nakata, Y. (2003). Japanese learners’ perceptions of English language study: A qualitative analysis of English learning experiences. *Studies in English Language Teaching*, 26, 33-56.
- Nakata, Y. (2006). *Motivation and experience in foreign language learning*. Oxford:

Peter Lang.

- Nakata, Y. (forthcoming). Towards a framework for self-regulated language learning. *TESL Canada Journal*, 27(2).
- Noels, K. A. (2001). New Orientations in language learning motivation: Towards a model of intrinsic, extrinsic, and integrative orientations and motivation. In Z. Dörnyei & R. Schmidt (Eds.), *Motivation and second language acquisition* (pp. 43-68). Hawaii: Second Language Teaching and Curriculum Center, University of Hawaii at Manoa.
- Noels, K. A. (2009). The internalization of language learning into the self and social identity. In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the self* (pp. 295-313). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Noels, K. A., Pelletier, L. G., Clément, R., & Vallerland, R. J. (2000). What are you learning a second language? Orientations and self-determination theory. *Language Learning*, 50(1), 57-85.
- Oldfather, P., & Dahl, K. (1994). Toward a social constructivist reconceptualization of intrinsic motivation for literacy learning. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 26, 139-158.
- Reid, J. (1995). *Learning styles in the ESL/EFL classroom*. New York: Heinle & Heinle.
- Reiss, S. (2004). Multifaceted nature of intrinsic motivation: The theory of 16 basic desires. *Review of General Psychology*, 8(3), 179-193.
- Rogers, C. R. (1969). *Freedom to learn*. Columbus: Merrill.
- Rosenberg, H. C. (1984). *Cluster analysis for researchers*. Belmont, CA: Lifetime Learning Publications.
- Ryan R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2002). Overview of self-determination theory: An organismic dialectical perspective. In E. L. Deci & Ryan, R. M (Eds.), *Handbook of self-determination research* (pp. 3-33). Rochester: University of Rochester Press.
- Ushioda, E. (2008). Motivation and good language learner. In C. Griffiths (Ed.), *Lessons from good language learner* (pp. 19-34). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- White, R. W. (1959). Motivation reconsidered: The theory of competence. *Psychological Review*, 66(5), 297-333.
- Wu, X. (2003). Intrinsic motivation and young learners: The impact of the classroom environment. *System*, 31, 501-517.

APPENDIX

English Language Learning Questionnaire

Please fill out this questionnaire. All your answers will be kept strictly confidential and will not have any effect on your grade. Please mark ○ in the parenthesis.

1. Your grade () Your class ()
Gender Male () Female ()
2. Have you studied English before entering junior high school?
3. If you answered 'yes' on Item 2, how long have you been studying English?
() less than two months
() more than 2 months ~ less than 6 months
() more than 6 months ~ less than 1 year
() more than 1 year ~ less than 3 years
() more than 3 years ~ less than 5 years
() more than 5 years
4. If you answered 'yes' on Item 2 [Have you studied English before entering junior high school?] and have learnt English at elementary school, please answer the following multiple-choice questionnaire items. For others, please move on to question 19 and answer questions 19-21.

Please circle the numbers corresponding to your answers.

5. Strongly agree 4. Agree 3. Neither agree nor disagree 2. Disagree 1. Strongly disagree

When I was a first grader at elementary school,

1. Learning English was enjoyable. 5 4 3 2 1

Intrinsic Motivation in the EFL School Context

2. I was willing to learn English continuously.	5	4	3	2	1
3. Learning English was meaningful to me.	5	4	3	2	1
When I was a second grader at elementary school,					
4. Learning English was enjoyable.	5	4	3	2	1
5. I was willing to learn English continuously.	5	4	3	2	1
6. Learning English was meaningful to me.	5	4	3	2	1
When I was a third grader at elementary school,					
7. Learning English was enjoyable.	5	4	3	2	1
8. I was willing to learn English continuously.	5	4	3	2	1
9. Learning English was meaningful to me.	5	4	3	2	1
When I was a fourth grader at elementary school,					
10. Learning English was enjoyable.	5	4	3	2	1
11. I was willing to learn English continuously.	5	4	3	2	1
12. Learning English was meaningful to me.	5	4	3	2	1
When I was a fifth grader at elementary school,					
13. Learning English was enjoyable.	5	4	3	2	1
14. I was willing to learn English continuously.	5	4	3	2	1
15. Learning English was meaningful to me.	5	4	3	2	1
When I was a sixth grader at elementary school,					
16. Learning English was enjoyable.	5	4	3	2	1
17. I was willing to learn English continuously.	5	4	3	2	1
18. Learning English was meaningful to me.	5	4	3	2	1
When I was a first grader at junior high school,					
19. Learning English was enjoyable.	5	4	3	2	1
20. I was willing to learn English continuously.	5	4	3	2	1
21. Learning English was meaningful to me.	5	4	3	2	1

5. If you circled 'yes' on Item 2, please answer the following questions. If you circled 'no' on this question, please fill in the last section on junior high school.

When you look back on your English learning experiences, under what circumstances did your motivation to study English increase and under what circumstances did you lose motivation? Use an episode in providing your answer.

When I was studying English in my first grade at elementary school,

When I was studying English in my second grade at elementary school,

When I was studying English in my third grade at elementary school,

When I was studying English in my fourth grade at elementary school,

When I was studying English in my fifth grade at elementary school,

When I was studying English in my sixth grade at elementary school,

Since I have been studying English after entering junior high school,

I thank you for your time and courtesy in responding to the questionnaire.