

# Are Our Students Unmotivated?:

Assessing Initial Student Attitudes in the EFL Classroom.

J.J. Duggan

The cat would eat fish,  
and would not wet her feet.

John Heywood  
Proverbs [1546], pt.I, ch.11

## Introduction

In the United States there exists an assumption that Japanese are better students than Americans. This stereotype originates with the highly motivated Japanese students at American colleges and universities.<sup>1)</sup> In Japan itself, the stereotype among educators and non-educators alike of those Japanese students engaged in the quest for knowledge at institutions of higher learning in Japan appears to evoke images of lethargy and indifference.

Examples of published materials meant for the general reading population refer to Japanese college students as “look(ing) forward to an easygoing university like” (Fields 1983:228), and once in university, “giving themselves over to...unproductive indolence and revelry” (Bohnaker 1990:199). Their college days in Japan are referred to as “the time to socialize and have some fun” (Fields), and as “a long breather between the pressure-cooker atmosphere of the school system and the rat race of office

life after graduation” (Reischauer 1988:197).

Published research and materials intended for those involved in the field of English education also abound with similar such negative references.<sup>2)</sup> According to a survey by literature professor Kenji Sugiyama in Toyo University Report No.15, almost 60% of college students study less than one hour a day. Sugiyama said that Japanese colleges have turned into “playgrounds.” In a study, Berwick and Ross (1989:193) inform us that “most university language teachers in Japan lament the apparent lack of motivation and positive attitudes toward learning their students show shortly after matriculation to university.” They further state that upon entrance, “Japanese university students are left with a motivational vacuum that they are unable to fill,” or perhaps more graphically, that entrants to Japanese universities make up a “motivational wasteland” (p.207). Wadden (1990:30), an assistant professor at a Japanese university, expresses concisely the opinion of many of his fellow English instructors in his article when he states that Japanese university students “are generally unmotivated and apathetic.” Naruse (1989:5~6) tells us that Japanese college students “lack motivation to such an appalling extent,” and put forth only a “half-hearted commitment toward study.” Simply put, “(Japanese) colleges are full of pleasure-seekers who have little interest in cognitive training and who regard class attendance as a necessary evil to maintain the privileged status of student.” Even former Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone has referred to Japanese universities as so-called “leisure lands.”

At this point, we can safely assume that a perception of the Japanese college student as being unmotivated does exist (and this image doesn't exactly portray the Japanese institutions of higher education as beehives of scholastic achievement either). Though as English language instructors we can at least be grateful that this negative perception is not limited only to the study of the English language, this perception does seem to especially focus on English language study, and this should concern us.

Usually perceptions have at least some basis in fact. Is this image of

### Are Our Students Unmotivated?:

the Japanese student as unmotivated, especially with respect to the study of English, well-founded? If so, what attitudes influence the development of this, and when? And if not, what factors would give rise to such an image? In either case, what attitudes and motivations do they really have towards the English language and the study of the language, and how does this concern us?

In this paper I propose to assess and analyze Japanese college students' attitudes immediately upon matriculation towards the English language and the study of the language. Through this it is believed that the posed questions can be addressed if not answered, and at the very least the reader can get gain a better understanding of students' attitudes and motivations towards the English language.

### **Orientation To The Survey (Attitude & Motivation)**

Prior to addressing the survey approach and methodology, for the benefit of the reader to better understand the survey, a clear look at what the available literature and research has to say concerning the terms "attitude" and "motivation" is in order.

Attitude and motivations are concerns limited not only to Japan. Student attitude and motivation in the EFL classroom is an issue that has been covered by numerous researchers and educators ever since the late 1950s, when Gardner and Lambert carried out their groundbreaking work on the role of attitude and motivation in L2 learning. Since this study, most research in the field of affective characteristics has concentrated on these two concepts, leading to countless studies and writings. From such studies, no one contests the argument that attitudes and motivation are important and powerful factors in successful L2 learning (See Ellis 1986: 116 ~ 119 and Brown 1987: 114 ~ 117), but as Brown (1987:114) points out, such claims gloss over a detailed understanding of exactly what motivation is and what the subcomponents of motivation are. Indeed, especially in the early studies,

“Attitudes and motivation have usually been lumped together into a cluster of factors which were held jointly responsible for the relative success or failure in L2 learning” (van Els et. al. 1984:117). If you, the reader, were asked to differentiate between “motivation” and “attitude” and the relationship of one to the other, could you give a clear explanation? After all, aren’t these two of the most important factors in L2 learning?

Ellis (1986) states, “It is not always clear in SLA research what the distinction is between ‘attitudes’ and ‘motivation’” (p.116). What is clear, he says upon comparing Schumann’s (1978), Gardner and Lambert’s (1972), Gardner’s (1979) and Brown’s (1981) definitions of ‘attitude’ and ‘motivation,’ is that “there is no general agreement about what precisely ‘motivation’ or ‘attitudes’ consist of, nor of the relationship between the two”(p.117). Because of such ambiguity, it is important at this point to attempt a workable distinction and relationship between the concepts of attitude and motivation as these two concepts are fundamental to the survey and this paper.

Bauman et. al. (1985:266) warn against the danger in “pin(ning) definitions on the terms ‘attitude’ and ‘motivation,’” and suggest using “the simplest and broadest definitions available.” They recommend Fishbein and Ajzen (1975:6) for a definition of attitude as accommodating most theorists: “a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object”; and Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982:47) for a general definition of motivation, specifically as the term applies to language learning: “the incentive, the need, or the desire that the learner feels to learn the second language.” By giving such definitions Bauman et. al. hope that even laypersons would be clearly able to understand the terms “attitude” and “motivation.”

This does help in our understanding of each of these terms, but not of the all-important relationship between them. For this we need to look to van Els et al. (1984), who tell us that, “It is now argued that attitudes are directly related to motivation, which in turn is directly related to L2 learning. In other words, attitudes should be viewed as motivational supports and

### Are Our Students Unmotivated?:

not as factors which have a direct effect on L2 learning" (p.117). Brown (1987) illustrates this: "Second language learners benefit from positive attitudes and that negative attitudes may lead to decreased motivation and in all likelihood, because of decreased input and interaction, to unsuccessful attainment of proficiency" (p.126). Thus, the development of positive attitudes is of prime importance as a motivational factor, though it is not the only one. Van Els et.al. (1984) explain, "Motivation to learn a language is not only determined by attitudes, but also by other 'motivational props' such as the desire to please teachers and parents, promise of a reward, or experience of success, etc. Also, the relation of attitude to motivation is dependent on the type of motivation. An integrative motivation, for example, presupposes a positive attitude of the learner towards target language speakers and their culture, but a learner who is instrumentally motivated does not necessarily have a positive attitude towards the target language group. Other attitudes which are relevant to L2 learning, such as attitudes towards the language, the teacher and the course, are probably related to both types of motivation" (p.117 ~ 118).

It is some of these "other" attitudes that I wish to assess in my survey, for as van Els et. al.(1984) relate, "Most attitude research has tended to concentrate on attitudes towards target language and target language speakers. Much less research has been done on attitudes towards L2 learning, the L2 teacher and the L2 course, which are also important factors in L2 learning" (p.121).

### Approach

752 Japanese first-year students from five different colleges in and in close proximity to the Tokyo area were surveyed over the span of five academic years (April, 1987; April, 1988; April, 1989; April, 1990 and April, 1991):

A) 187 first-year students from an "upper-rank"<sup>3)</sup> four-year university

with a strong foreign language studies program. These students were all English language majors, and were surveyed in their first English language “conversation” classes of the school year. Being English language majors, the one-year freshman “conversation” course was compulsory. There were a number of “returnees”<sup>4)</sup> in the classes. Approximate male to female ratio: 3 to 7. Average class size: about 50 students.

- B) 149 first-year students of an “upper-middle” rank women’s junior (two-year) college. These students were also surveyed in their first English language “conversation” classes of the school year. For these students English language (conversation) was also a one-year compulsory course. but their majors were in American and Western European studies. There were a few “returnees” among the students. Classes 100% female. Average class size: about 20 ~ 25 students.
- C) 152 first-year students in a “middle-rank” four-year university. These students were economics and business management majors, and for them the English language (“conversation”) course was a one-year compulsory class. No “returnee” students, but a few “repeaters,”<sup>5)</sup> Male to female ratio in this group: about 20 to 1. Average class size: about 60 ~ 65 students.
- D) 118 first-year students in a “middle-rank” women’s junior (two-year) college. These students were all secretarial studies majors, and the English “conversation” course was “semi-elective.” This means that the students in the secretarial studies major were required to select courses out of a limited choice, one of which was “First-year English conversation,” to meet credit requirements for graduation. Classes 100% female. Average class size: about 30 students.
- E) 146 “first-year” students in a two-year nursing college program. Completion of the two-year program would lead to the receipt of a R.N. (Registered Nursing) license. As a prerequisite to entering this program was L.P.N. (Licensed Practical Nurse) status, in itself at least a one-

### Are Our Students Unmotivated?:

year program of post-secondary study, and because with this license all the students have had at least some work experience, ranging from a few months to 15 years, the students in this course cannot really be considered "first-year" in the normal sense. But, as the majority of students has had limited or no recent formal English training,<sup>6)</sup> for the purposes of this study, we can consider them "first-year." The English ("conversation") class was a one-year compulsory course. The ages of the students varied from 20 to 35 years old, with the average being about 22~24. Male to female ratio: about 30 to 1. Class size varied from about 45 to 60.

The survey was held in the very first class of the school year. The reasons for this were two:

- 1) To collect data on the students' initial attitudes and motivations as concerns the English language and its study before these could be influenced by such factors as the teacher, lessons, classroom and school ambience, classmates, etc.
- 2) To provide the teacher with material on the students' feelings towards the English language, in order to determine students' purposes and priorities of study, and so lay out a course of study that would most efficiently benefit the students and the teacher during the span of the school year.<sup>7)</sup>

In an effort to "standardize" or reduce the number of variables affecting the data, the survey included the following common denominators:

- 1) only college (post-secondary) first-year students
- 2) all students of Japanese nationality
- 3) number of students surveyed at each location 100 or more
- 4) Japanese institutions surveyed located in and in close proximity to the

Tokyo area.

- 5) surveyed in English “conversation” courses
- 6) surveyed within the years 1987 ~ 1991
- 7) survey administered and collected by only one agent (the author)

The variables especially focused on (as affecting attitude & motivation) were:

- 1) the perceived “ranking” of the institution entered
- 2) the relationship of the student’s major to English
- 3) was the English course surveyed a requirement or elective

Other variables that existed were:

- 1) differences in age: Excepting school E, slight differences in age (though the great majority of students fell within the 18 ~ 19-year-old age group) did exist, due in part to the “ronin” factor: students studying (much of it English language) for an unfixed number of years in order to pass entrance tests to the college of their choice. This post-secondary/pre-college study must also be considered for its effect on these students’ attitudes towards the English language.
- 2) “returnee” students: Were in some schools/classes as noted. Would be expected to have a positive attitude towards the English language.<sup>8)</sup>
- 3) “repeaters”: Were in some schools/classes as noted. Would be expected to have a negative attitude towards the English language.
- 4) differences in class size: Would be expected to affect the performance of the class as the school year progresses, and so the attitude of students in the class towards the English language. But at this point in time (the first class of the year) should have a minimal effect on student attitudes toward the English language, this minimal effect being changing student expectations upon seeing the size of the class.



### Are Our Students Unmotivated?:

- 5) male to female class ratio: Anecdotal evidence seems to indicate that females "perform" better in English language studies on the whole. This has held true for those classes in which this author taught, whether the grades were based on objective means such as tests, or subjective means such as evaluation of in-class performance. This would make an interesting study, but for our purposes here, incidental. This point is similar to the class size variable in that it might affect attitudes toward the English language as the school year progresses, yet should have little effect on initial attitudes as both male and female, having taken the same entrance tests for a said college, should fall within the same general range of English language skills for students accepted by that college. Where this variable might have an effect on attitudes is when the social factors involved with being male or female come into play. This situation will be touched upon in the Evaluation & Discussion section.
- 6) other variables: Other variables most certainly exist. And as it is difficult to control all such possible variables, including those listed immediately above, the author recognizes that, though an attempt has been made to minimize such, some margin of error is to be expected in the data.

### Procedure

The survey was carried out by first passing out questionnaires to the students involved, and on which the students would record their answers (opinions). And as it was realized that this survey might be affected by a student's non-interest (as well as hesitation) in the class and this survey, the very subject that is being explored in this paper, especial steps were taken to minimize any reluctance due to such problem/factors.

The directions and questions were presented in both oral and written form. Though the written handout was only in English, the directions for the survey was carried out in Japanese as well as English, where deemed

necessary, to minimize if not eliminate any possibility of misunderstandings that could affect the data.

The answers were simple multiple choice, to be circled on a survey sheet by the student, with a selection and space for a student's own answer to be written if none of the given answers sufficed for the student. The results were guaranteed to the students to be anonymous, with no names being necessary on the questionnaire. This was done to minimize *approval motive variance*. "Respondents to attitude questionnaires tend to give answers which they view as acceptable in the eyes of others" (van Els et.al., 1984:118). In this case the questioner, myself, is also the instructor of the course in which the respondees are enrolled students. As such, the possibility exists that a student would record or not record an answer that he/she felt would influence his/her grade.

Only five questions were posed to the students. They and their choice of answers are as presented in the following complete sample of the questionnaire:

Please fill out the following questionnaire concerning your feelings about English:

- \*Do not write your name.
- \*Give your true feelings.
- \*Circle a,b,c, or fill in d with your own answer.
- \*Numbers 2 & 3 may have more than one answer.

- 1) I want to be able to speak in English well.
  - a) Yes
  - b) Unsure/maybe
  - c) No
  - d)

### Are Our Students Unmotivated?:

- 2) I want to study...
  - a) grammar
  - b) conversation
  - c) listening
  - d)
- 3) In class, I want to ...
  - a) play games
  - b) listen to the teacher lecture
  - c) work in a textbook
  - d)
- 4) English is...
  - a) easy
  - b) so-so
  - c) difficult
  - d)
- 5) I...English.
  - a) like
  - b) neither like nor dislike
  - c) dislike/hate
  - d)

### Survey Data

Numerical data for each question is expressed both as an absolute number of responses given (according to the type of response or answer {Ans. a, b, c or d} and respective schools {Sch. A, B, C, D & E}), and as a corresponding percentage (in parentheses) of the total number of respondents in each respective school. Percentages have been rounded off to the nearest

## Are Our Students Unmotivated?:

tenth.

Diagrams graph the aforementioned percentage of each type of answer used within the three respective schools. The horizontal bar graphs of diagram numbers 1, 4 & 5 may be viewed as displaying the data as a percentage of the total number of responses given (maximum/total 100%), for each respondent was limited to one answer. The vertical bar graphs of diagram numbers 2 & 3 display the data as a percentage of total number of respondents from each school, as questions 2 & 3 allowed multiple answers.

The Key to the Diagrams is as follows:



Question #1 (I want to be able to speak in English well.)

	Sch.A	Sch.B	Sch.C	Sch.D	Sch.E
a.(Yes)	180(96.3%)	142(95.3%)	128(84.2%)	77(65.3%)	103(70.5%)
a.(Unsure)	3( 1.6%)	5( 3.4%)	14( 9.2%)	20(16.9%)	19(13.0%)
a.(No)	4( 2.1%)	2( 1.3%)	10( 6.6%)	21(17.8%)	22(15.1%)
a.(Other)	0( 0.0%)	0( 0.0%)	0( 0.0%)	0( 0.0%)	2( 1.4%)

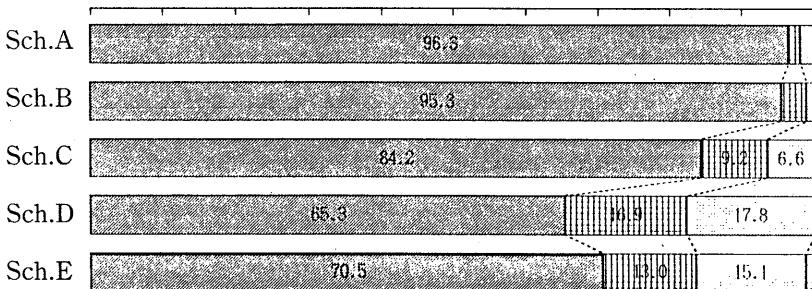


Diagram #1

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Question #2 (I want to study...)

	Sch.A	Sch.B	Sch.C	Sch.D	Sch.E
a.(grammar)	49(26.2%)	26(17.4%)	24(15.8%)	10( 8.5%)	35(24.0%)
b.(conversation)	175(93.6%)	142(95.3%)	106(69.7%)	114(96.6%)	132(90.4%)
c.(listening)	151(80.7%)	114(76.5%)	106(69.7%)	74(62.7%)	110(75.3%)
d.(other)	20(10.7%)	0( 0.0%)	3( 2.0%)	2( 1.7%)	4( 2.7%)

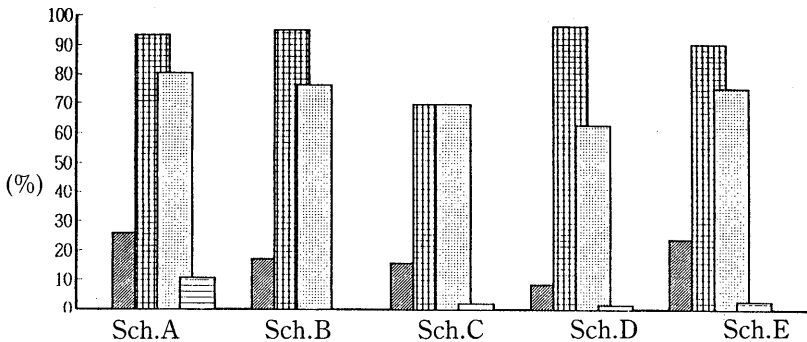


Diagram #2

Question #3 (In class, I want ...)

	Sch.A	Sch.B	Sch.C	Sch.D	Sch.E
a.(games)	137(73.3%)	104(69.8%)	92(60.5%)	100(84.7%)	99(67.8%)
b.(lecture)	94(50.3%)	106(71.1%)	79(52.0%)	55(46.6%)	90(61.6%)
c.(textbook)	45(24.1%)	17(11.4%)	11( 7.2%)	19(16.1%)	40(27.4%)
d.(other)	23(12.3%)	33(22.1%)	18(11.8%)	11( 8.5%)	5( 3.4%)

# Are Our Students Unmotivated?:

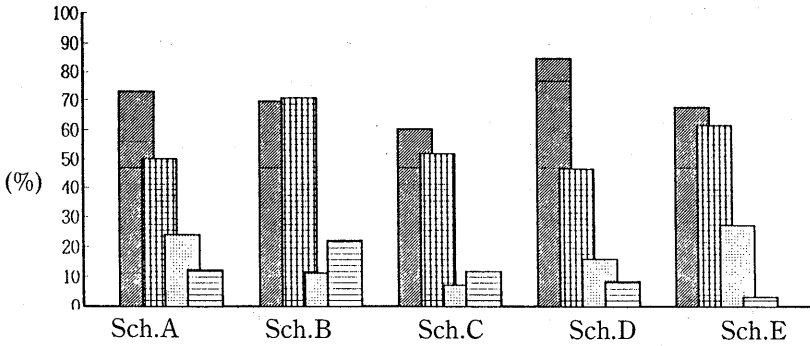


Diagram #3

## Question #4 (English is...)

	Sch.A	Sch.B	Sch.C	Sch.D	Sch.E
a.(easy)	3( 1.6%)	1( 0.7%)	3( 2.0%)	1( 0.8%)	0( 0.0%)
b.(so-so)	65(34.8%)	64(42.9%)	40(26.3%)	18(15.3%)	28(19.2%)
c.(difficult)	109(58.3%)	84(56.4%)	109(71.7%)	97(82.2%)	117(80.1%)
d.(other)	10( 5.3%)	0( 0.0%)	0( 0.0%)	2( 1.7%)	1( 0.7%)

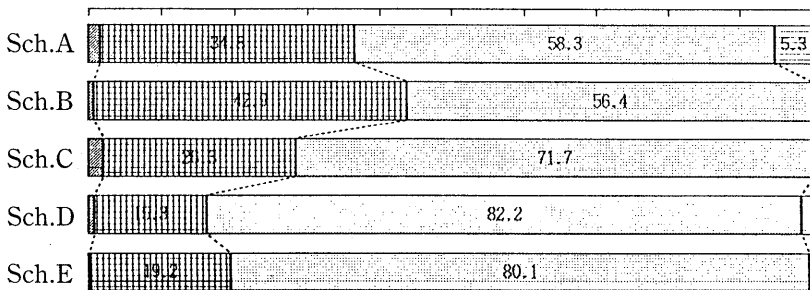


Diagram #4

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Question #5 (I ...English.)

	Sch.A	Sch.B	Sch.C	Sch.D	Sch.E
a.(like)	161(86.1%)	129(86.6%)	71(46.7%)	51(43.2%)	49(33.6%)
b.(neither)	22(12.2%)	15(10.1%)	37(24.3%)	56(47.5%)	52(35.6%)
c.(dislike)	1( 0.5%)	5( 3.3%)	44(29.0%)	9( 7.6%)	43(29.4%)
d.(other)	3( 1.6%)	0( 0.0%)	0( 0.0%)	2( 1.7%)	2( 1.4%)

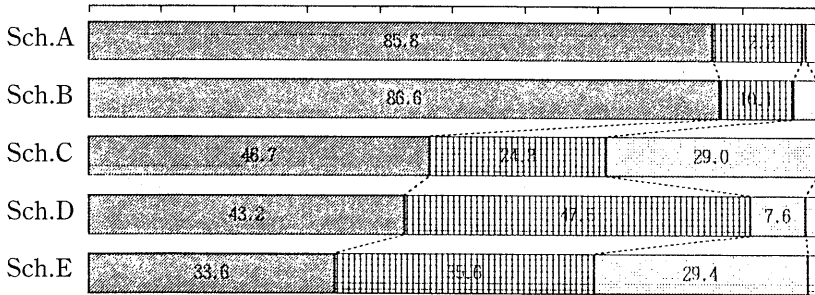


Diagram #5

## Evaluation & Discussion

The results from question #1, and especially as graphically portrayed in diagram #1, show that the overwhelming majority of students at all the schools surveyed want to be able to speak English well. This is not surprising in light of the image students seem to have of English, as the language of the world and of the modern and up-to-date “international person” as presented by the media in Japan, and reinforced by all levels of society, one such level being its prevalent use in Japanese college entrance examinations. To a student this only reinforces its importance. Another level meaningful to students is English ability being a “plus” in relation to obtaining a good job or future promotions.<sup>9)</sup> Note the enormous popularity in Japan of such English language communicative skills tests as STEP and TOEIC among others.<sup>10)</sup> Even from a less serious angle, spoken English is shown to be popular. “Some (Japanese) even consider studying spoken English as an ‘in’ pastime or as a status symbol” (Yukawa 1989:24). And as Igawa points out, although they are already burdened with six years of struggle, “Throughout their years of English study, students most certainly maintain a curiosity about the language, as shown by their preference for English movies, music and t-shirts” (As reported by Bruell 1990:9).

Assessing the schools individually, it’s not surprising to note that school A had the largest percentage of students wishing to be able to speak English well. After all, this was the only group surveyed of which the respondents were English language majors, so they already had some reason for recognizing the importance of English, whether for their future jobs, because of a personal affinity, or some other reason.

As for school B, the relationship of the English language as an integral part of their majors (American and European studies) probably plays no small part in the great majority of them answering that they would like to be able to speak the language well. The impression was also received that these students (all female) saw English as an “in” thing.

For school C, while the actual percentage of students wanting to be able



### Are Our Students Unmotivated?:

to speak English is slightly lower than schools A and B, probably as economics and business management majors, they recognize the importance of English in these fields, and in their future employment (dreams?) in the world business scene. Also, as mostly males, they might see themselves as the breadwinners in the traditional Japanese family, and so must "gambaru."

In schools D & E, though a large number of the students don't really seem to care if they are able to speak English well, the most common answer was yes, that they do want to be able to. It seems plausible that the reason for such a large number of negative answers at both schools was because of the limited importance to their jobs or future. Many of those in the secretarial major see it as unneeded in the course of their future work, and look forward more to marriage than work.<sup>11)</sup> As for the nursing students, as they already have had experience being gainfully employed in their chosen field, and are only studying now to further themselves in this same field, they have had firsthand experience in that English is never or very rarely needed in their day-to-day work.

In the responses to question #2, "I want to study...." all the school gave proportionally similar answers. It is easy to see from diagram #2 that the large majority in each school chose conversation and listening as their two top choices. This comes as no great surprise, you might say, as the survey was taken in an English "conversation" class and this is what they were expecting. This is doubtlessly true. But looking at their responses from the opposite angle, the angle of what responses they did *not* choose, can give us more insight into the matter.

Granted, the kinds of choices were limited, and probably the students would have found other kinds of study to their liking had they been given the choice. To write in an answer for "d" (other) is a poor alternative, in that most students probably feel it safer and/or easier to pick from the choices offered. Most of the responses that were written in for answer "d," came from school A, as we would expect, again for they major in English,

and so probably have larger expectations of what they would like to accomplish, and very possibly already have a background in other avenues of English study apart from the standard junior high school and high school studies, whether it be at a language school, International/American school in Japan, overseas study, or self-study. They have had more exposure to various types of teaching, classes, and techniques. In total, from all five schools, eleven students specifically wanted to study pronunciation. Other answers were “everyday English,” speech communication, slang, idioms, communication, vocabulary, reading, composition, and “everything.”

Response “a” (grammar) appears to be the big loser. About 80% of the students specifically did not select it (remember, they could select as many of the choices as they wanted.) But why would most of the students at such dissimilar schools have such an aversion to studying grammar? A look at the available literature suggests that the cause lies with the attitudes students develop from their high school experiences—attitudes of dislike (as will be covered in the evaluation of responses to question #5), disappointment/disillusionment and apathy:

“While a great amount of English has been crammed into heads throughout the high school years, the perceivable results are depressing to many students. First, communication skills, not an object of high school study, are weak. Second, cramming of vocabulary and grammar rules in the absence of meaningful context or in teaching situations where available context is ignored does not produce long-term knowledge. Much painfully acquired information is quickly forgotten, leaving the students wondering exactly what they have learned, or how much English they know. And, of course, they are just plain tired of intense study” (Dissosway 1989:14).

“The intensity of motivation to ‘learn English’ hits a peak in the last year of high school. Students are obliged to compete fiercely for a limit

### Are Our Students Unmotivated?:

ed number of openings at universities. At the same time, the content focus of the English examination is on grammar and translation, that is, relatively narrow, easily testable aspects of English proficiency. Motivation to learn English is thus channeled into the sort of proficiency with the least communicative value. Once the university examinations are over, there is very little to sustain this kind of motivation, so the student appears in freshmen classrooms as a kind of timid, exam-worn survivor with no apparent academic purpose at university" (Berwick and Ross 1989:206).

The above examples portray what English language educators believe at present, that intense, specialized (grammar, translation, vocabulary) English language studies for the specific purpose of passing college entrance exams is one of the major culprits that leads to negative attitudes towards subsequent English language study in Japan.

An interesting point that supports this belief is that the development of such negative attitudes seems to appear in high school and not junior high, where also English is studied for three years. Igawa (as reported by Bruell 1990) documents the more positive attitudes of junior high students, when compared with senior high students, towards English.<sup>12)</sup> Dissosway (1989) attributes this to the fact that, "While entrance exams served to motivate English study in high school, they produced ambivalent feelings toward English in general. This intense period of study has eroded some of the positive feelings toward English exhibited by younger students" (p.14).

Indeed, as was pointed out in the evaluation and discussion of question #1, there is a certain innate novelty about English among Japanese, including if not especially, of student age. It is unfortunate that this chance to develop an affinity for the English language, that junior high students do show, is wasted, and instead negative attitudes are developed, supposedly in the name of education.

In question #3, we see, though having the choice, the large majority of students specifically chose not to work in a textbook. Similar to the evalu-

ation of the results of question #2, textbooks were, in the minds of the students, equated with grammar, as most textbooks used in Japanese junior high and high schools are grammar-syllabus based (to meet the needs of college entrance examinations).

As to what they would actually like to do in class, out of the given choices, about half or more of the students from all the schools chose playing games and listening to the teacher lecture. Why? Well, perhaps it is because both are comparatively non-threatening activities. Games are usually fun and interesting, at least more so than other class activities, such as using the textbook (answer "c"), and in the minds of students are usually non-grade related, especially when the instructor is a native speaker.<sup>13)</sup> Lectures are also non-threatening in that they are a passive activity on the part of the students. (Instructors usually do not require active responses from students.)<sup>14)</sup>

Such responses to question #3 would seem to indicate that students are lazy, if not apathetic. A few reasons for such apathy was pointed out earlier—that students may be exam-worn (just plain tired of intense study) or have no apparent academic purpose at university. This last point is one voiced by many:

"Many students did not really know why they were attending university. They only knew that with a graduation certificate they would stand a good chance in landing a nice job with a famous company, be taken care of for the next 35 years and retire a 'bucho'" (Wasa 1991).

"Grade point averages are not important to Japanese employers: it's the status of the school itself that counts" (Wadden 1990:30).

"The four years in the (Japanese) university are, traditionally, not very rigorous, and acceptance almost assures graduation" (Sharp 1990:207).

### Are Our Students Unmotivated?:

“If admitted into an institution, a Japanese student assumes that he or she will be academically successful” (Lenn 1990:216).

Other reasons given for students’ “laziness” or apathy towards their studies might be because they are too busy with club activities, new friends, and/or part-time jobs to put much effort towards study (Dissosway 1989).

Other answers given to question #3 included video (4 students), discussion (3), reading & discussion, speech & discussion, listening & dictation, drama, conversation, pronunciation exercises, answering questions, watching American movies, situations & roleplay.

In the results to question #4, we can see from the data and diagram #4 that only a minute number of students considered English to be easy. Regardless of school or major, a number of students considered it so-so, but the majority considered it difficult. Did they think that if they responded that it was easy, this instructor would make class more difficult? Possibly. But after having studied and crammed a number of years, including perhaps in a yobiko and juku, all to pass the very difficult entrance examinations (which send many students, upon failure, to or back to the yobikos and jukus), anyone in a similar situation would develop the impression that English was difficult too.

Due to the small number of “a” responses, even a number of returnees that took part in this survey at school A considered English difficult. One problem could be that students see perfection as the goal,<sup>15)</sup> and from that viewpoint it is easy to see that achieving perfection in English would be difficult. The small number of miscellaneous answers given by school A respondents were but an emphasized choice such as “very difficult”, or an in-between choice such as “so-so to difficult”. Inclusion of these into answers a, b, or c would not have significantly changed the results.

It’s interesting to note that the fiscal 1990 White Paper on Education showed that 43% of college students admitted they understood only half of what they were being taught.<sup>16)</sup>

In question #5 we see the first large deviation in answers among the five schools. In schools A and B, the great majority of the students liked English. Of course they had to have some previous interest, as noted earlier, in order to have chosen the majors they did. But the majority of students in schools C, D and E disliked English, or didn't care about it one way or the other. It's interesting to note, referring back to the data in diagram #1 that most of the students in these same schools wanted to be able to speak English well.

Dislike or hate can also be a product of having studied for six years or more, but not being able to get into the college of choice. This is the impression that this author received especially from those students in school C. Perhaps they felt that English (esp. grammar) was to blame because this made up a major part of the entrance exams of which they failed. They studied for six or more years, but in the end English served no use. "Why should we now have to study it in college?"

As Berwick and Ross (1989) point out, "The entrance examination system forces applicants to sit for as many examinations as they can afford with the hope of gaining entrance to the most prestigious school on their list. Unfortunately, because most students do not matriculate to their first choice, they are typically deposited at an institution and in a departmental major for which they have no special interest. This contributes to their lack of motivation to learn virtually any new subject, including English, which is presented to them in college classrooms. The implication of this method of matriculation is that Japanese university students are left with a motivational vacuum that they are unable to fill" (p.207).

"d" answers given were actually similar to "a" answers. These answers were such as "interested in," "like very much," and "love."

### Final Comments

From the survey and literature covered, it was observed that students

### Are Our Students Unmotivated?:

do not normally start with a negative attitude towards the English language and its study, but rather this attitude (as are all attitudes by definition)<sup>17)</sup> is developed by students' negative experiences with the study of English for entrance examinations. As Terasaki (1991) finds, "The situation has unfortunately reached the paradoxical point at which examinations are no longer a tool in the service of education; education has become a tool in the service of examinations, and its effects are very serious" (p.16).

There are no easy answers to the problem of examination motivation to present here. Changing the examination system is a long and complex process.<sup>18)</sup> When LoCastro, an educator known for her papers on the Japanese college examination system, was asked in an interview if she knew of any answers to this problem, she could only answer, "I don't know. Do you have any ideas?" (Higa & LoCastro 1990:129). But there are some things, that we, as educators can do. The data and diagram for survey question # 1 showed that most students did have a motivation, a reason, to learn English. By identifying your students' attitudes and motivations towards the English language, its study, and your course in particular through such a survey as carried out in this paper, a better understanding of your students can help you spark and channel what motivations may exist and make for another chance for students burdened with negative attitudes to develop positive attitudes towards English, or to strengthen such attitudes if they already exist.

### Footnotes

- 1) See Jarrett (1990) and Chambers & Cummings (1990).
- 2) Including this author, who, in Duggan (1990) points out a number of encountered student response types that are seemingly very much indicative of a lack of interest in the class, in English in general, and what the teacher is doing and/or saying in particular.
- 3) "Rankings" assigned to this and succeeding colleges are based on published and unpublished college ranking lists (see references), as well as the author's

experience.

- 4) In this case, students of Japanese nationality who have returned to Japan after an extended (usually a minimum of one year) stay in a foreign country. These students have usually developed a higher level of proficiency with the language of the foreign country in which they resided.
- 5) Students who have failed a course and are now repeating it.
- 6) As concluded from a separate survey of these students concerning previous English study.
- 7) As espoused by Rivers (1991), one of the first jobs of a teacher is to identify student motivations. Only then can the teacher go on to channeling and/or “spark-ing” these motivations.
- 8) A study by Yashiro (1991) showing that 92% of returnees desire or strongly desire to retain their foreign language supports this.
- 9) This author has experienced teaching in one such situation at the headquarters of a major Japanese automobile manufacturer. The rank-and-file as well as managers were required to reach predetermined English fluency levels as a prerequisite to job(title) advancement.
- 10) The number of STEP (Standardized Test of English Proficiency) examinees during 1989 numbered 2,401, 254—a steady yearly increase from the 1980 total of 1,135,365. Source: *STEP Bulletin*, Vol.2. Sept. 1990, p.151.
- 11) In a separate survey, a goal of the great majority of these same students was to get married by age 24 ~ 25.
- 12) This may be an understatement as Igawa tells in his study, among the respondents in the classroom, “a full 80% of senior high school students admitted they hated English.”
- 13) See Dissosway (1989:14).
- 14) See Duggan (1990) on the causes of student hesitation.
- 15) See Duggan (1990) and Yukawa (1989).
- 16) Lazy learners, *Business Tokyo*, 5.
- 17) See Brown (1987:126) concerning the development of attitudes.
- 18) As explained by Wada (1991) of the Japanese Ministry of Education.

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