

Motivating Japanese Students to Research Using the Internet:

A Case Study of a Japanese University Second Year Research and Discussion Course

David WATTS

Abstract

Student motivation has been described as ‘one of the major challenges of pedagogy’ (McGroarty 2001). The aim of this paper is to examine an attempt to meet this challenge of encouraging and maintaining motivation of students in Research and Discussion courses at a Japanese university by making extensive use of the Internet as a learning resource. A brief literature review is followed by a detailed description of the course context and modus operandi, and the results from a summative questionnaire are presented and analysed, with particular focus on pre-and post-course motivation and confidence levels and how they might relate to students’ professed enjoyment of the course. The paper concludes with reflection and suggestions for possible future iterations of the course.

1. Introduction

According to Dudeney (2000), the widespread use of the Internet is ‘the biggest communications revolution since the advent of the printed book’. This revolution is still very much in its infancy, but it is fair to say that it is reaching into every conceivable aspect of our lives. Language teachers are increasingly seeing the beneficial aspects of using the Internet and seeking to exploit them in preparation for lessons and courses. Although a good deal of research is available regarding the Internet as a pedagogical tool, there still seems to be scope for a brief investigation into the motivational effects of using the Internet for learners of English at the university level in Japan. This paper aims to examine these effects and their possible causes and outcomes

for such learners on an introductory Research and Discussion Skills course, conducted in English. The pedagogical implications for the course teacher will also be addressed.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Motivation in the Japanese university context

Student motivation has been described as ‘one of the major challenges of pedagogy’ (McGroarty 2001). Various kinds of motivation in second language (L2) acquisition have been widely researched in the recent past; the main categories being identified as instrumental, integrative, resultative and intrinsic (Ellis, 1997).

Instrumental motivation indicates the efforts that a student might make in learning the L2 because of some ‘functional reason’ (Ellis, *ibid*); in other words, to further their career or achieve academic success and progress. Norris-Holt (2001) suggests that in the Japanese university setting, students’ motivation previous to admission was largely instrumental as their primary objective had been entrance to university or similar. She further notes that ‘typically, upon entrance to the desired establishment the student’s interest to continue study declined’ (*ibid*). If this is true, then it could be argued that the second language teacher in the Japanese university setting can no longer exploit this instrumental kind of motivation in their language instruction. The key to effective exploitation of these students’ motivational patterns may therefore seem to lie in the latter three types of motivation in Ellis’ framework. Integrative motivation is characterised by the students’ interest in the L2 culture(s) serving as a motivating factor in their L2 acquisition, while resultative motivation is that which is experienced by students of the L2 when they achieve some kind of success in that L2. Finally, intrinsic motivation describes how students of an L2 might be interested in an activity not necessarily because of its language learning potential, but because they are curious about the subject matter which might be an outcome of the activity. It is this final kind of motivation, intrinsic motivation, that this paper primarily focuses on exploiting, in the L2 classroom setting of an introductory Research

and Discussion skills course for second year Japanese university students.

Following Norris-Holt, the challenge is to put a 'great deal of thought into developing programs which maintain student interest and have obtainable short term goals' (2001). Since the course in focus here meets only once a week, in its initial stages at least, this challenge can only be met by careful time management, ensuring all goals set can be achieved within one (90 minute) session. It is hoped that this achievement of clear goals within each given session may have a secondary benefit of also increasing resultative motivation.

2.2 The Internet as a motivating factor in L2 acquisition

This paper examines the use of the Internet to increase of students' intrinsic motivation to carry out research through the medium of the L2. According to Dudeney (2000), the widespread use of the Internet is 'the biggest communications revolution since the advent of the printed book'. To Wellington (2006), 'the Internet has huge potential for enhancing teaching and learning. So language teachers should be very interested in exploiting this 'communications' resource in their teaching, especially as 'the development of easier connections ... and cheaper access has opened up the 'information superhighway' to everyone' (ibid). The benefits of having access to the Internet in the classroom are many; students are becoming increasingly familiar with working with computer-based text and information, and, as Dudeney and Hockly (2007) point out, 'authentic sites ... can be chosen to fit your learners' interests. This is a key factor in keeping motivation high in your electronic classroom'. In this paper, it is further argued that this motivation through interacting with authentic materials can be even more enhanced if students feel empowered by a perceived increase in their ability to locate their own authentic sites that are appropriate to the language learning activity. Particularly appropriate to the context of this paper, namely the teaching of research and discussion skills, is the enormous potential for students to carry out their own research to bring back to the language class, as the web is a 'source of content which can be used as a window on the wider world outside your class' (ibid). It is one aim of this paper to demonstrate

that with appropriate selection of materials and activities, the Internet can be used as a rich resource in promoting research and discussion skills in second language learners.

2.3 Foraging as an analogy for research

Schumann (2001) uses the analogy of ‘learning as foraging’ in his observation that ‘just as organisms forage for food, humans may forage for information, knowledge and skill’ (ibid). This paper contends that this analogy can be extended to the research paradigm, especially if the research is required to be carried out in the L2.

According to Schumann, ‘learning and foraging may share the same neural mechanisms’ (ibid). In other words, human beings’ need for information, knowledge or skill may be just as fundamental a motivational factor as the human need for food. The activities outlined in this paper are informed by this fundamental human need. It is also Schumann’s contention that ‘a learner must *do* things in order to learn’. In other words, a teacher can talk for hours about how to swim or ride a bicycle, and the student will still not likely be able to carry out these practical activities. However, the chances of the student acquiring these abilities will be greatly increased if the student tries them in practice with teacher support. In the same way, students must engage in a task in order to learn from it.

Nunan (1988)’s definition of a communicative task as being

‘a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form’

is useful here; students learn the target language while using it, but not necessarily focusing on it. The language learning activities detailed below represent an attempt to exploit these insights into human learning patterns.

3 Context of the course

3.1 Students and Faculty: Aims and expectations

This course is designed initially for a group of around 20 second year students at a Japanese university over one semester (15 weeks). Although some differences exist in students language competence levels, they could be broadly described overall as lower-intermediate to intermediate. No previous experience of Internet research is assumed, although increasingly, in practice, most students are to some extent reasonably computer and Internet literate, albeit using their first language, Japanese, as their language that they mostly utilise online.

Another important consideration is that these undergraduate students will be new to academic research and discussion skills, even in their L1. Therefore, one pedagogical implication for the course teacher is to understand what skills the Japanese Faculty (i.e. the students' subject professors) will expect them to be able to transfer to their future academic study in Japanese. In consultation with students and their professors, a syllabus for research and discussion skills development over two to three years can be implemented, though elaboration of that process is beyond the scope of this paper.

The modus operandi described below is for an initial sequence of once-weekly lessons in a one semester introductory course in Research and Discussion Skills. The primary aims are threefold: 1) to initiate students in the variety of skills they will need to continue developing in both L2 and L1 in subsequent years up to graduation; 2) to build on whatever informal Internet research skills are present in the L1, while transferring them to the L2; and 3) to maintain student interest in and intrinsic motivation towards the achievement of obtainable short-term goals, which are authentic to academic research and discussion.

Towards these ends, the pedagogical analogy of research as foraging is applied, with discussion as a communal bringing together and sharing of resources. All activities are timed to take place within one session. As suggested in 2.1, any increase in resultative motivation can lead – in later lessons or courses – to independent research by students outside class time,

increasing opportunities for deeper discussion in class. However these developments are also outside the scope of this paper.

3.2 Facilities

The nature of the requirements of the tasks on the course dictates that the facilities that are available are crucial to a successful iteration of the course. Each student should have access to his or her own computer connected to the Internet for his or her own individual research. Therefore a computer lab with at least 20 Internet-connected computers is necessary. However, smaller numbers of computers may still be used by students by asking them to work in pairs at one terminal, but this has some disadvantages. First, although this is an opportunity for students to communicate in English while cooperatively researching, without effective supervision students may be tempted to revert back to their first language. Secondly, sharing a terminal effectively halves individual access, thus limiting the amount of useful research that is actually carried out in a relatively limited time frame.

In addition to a computer laboratory, it is necessary for students to present their research and also to discuss questions that arise from it, so it would be ideal to have a second, conventional classroom nearby to carry out these tasks. On this particular course, pressure on space did not allow for this ideal situation, so careful thought had to be given to creating space away from the computer desks for this communication to happen. Desks can form a barrier to communication, especially with the fixed style of computer labs that seems to be the norm in many educational establishments. If students cannot be moved physically away from their computer screens for discussion, at the very least the monitors can be switched off to reduce visual distraction.

3.3 Modus Operandi

3.3.1 Classroom operation

Students are divided into six groups and assigned a continent; North America, South America, Asia, Europe, Africa, Australasia. Although there are arguably seven continents, the one that is excluded from this list, namely Antarctica, although is the venue to many fascinating pieces for research,

is not deemed to be suitable due to the comparative lack of human activity there.

Students are then assigned a part of the computer lab where they can work together as a team. As the whole group consists of around 20 students, this tends to result in individual ‘continent’ groups numbering typically three or four. In the author’s experience, this is a good number for Japanese students to work in; any smaller and the burden of group activities may be too great, and any larger and there can be a tendency for weaker students to rely on other students in the group to ‘rescue’ them in the presentation and discussion stages. Each week the students are placed in different groups in an attempt to keep each session unique and challenging; different team members have different strengths that they can offer different groups over the course of the semester. As a necessary result of this, each student must also be assigned a different continent each session. Again, this adds to the individual nature of each session, as well as creating a good working atmosphere among the whole group and can help avoid the creation of ‘cliques’. In practice, after a while, students became familiar with this arrangement and were more than happy with new team members each week.

3.3.2 Choice of theme

Each week, students are given a different theme to research. The choice of these themes should be influenced by an understanding of what the students’ interests are, at the same time being appropriate for research; both in terms of its scale and suitability for subsequent presentation and discussion. Possible themes might be; music, fashion, art, movies, literature, sport, architecture, famous people, pros and cons of tourism, food, famous people, economics and money, safety (natural disasters), safety (crime), education and work, politics, population and health, environment and pollution, technology, etc. Careful thought should be given to the order of presentation of these themes, perhaps with students being asked to research more familiar and potentially less taxing themes earlier on in the course, thus giving them time to get used to the way of working. Eventually, I have found that towards the end of the course, students have to a great extent acquired the research skills necessary

to deal with the more complex issues.

As a group, they are asked to quickly create a list of possible search terms, and these are then elicited, and written on the white board for all students to use a resource to kick-start their research. They are then asked to discuss which aspect of the theme and continent each student is going to research, always with a view to successfully completing the subsequent tasks of presentation and discussion.

3.3.3 Stages of the class

3.3.3.1 Research

After students have decided as a group their own research area of responsibility, they are given a fixed time of around twenty minutes for individual research into the area. They are asked to take notes and be prepared to share their research with the group later. Students are strongly encouraged not to copy down large chunks of text and to utilise as many websites as possible to show a breadth of research. To this end, it is often necessary to provide opportunities for training in effective note-taking.

3.3.3.2 Share and prepare

After around 20 minutes of individual research, students should then turn off their computer screens to focus themselves on the next task, which is to orally report their findings to their group in English. Other members listen and take notes, with a view to preparing a group presentation to be made later to another ‘continent’ group. Students are required to prepare three content questions related to their presentation, and additionally, two broader discussion questions that will subsequently promote discussion between the two groups. Organisational issues such as order of presenter and content of each part of the presentation should also be decided at this time. All of these negotiations are expected to be carried out completely in English, and, like the Research (3.3.3.1) stage, students are given a fixed time of twenty minutes to complete the task.

3.3.3.3 Presentation

Students now move away from their computer desks to an environment more suited to presentation and discussion; in this case an open space behind the bank of computer screens. Three larger groups are formed, each consisting of two of the former, ‘continent’ groups. After the two groups have decided who will make their presentations first, two of the content questions are read out for the other group to try to answer, based on the presentation. The purpose of these questions is to focus the non-presenting group on the content of the presentation. The third, ‘secret’ question, is held back until the end of the presentation, to ensure that students on the non-presenting group listen to the whole of the team’s presentation and take more general, global notes.

The presentation should last around three minutes. I have found that this is a suitable amount of time to present the research that has been carried out; any shorter and the volume of the content could be seriously compromised, and much longer will have the counter-productive effect of daunting students, thus forcing them to rely on strategies such as reading out notes as opposed to presenting them. At the end, there is an opportunity for listening students to ask questions and then to answer the questions that were asked of them at the start.

This series of mini-tasks is then repeated, this time with the roles of the two groups reversed, ie the non-presenting group from the previous stage now asking their own questions and presenting their own findings.

3.3.3.4 Discussion

At the end of the two presentations, students are asked to initiate discussion by asking one of their two discussion questions. As each group should have prepared two of these questions, there is an opportunity for them to discuss up to four issues that have been prepared by both groups.

3.3.3.5 Repeat

Depending on the amount of remaining time, students can repeat the process with a different group, as there are still four other groups who they

have not presented to or discussed with. In practice, this stage has never been possible in a 90-minute session, but could be borne in mind as an additional activity.

3.4 Self-assessment

At the end of the discussion stage, time is allocated each week at the end of the lesson for students to briefly reflect on their performance in the class and also their progress over the semester as a whole, by asking them to fill out a self-assessment sheet. Their task is to think of one aspect of their performance in class that they are pleased with, and one aspect that they would like to improve on in the following week. This sheet is handed to students every week at the start of the lesson in order to help them remember what they did the previous week and to provide a focus for their performance in the lesson. Gardner (2000) notes that a well motivated person ‘tends to evaluate the learning situation positively’, so by encouraging students to think of one thing they did well and one thing they would like to improve in the subsequent session, it is hoped that the positive aspects of their performance will be reinforced while at the same time focusing on an area that they feel needs more attention. In addition, the positive wording of self assessment sheet (‘points I am pleased with’, ‘points I want to improve’) is designed to encourage this positive attitude suggested by Gardner.

3.5 Student and teacher roles

Throughout this set of activities, both students and teacher are required to take on different roles at different stages of the lesson in order to successfully fulfil the overall aim, which is to research and discuss various issues solely in the English language. Similarly, the roles of the teacher can be summarised as learning facilitator, task setter, research counsellor and monitor, individual interactor and classroom dynamic organiser. These student and teacher roles are respectively detailed below.

3.5.1 Student roles

As Norris-Holt (2001) observes, ‘encouraging students to become more

active participants in a lesson can sometimes assist them to see a purpose for improving their communication skills in the target language'. Students on this course are very much expected to become more active by fulfilling a variety of different roles throughout the course of one lesson. They might be categorized as researcher, team worker, negotiator, presenter, audience and participant in discussion, and these roles are briefly explained below.

Researcher

Initially, after a brief discussion with other team-mates as to how they will organise their research in order to make a presentation, students embark individually on the task of researching an issue or part of an issue relevant to their designated continent and theme on the Internet.

Team worker

Students are required to prepare a group presentation, and so as a result should collaborate and work as a team in preparation for this.

Negotiator

Students need to share their individually researched information and data with a view to preparing a presentation as well as content and discussion questions based on their presentation. This requires them to decide as a group such issues as content of the presentation, order of presenters and length of time apportioned to each section.

Presenter

The next requirement is that of making a group presentation to another group of students who have researched the same issue but in relation to a different continent.

Audience

In this section of the lesson, students should also act as an audience for the other group, taking notes in order to be able to answer their content questions. They are also encouraged to feel free to ask questions of the presenting group in the event that they have not heard or understood a particular part of the presentation.

Discussor

Finally, students are expected to initiate, facilitate and continue a discussion based on the content of both presentations. They are required to

ask questions, to state their own opinion, to listen to others' opinions and provide thoughtful feedback to them.

3.5.2 Teacher roles

Learning facilitator

The role of the teacher in this suite of activities is to facilitate the learning of students, not by traditional, teacher-based instruction, but by providing opportunities for students to learn the L2 in a variety of types of activity.

Task setter

Teacher preparation for this suite of activities involves careful consideration of a number of issues or themes that are chosen for their suitability in terms of interest and relevance to the students, but at the same time being a legitimate and realistic area for them to research.

Research counsellor and monitor

In the 'research' phase, students are largely working individually to collect information and data relevant to their subsequent group presentation. The teacher's role here can be to talk individually and as continent groups to ensure that they are researching in the 'right direction', and are staying on task. At the same time the teacher can provide extra information or keyword search terms for students to pursue.

Individual interactor

In the presentation and discussion phases, the teacher should listen to and where appropriate, contribute by asking for clarification or moving the discussion along to another area of interest to students. This can be sometimes difficult, however, as there are three simultaneous presentations in the same classroom, thus requiring a considerable amount of teacher athleticism.

Classroom dynamic organiser

Students need to be allocated groups and places for their group to research, and subsequently to present and discuss. Careful thought and consideration needs to be given in choosing which continents groups should be paired up. This is informed by an understanding of the subject matter of the presentation gained in the research phase, and helps the teacher to make a selection based on their suitability and relevance to each other.

Hockly and Dudeney (2007) suggest that teachers make sure students have a ‘clearly-defined task’ and ‘clearly-defined time frame in which to achieve it’. In this 1 course, it is therefore crucial that the teacher is responsible for regular, clear announcement of task deadlines, and regular and clear instructional language to guide students to participate in different stages of the lesson.

3.6 Additional considerations for the teacher

3.6.1 Balance of online and offline time

As Hockly and Dudeney (2007) note, ‘it’s important to spend only as much time as you need working with the computers’, suggesting that non-computer activities be carried out in a conventional classroom. As stated in 3.2, availability of space prevents this from being a possibility in this particular context, meaning that students have to share, prepare and present in a computer lab, which although not ideal, is not impossible. They suggest that ‘careful planning of the logistics may be necessary’ (ibid), and to this end, students are given a clear instruction to turn off computer screens to focus attention on the speaking stages of the lesson, such as the presentation preparation stage. However, each group can keep one computer running in the event that they need to return to the Internet to research a few final details that they deem necessary for their presentations.

3.6.2 Maintaining the communicative, goal-oriented and learner centred nature of task.

As noted earlier, Nunan (1988) defines a communicative task as ‘a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form’. The tasks detailed in this course can be seen to conform to this categorization, as they are aimed primarily at promoting discussion through presentation of previously researched material in the target language rather than any particular focus on language form.

Ellis (2003) notes, regarding Prabhu’s work in developing task based

learning in the 1980s, that his ‘tasks were problem-oriented and designed to be intellectually challenging in order to engage learners and sustain their interest’. The design of this course reflects an understanding of this design characteristic, as in this context, students are required to respond to an individually tailored problem and are both individually and as a group asked to solve the ‘problem’, namely “How do I / we make a presentation and encourage a discussion on our particular research area?”. This goal-oriented approach encourages greater motivation to participate in achieving a solution to the problem created for the student(s). This is borne out by Pintrich & Schunk (1996)’s notion that ‘motivation is a process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained’. In the course currently examined, all stages of the class are related and aimed at equipping students with the necessary knowledge and language ability in order for them to participate in the final goal of a discussion on a particular theme that they have previously researched.

Marzano (1991) notes that students’ motivation is likely to be affected by factors such as ‘control over the task’, amongst others. The nature of this course is such that students can feel very much in control of their task both as individuals and members of a team, as they are given freedom to choose their focus, presentation style, etc as well as formulate their own content and discussion questions, thus enabling them to direct the task towards their own specific interests. The key here is to provide a strong and reliable classroom dynamic and framework so that students feel confident in a ‘safe’ and supportive environment. The teacher needs to be aware of the importance, therefore, of facilitating this supportive environment. One way is to ensure that all students feel that their contribution to their presentation team is important by (where possible) occasional teacher contribution to the presentation preparation, preparation, and discussion stages of the lesson.

3.6.3 Maintaining student motivation

McGrath (1984, cited in Julkunen p 35) notes that tasks can be classified into ‘open’ and ‘closed’ tasks, and that these have differing effects on student motivation. Closed tasks are ‘high in risk’ as ‘failure is highly detectable’

(ibid), whereas open tasks are ‘low in risk’ because the emphasis is not necessarily on achieving the ‘right’ answer; rather on completion of the task to the satisfaction of the group. Open tasks also have the advantage that the individual student can perform according to her own language proficiency. This course attempts to inspire and maintain this motivation through extensive use of open tasks while preserving a strong time-based structure for the completion of these tasks.

The effective sequencing of tasks has also been argued as being important for increasing student motivation. A ‘chain of tasks’ (Julkunen, 2001) should be provided for students, with a logical connection between these tasks. If the connection between the tasks is clear to the students, it will become clear that participation in and successful completion of each stage is vital for the success of the group in carrying out the summative presentation and discussion. Ellis (2003) also states that it is ‘helpful to classify tasks in terms of their type, to determine their thematic content, and then to sequence them’. Furthermore, it can be argued that the variety of speaking task types also encourages motivation in the students. These task types and their required language skills can be characterized as follows;

Table 1 Task types and skills

Task type	Language skills
Brainstorming key search terms	Speaking and listening
Negotiating research field	Speaking and listening
Online research	Reading / Note taking
Reporting notes	Speaking
Negotiating presentation preparation	Speaking and listening
Presenting	Speaking
Listening for detail	Listening / Note taking
Discussion	Speaking and listening

The variety and pacing of these tasks in the lesson can be seen to be a motivating factor for students as they are frequently required to change roles and engage in different task types using different language skills.

Julkunen (2001) recognizes that ‘some tasks are ... more motivating than

others. Tasks that include an optimal amount of uncertainty and unpredictability attract the learner'. In this course, the final task is unpredictable in the sense that the research area in the research stage is unknown and the presentation of the other group's research is also necessarily unknown. At the same time, the familiarity that the student gets from encountering a similar task method over the duration of the course enables them to feel less anxious in this encountering of unknown factors. Thus, the key is to achieve the 'optimal' amount of uncertainty to motivate students but not make them anxious, as it is widely accepted that an anxious learner is not a good learner.

Finally, McGroarty (2001) notes that 'the nature and quality of language instruction affect motivation'. It can be argued that this can be extended to course, syllabus and task design. If the design of these elements is appropriate to the students in terms of language level, task expectations, time management and classroom dynamics, it is probable that this will have a positive effect on students' motivation for learning and continuing to study the target language. An awareness of this idea was also seen as crucial in the development of the course currently examined.

4 Feedback Questionnaire

4.1 Aims

The aims of conducting this questionnaire were to assess students' motivation, confidence and skill levels in Internet research and English language discussion, and also to examine any correlation between these increases and students' enjoyment of the tasks. In the questionnaire, students are asked to respond to a number of attitude statements regarding motivation and confidence in research and discussion before and after the course, as well as to a number of statements regarding the enjoyability of the discreet stages of each individual lesson, namely the research, preparation for presentation, presentation and discussion stages.

4.2 Design

A summative feedback questionnaire was presented to students of the

course in the final week of the semester in order to ascertain their feelings, impressions and in a very basic and simple way, test the effectiveness for this particular cohort of students that this course had in increasing motivation and confidence in research and discussion in the English language. These feelings and impressions correspond to what Oppenheim (1992) refers to as ‘non-factual questions’, or those which attempt to discover respondents’ ‘state of mind’ (ibid). The nature of the classification of the data as well as the context of this particular group of students presented a number of implications that affected the questionnaire design process in this study.

Oppenheim notes that ‘an attitude ... has intensity’ (ibid), so in an attempt to capture the nature of individuals’ attitudes, respondents were given a choice of five responses which reflect that intensity to the attitude statements on a Likert scale, ranging from ‘Strongly agree’ to ‘Strongly disagree’. It was felt that the fact that the Likert scale is ‘the most popular scaling procedure in use today’ (ibid) would mean that students would be familiar with this method of attitude measuring, and this would be likely to increase their willingness to answer accurately.

The questionnaire was presented to students in a structured approach, acknowledging Oppenheim’s observation that ‘we should have sets of questions’ in order to more fully understand respondents’ (ibid) attitudes. In this case, it was felt that a logical system of structuring these ‘sets’ would be into statements relating to students’ attitudes before, during and at the end of the course. It was hoped that the grouping together of attitude statements in a chronological order would help students to consider their progress throughout the semester.

A further consideration that it was necessary to take in the design of this questionnaire was a sensitivity to the students’ English language ability. The usefulness of the responses would be severely compromised if students were not able to fully understand the attitude statements. The importance of this sensitivity is reflected in the clarity and appropriateness of language level of the attitude statements and the fact that the requested response was simply to circle a number which most corresponded to the respondents’ attitude. Furthermore, written responses were not required in this survey.

Finally, Oppenheim notes that ‘all survey data must be treated as confidential’ (ibid), so, in order to safeguard respondents’ identities, and to increase the validity of students’ responses, all respondents were explicitly requested, both verbally by the teacher, and written in the text of the questionnaire, not to reveal their name on the response sheet.

As a result of all the above considerations, students were presented with the following attitude statements.

Table 2 Questionnaire sheet

Before the course	Code
1. I was motivated by the idea of doing research in English	B1
2. I was motivated to speak and take part in discussions in English	B2
3. I was confident about doing Internet research in English	B3
4. I was confident about my discussion and speaking skills	B4
During the course	
1. I enjoyed the research task	D1
2. I enjoyed the preparation task	D2
3. I enjoyed the presentation task	D3
4. I enjoyed the discussion task	D4
5. I was able to discover new information	D5
6. I was able to discover interesting information	D6
At the end of the course	
1. I am motivated to do research in English	E1
2. I am motivated to speak and take part in discussions in English	E2
3. I am confident about doing Internet research in English	E3
4. I am confident about my discussion and speaking skills	E4
5. My research and discussion skills have improved on this course	E5
6. I am able to use these skills on my own for other English courses at this university	E6
7. My confidence in research and discussion has improved since the start of this course	E7

5 Findings

5.1 Questionnaire results

A total of 17 respondents cooperated in this research, and their responses to the attitude statements are as follows. The code on the left of the table refers to the attitude statements detailed above, and responses are given in terms of numbers of people and as a percentage of the whole group of students.

Table 3 Students' responses to questionnaire

Code	Strongly agree		Agree		Don't know / Rather not say		DisagreeE1		Strongly disagree	
	People	%	People	%	People	%	People	%	People	%
B1	3	17.6	6	35.3	6	35.3	2	11.8	0	0
B2	5	29.4	6	35.3	2	11.8	4	23.5	0	0
B3	1	5.9	5	29.4	3	17.6	6	35.3	2	11.8
B4	0	0	2	11.8	4	23.5	6	35.3	5	29.4
D1	1	5.9	10	58.8	6	35.3	0	0	0	0
D2	2	11.8	6	35.3	8	47.0	1	5.9	0	0
D3	2	11.8	7	41.1	6	35.3	2	11.8	0	0
D4	2	11.8	6	35.3	8	47.0	1	5.9	0	0
D5	6	35.3	9	52.9	1	5.9	1	5.9	0	0
D6	6	35.3	9	52.9	1	5.9	1	5.9	0	0
E1	4	23.5	10	58.8	3	17.6	0	0	0	0
E2	6	35.3	7	41.1	4	23.5	0	0	0	0
E3	0	0	8	47.0	8	47.0	1	5.9	0	0
E4	1	5.9	6	35.3	8	47.0	2	11.8	0	0
E5	1	5.9	13	76.5	2	11.8	1	5.9	0	0
E6	1	5.9	8	47.0	7	41.1	0	0	1	5.9
E7	4	23.5	10	58.8	3	17.6	0	0	0	0

5.2 Analysis

From this set of data it is possible to extract a number of interesting findings which are relevant to the aim of this paper, namely the effect of research and discussion tasks on students' confidence and motivational levels towards these activities, as well as students' degree of enjoyment of individual tasks

within a lesson.

First of all, we can compare how students self-reported their motivational and confidence levels towards research and discussion in English both before and at the end of the course, and from this, attempt to come to a greater understanding of how the course might have affected their motivation and confidence.

5.2.1 General increase in motivation

We can see from the data that 52.9% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement B1; ‘I was motivated by the idea of doing research in English (before the course)’, whereas 82.4% of respondents responded similarly at the end of the course (E1). This represents a proportional increase of over 50%.

Similarly, motivation levels towards discussion also showed an increase. 64.7% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement B2; ‘I was motivated to speak and take part in discussions in English (before the course)’, whereas 76.5% of respondents responded similarly at the end of the course (E2), representing a proportional increase of 18%.

These increases in motivation in researching and discussing between the periods before and at the end of the course are encouraging as increases in levels of motivation towards language learning tasks and activities are likely to have a positive effect on students’ L2 acquisition, as noted earlier.

5.2.2 General increase in confidence

There were also increases in reported levels of confidence in the two areas of research and discussion. Firstly, regarding research, the data shows that only 35.3% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement B3; ‘I was confident about doing Internet research in English (before the course)’, but this figure increased to 47% at the end of the course, in response to statement E3. This represents a proportional increase of 33% between the start and end of the course.

A more dramatic increase in reported confidence in discussion is revealed by the data; only 2 students (11%) either agreed or strongly agreed with

the statement B4; ‘I was confident about my discussion and speaking skills (before the course)’, but this figure rose to 41.1% of responses to the corresponding attitude statement (E4) at the end of the course, representing a more than threefold increase between the start and end of the course.

The increases in reported levels in confidence in their research and discussion abilities between the start and end of the course are, like the increases in motivation detailed above, very encouraging, because as noted earlier, increases in levels of confidence in students’ abilities are likely to positively influence students’ L2 acquisition.

5.2.3 General increase in enjoyability of the course

Statements D1, D2, D3 and D4 refer to how much the students enjoyed the individual stages of the lesson, namely the research, preparation, presentation and discussion stages. Students’ responses reveal a largely positive attitude towards these activities, with 36 out of the total of 40 analysable responses (90%) to statements D1 to D4 expressing agreement.

11 out of 17 students (64.7%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement D1; ‘I enjoyed the research task’, while no students disagreed. 8 out of 17 students (47%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement D2; ‘I enjoyed the preparation task’, whereas only 1 student (5.9%) disagreed.

9 out of 17 students (52.9%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement D3; ‘I enjoyed the presentation task’, whereas only 1 student (5.9%) disagreed. 8 out of 17 students (47%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement D4; ‘I enjoyed the discussion task’, whereas only 1 student (5.9%) disagreed.

Although the value of these findings could be argued to be somewhat compromised by the high occurrence of non-analysable ‘Don’t know / rather not say’ responses, significantly more students report positive rather than negative engagement with tasks and activities on the course.

5.2.4 Individual student enjoyment

The data can be further utilized to investigate how much students enjoyed the lessons on the course by calculating the mean score of responses to

statements D1, D2, D3 and D4. To do this, all scores were added together and divided by 4. For example, a student who responded 2,2,4,4 would be given an overall enjoyment score of 3. For this calculation, ‘Don’t know / rather not say’ responses were discarded as being non-analyzable.

This calculation reveals that a significant proportion of students (12 out of 17 or 70.6%) gave a positive response overall to the enjoyability of the lesson, with scores of between 1 and 2. Of the remaining five students’ responses, 2 were discounted as they consisted entirely of ‘Don’t know / rather not say’ responses, two scored 3, and one scored 4.

Overall, based on these findings, it would seem reasonable to conclude that students to a significant degree enjoyed the tasks in the lessons on this course.

5.2.5 Individual student progress

Although the above findings are encouraging on their own, it would be useful to look in more detail at each individual’s progress in terms of their motivation and confidence levels between the start and the end of the course. This could be achieved by a comparison of their responses to B1 and E1, B2 and E2, B3 and E3 and B4 and E4. Unfortunately, given the small number of respondents in the the present study, it was felt that the frequency of the non-analysable ‘Don’t know / rather not say’ responses would limit the significance of this comparison. Nevertheless, in the following section, the responses of those students who did not give ‘Don’t know / rather not say’ responses to statements B1-4 and E1-4, and whose responses to the latter were more positive than to the former, are used as measures of progress.

5.2.6 The relationship between motivation, confidence and enjoyability

So far, this analysis has focused principally on students’ motivation and confidence in their Internet research and discussion skills, as well as how much they enjoyed the individual tasks in different stages of a typical lesson, with the broad findings that students’ motivation and confidence levels increased between the beginning and the end of the course, and that students were more likely to enjoy the different tasks. What follows is an attempt to

draw out from the data the relationship between these three factors, in order to investigate their effects on each other by looking at the relation between the numbers of those students who increased in confidence and motivation in research and discussion over the duration of the course and their enjoyment of research and discussion tasks, in order to discover whether their enjoyment of the tasks had a beneficial effect on their confidence and motivation levels. This can be demonstrated by taking those students who reported increases in confidence and motivation in research and discussion and analyzing their responses to statements D1 ('I enjoyed the research task') and D4 ('I enjoyed the discussion task'). The results are shown in the following two tables.

Table 4 reveals that there is a strong tendency for positive reporters of increases in motivation in research skills to either agree or strongly agree with statement D1; 'I enjoyed the research task', with 8 out of 9 students (88.9%) either responding with a '1' or '2'. By contrast, no students disagreed with the statement. Similarly, positive reporters of increases in confidence in their research skills showed a tendency to agree with statement D1, with 4 out of 9 (44.4%) agreeing and 1 (11.1%) disagreeing.

Table 5 reveals a similar tendency to the Table 4 in the sense that most students who positively reported an increase in motivation about discussion over the duration of the course (6 out of 7 or 85.7%) either agreed or strongly agreed with statement D4; 'I enjoyed the discussion task'. As in Table 4, no students disagreed with the statement. Of the positive self-reporters of an increase in confidence in their discussion skills, 7 out of 8 (87.5%) of those who expressed an opinion either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

From this analysis of the analysable responses, we can conclude that there seems to be a strong relationship between positive self-reporting of increases in confidence and motivation in research and discussion skills and students' enjoyment of the relevant tasks, whereby people who enjoyed the tasks reported greater confidence and motivation levels.

Table 4 Individual responses to statement D1: 'I enjoyed the research task'

	Number / percentage of the group	Strongly agree	Agree	Don't know / rather not say	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Students who reported an increase in motivation about research	9 / 52.9%	1	7	1	0	0
Students who reported an increase in confidence about research	9 / 52.9%	0	4	4	1	0

Table 5 Individual responses to statement D4: 'I enjoyed the discussion task'

	Number / percentage of the group	Strongly agree	Agree	Don't know / rather not say	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Students who reported an increase in motivation about discussion	7 / 41.1%	1	5	1	0	0
Students who reported an increase in confidence about discussion	9 / 52.9%	1	6	2	0	0

5.3 Summary of findings

Although this research used a very small set of students as informants, it would seem appropriate to make the following conclusions based on a brief analysis of the data they provided.

1. More students reported being motivated to do Internet research in English at the end of the course than at the beginning.
2. More students reported being motivated to take part in discussions in English at the end of the course than at the beginning.

3. More students reported feeling more confident about doing Internet research in English at the end of the course than at the beginning.
4. More students reported feeling more confident about taking part in discussions in English at the end of the course than at the beginning.
5. A majority of students enjoyed the lessons as a whole and the different stages in particular.
6. Students who positively self-reported increases in confidence and motivation had a tendency to enjoy the corresponding tasks, arguably contributing to positive levels of confidence and motivation in the future.

5.4 Discussion of findings

From the data revealed by the questionnaire, it seems clear that there is a relationship between students' enjoyment of the course and increases in motivation and confidence in research and discussion skills. Enjoyability would seem to relate to the third of Gardner (2000)'s three elements of the 'motivation variable', namely 'effort, desire and affect'. He suggests that a motivated 'individual will enjoy the task' (ibid). On the course described in this paper, it is hoped that students take the opportunity of enjoying exchanging recently gathered information with the aim of stimulating a debate and discussion in English.

6 Conclusions

6.1 The course

This paper has described in some detail a one-semester course of 15 weeks at a Japanese university in Research and Discussion for second year lower intermediate to intermediate students. The course was developed with an understanding of motivation of L2 acquisition and the potential benefits of empowering students to carry out their own online Internet research with a view to preparing a group presentation, and with the ultimate aim of promoting discussion on a wide variety of issues both relevant and challenging to students. This understanding of L2 acquisitional motivation led to effects

on the course such as considerations of task content, sequencing and timing of activities, student and teacher roles, self-assessment, balancing online and offline time, and attempting to ensure that lessons were communicative, goal-oriented and learner centred.

6.2 Suggestions for improvement of the course

Hockly and Dudeney (2007) suggest that rather than aiming at ‘total comprehension’ of a website, students can be ‘guided towards being comfortable with understanding the content of a site and identifying what they need to know or find out without getting bogged down’. On reflection, the teacher therefore needs to help students develop skills in visiting and summarizing greater numbers of websites in order to gain a rounder understanding of their particular research area, rather than focusing on a narrower range of resources.

6.3 Students’ motivation and confidence in Internet research and discussion

This paper has investigated how using the Internet as a research resource can increase students’ motivation and confidence in their research and discussion skills, and has arrived at the broad finding that a variety of carefully sequenced task types can add to student’s enjoyment, which in turn can be argued to in turn increase motivation and confidence, thus creating a ‘virtuous circle’ of student attitudes to L2 acquisition. That having been said, there are some limitations to the present research, the most obvious of which is its very small scale. This is compounded by the significant number of non-analysable responses, due to the inclusion of the ‘Don’t know / rather not say’ attitude statement in the questionnaire. It is fully accepted that more extensive research in terms of numbers of students would be necessary to strengthen the validity of the findings detailed in this paper.

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