

Understanding Motivation for Learning English: A Study of Japanese University Students

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英語学習における動機の理解：日本の大学生を対象と した研究

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Abstract: This paper investigates the motivations and challenges for Japanese university students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The study uses a survey of 122 participants across six English Communication classes at Muroran Institute of Technology, a national university in Hokkaido, Japan. The survey explored various aspects of English language learning, including motivations, interactions with foreign English speakers, and perceptions of English as a tool for career, travel, and cultural engagement. The findings reveal a diverse range of motivations, with students recognizing the importance of English for career advancement, cross-cultural communication, and travel. However, the study also identifies challenges, including varying proficiency levels and limited opportunities for practical language use with foreign English speakers outside of educators. The research emphasizes the need for educational institutions to provide targeted support, differentiated instruction, and opportunities for real-world language use to effectively address the needs and motivations of Japanese EFL learners.

Key words: EFL, interactions, motivation, perceptions, university

1. Introduction

Learning English is essential for Japanese university students, particularly due to the importance of international business and tourism to Japan. Proficiency in English, as well as being a “necessary tool” (Maekawa & Yashima, 2012), provides access to new professional and social opportunities, such as jobs in multinational companies, work abroad programs, and networking with international experts, enabling individuals to connect globally (Crystal, 2003). However, research on weaknesses in the Japanese educational system has shown (Amaki, 2008) that learners face many challenges such as differing levels of English proficiency amongst their

teachers, lack of creativity in classes, a narrow focus on exams (Entrich, 2018), and an overemphasis on rote memorization in traditional lecture style education (Yamanaka & Suzuki, 2020). This can impede their progress and reduce the full benefits of English learning. These persistent challenges in Japan's English education system also raise connected questions about the country's overall English proficiency in global and Asian contexts. To better understand how Japan compares internationally, it is useful to examine large-scale assessments that measure English proficiency across different nations. One such widely recognized measure is the EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI).

EF EPI ranks countries based on the distribution and equity of English skills among those who take the EF Standard English Test (EF SET). The EF SET was developed by EF Education First, an international education company headquartered in Switzerland. The EF SET, is a standardized online test aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). It is comprised of three versions: a 15-minute quick quiz, a 50-minute test assessing reading and listening, and a 90-minute test covering reading, listening, writing, and speaking. The EF EPI is based on data from EF SET test takers with varied linguistic, educational, and age backgrounds. Their test result data is then compiled into an annual report. The 2024 edition of the report was calculated using test results from 2.1 million test takers in 2023. This data was then used to rank 116 countries, making it one of the largest benchmarks for English proficiency available (EF Education First, 2024).

The benefit of the EF EPI proficiency comparisons is that they rely on structured scored assessments rather than self-reported assessments. EF EPI scores also correlate with other well established English proficiency exams such as TOEFL iBT and IELTS Academic. Another benefit is that the EF tests are free. As Richard Sugg (2021, p. 56) noted regarding his students use of the tests at Hiroshima Bunkyo University, "Because the EF SET is free, students can also afford to retake it termly, allowing them to see even small improvements within their CEFR band year on year." A five-year trial conducted by Sugg at Hiroshima Bunkyo University explored the feasibility and effectiveness of using the EF Standard English Test (EF SET) to assess and track student English proficiency (Sugg, 2021). The study found that the EF SET provided an accessible alternative to "prohibitively expensive" (Sugg, 2021, p. 44), like IELTS, and TOEFL. Particularly for non-English majors who were required to study English but did not plan to use it professionally. Sugg found that the adaptive test format allowed students to receive CEFR-aligned proficiency scores, which could be compared to institutional placement tests, providing external validation of in-house streaming methods. Longitudinal data showed that higher EF SET scores correlated with greater student engagement in English classes and self-access learning opportunities, reinforcing its potential for tracking progress over multiple years (Sugg, 2021). Despite some limitations, such as the absence of proctoring, the study concluded that EF SET is a viable tool for assessing student proficiency, motivating continued study, and complementing internal English placement

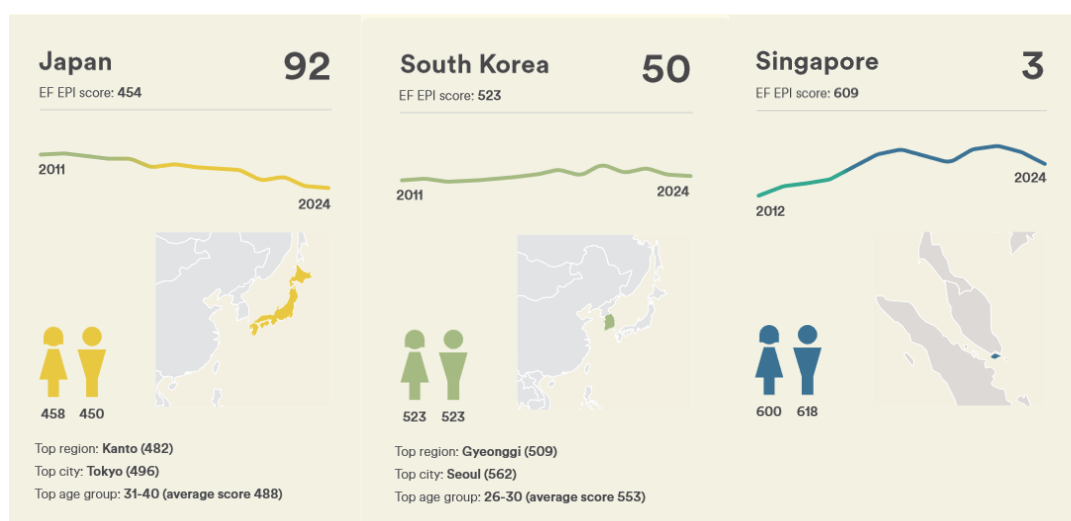
systems. These findings further support the EF SET's validity as a standardized measure of English proficiency and its use in this paper regarding university-level language education in Japan.

While the EF EPI has certain limitations, such as its partially self-selected sample of test takers and reliance on an online format, these factors are also mitigated by its large sample size, standardized methodology, and three-year rolling average, which help flatten variations. Self-selection bias could potentially skew scores higher or lower. However, as noted in the 2024 report (EF Education First, 2024, p. 47), "There is no other data set of comparable size and scope, and, despite its limitations, we, along with many policymakers, scholars, and analysts, believe it to be a valuable reference point in the global conversation about English language education."

According to the 2024 EF EPI, Japan ranked 92nd globally (Figure 1) with an average score of 454, placing it at the bottom of the low proficiency band. This represents a decline from its 2023 ranking of 87 and continues a steady downward trend since the EF EPI's inception. Notably, test takers aged 18–25 performed significantly worse than those aged 26 and older. Japan's position also stands in stark contrast with other highly developed Asian countries. For instance, Singapore ranked 3rd globally with an average score of 609, reflecting a high level of English proficiency across its population. South Korea also performed substantially better than Japan, ranking 50th with an average score of 523.

Figure 1

Japan's Declining English Proficiency Compared to South Korea and Singapore. Source: EF English Proficiency Index Report 2024. Creative Commons License.



While large-scale assessments like the EF EPI provide valuable insights into national and regional English proficiency levels, they do not capture the individual motivations, experiences,

and challenges that shape language learning outcomes. To gain a deeper understanding of these factors, this study examines data from a questionnaire conducted with 122 second-year undergraduate students enrolled in EFL classes.

The specific metrics of “understanding” are centered on factors such as career motivations, social interactions, TOEIC proficiency levels, and challenges experienced by university students learning English. This paper aims to provide insights into these findings and offer recommendations for educational institutions on how to better support learners in achieving their language goals. By addressing both the motivations and challenges outlined in the survey, institutions can hopefully create more effective programs and opportunities to help learners succeed in their English language journey.

2. Literature Review

The following literature review examines aspects regarding the motivation of Japanese students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and connected themes. The review primarily focuses on studies utilizing Self-Determination Theory (SDT) while also considering broader motivational factors and challenges specific to a strand within the Japanese EFL context. That strand is students undertaking compulsory EFL education as part of a non-English/foreign language learning major.

SDT posits that intrinsic motivation, driven by inherent interest and enjoyment, encourages more effective and sustained learning (Kimura, Nakata & Okumura, 2001; Yamamoto & Ohba, 2018). Studies have adapted SDT to assess EFL motivation in various contexts, including Japan (Agawa & Takeuchi, 2016). Many of these studies have employed or adapted a questionnaire by Hiromori (2006), leading to mixed results. This inconsistency has prompted researchers like Agawa and Takeuchi (2016) to re-examine SDT constructs within the Japanese EFL context. Their research led to the development and validation of a new questionnaire, claiming higher validity and reliability than the previous one. Agawa and Takeuchi focused on the relationship between innate needs and motivation within the Japanese EFL setting.

Lamb (2017) provides a comprehensive review of research on the motivational aspects of language teaching, examining how various teaching approaches influence learners' motivation and commitment to language learning. The review notes the importance of motivation in successful language acquisition and explores several key areas. One focus is on studies investigating Motivating Teacher Strategies (MotS), which examine specific instructional techniques that enhance student motivation. Another key area discussed is the application of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which suggests that fulfilling basic psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness is crucial for nurturing intrinsic motivation in second language (L2) learners (Lamb, 2017). In addition, the research investigated the motivational effects of specific pedagogical innovations. One key area of focus was CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) and

digital technology, which can either enhance or hinder learner motivation. The impact depends on how these technologies are implemented. When used effectively, they can increase engagement and autonomy. However, if they are not integrated well, they may lead to frustration or disengagement. Yamamoto and Ohba (2018) used SDT to investigate motivational patterns of lower-proficiency Japanese university EFL learners. Their findings indicated low intrinsic motivation and high introjected regulation among these students. High introjected regulation occurs when motivation is driven by internal pressures such as guilt, obligation, or fear of failure and external contingencies like societal expectations or anxiety about underperforming.

Other studies using SDT within the Japanese EFL context (Hiromori, 2006) have found that fulfilling learners' basic psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness, can enhance motivation. However, Maekawa and Yashima (2012) did not observe increased self-motivation in their L2 study despite fulfilling psychological needs. Their research, which explored the effects of presentation-based instruction on Japanese engineering students' attitudes toward English learning, found that while students became more confident and engaged during the course, the shift toward intrinsic motivation or personal interest in learning English was limited. This suggests that while fulfilling psychological needs like autonomy, competence, and relatedness can support motivation, they may not be sufficient alone to promote intrinsic motivation. In some cases, learners may become more confident and engaged without necessarily developing stronger self-motivation for language learning. Motivation in EFL settings is shaped by various factors, including instructional methods, cultural expectations, and prior language experiences. Given this complexity, generalizing findings across different learning environments should be approached with some caution.

Integrative motivation, characterized by a desire to engage with the target language community, is often considered a key motivator in language learning (Kimura et al., 2001; Tan & Chia, 2003). However, in the predominantly monolingual Japanese context, the influence of integrative motivation may be less straightforward (Yashima, 2002). Yashima (2000) identified an "intercultural friendship orientation" among Japanese college students, which, although similar to integrative motivation, reflected the role of English as a lingua franca without a clearly defined target community. Tan and Chia (2003) pointed out the possible demotivating effects of the emphasis on native speaker culture in Japanese EFL classrooms, suggesting that the complexity of foreign materials and the pressure to achieve native-like proficiency could be detrimental more than two decades ago. More recent research (Samuell, 2023) has shown that the emphasis on native speakerism continues both within private sector contexts and higher education settings. Research on student preferences by Harris (2024, p. 163) demonstrated that "despite indications of change in the stance towards English models at policy level, the results of this mixed methods study suggest that learners in Japan are still captivated by the native speaker as their ultimate speaking goal".

Instrumental motivation, driven by pragmatic goals such as academic or career advancement, is also relevant to Japanese EFL learners (Kimura et al. (2001). Studies have shown that instrumental motivation can play a significant role in predicting language learning success (Yashima, 2002). More contemporary research by Samifanni (2024) found that extrinsic motivation, such as earning course credits and achieving good grades, was the primary motivator for Japanese university students attending EFL classes. But also, that they “want to improve their English competence, and they want to learn” (Sammifanni, 2024, p. 18).

To more fully understand the motivational landscape, it is equally important to examine the factors that contribute to student demotivation. Identifying these elements helps educators mitigate negative influences and develop a more supportive learning environment. Demotivation in the Japanese EFL context has been attributed to a variety of factors (Samifanni, 2024), including negative teacher behavior, loss of task value, low expectancy for success, lack of self-discipline, and challenges related to the learning environment. Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) investigated demotivators among Japanese EFL learners, identifying factors such as inadequate school facilities, negative attitudes toward the English language and community, prior failure experiences, and peer influence (Samifanni, 2024). Samifanni (2024) discussed internal and external demotivating factors and low expectancy for success and lack of self-discipline as personal demotivators for Japanese university students. Kimura et al. (2001) emphasized that Japanese EFL learners possess both enabling and inhibiting motivational factors. While recognizing the importance of teachers in their learning, they also experience demotivation related to anxiety, past negative experiences, and a preference for teacher-centered approaches.

Learner autonomy involves taking responsibility for one's learning. Sakai and Takagi (2009) explored the relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency among Japanese university students. Their findings revealed varying degrees of learner autonomy across different proficiency levels, suggesting the need for tailored pedagogical approaches to help develop autonomy (Sakai and Tagaki, 2009). Kimura et al. (2000) and Head (2023) investigated motivation in various Japanese EFL learning environments (junior high school, high school, junior college, and university), concluding that the most significant motivational factor was varied in nature, blending intrinsic and integrative elements. They also noted the complex nature of instrumental motivation in this context. Head (2023) emphasized the importance of engaging pedagogy and recognizing students' diverse motivational orientations within secondary level education.

Again, to look at the broader motivational context outside of the tertiary setting, Kirkpatrick, Kirkpatrick, and Derakhshan (2024) focused on elementary and high school students. Their research provided valuable insights into the broader Japanese educational context and the development of attitudes and motivation toward English learning. Their research revealed a generally positive disposition among Japanese students toward learning English,

emphasizing the significant influence of personal attitudes on learning motivation. The authors discovered that most elementary and high school students enjoy English classes, understand the content well, and find value in studying English. The study also emphasizes the crucial role teachers play in shaping student motivation by creating positive learning environments, building strong relationships, and employing engaging teaching methods. This finding aligns with the emphasis on teacher-specific motivation in studies like those by Kimura et al. (2001) and the discussions of Motivating Teacher Strategies (MotS) in Lamb (2017). The drop in motivation when students' transition from secondary to tertiary education in Japan can be explained by several factors. Manalo et al. (2006) observe that the intense focus on academic achievement during the "examination hell" (Manalo et al., 2006, p. 115) of high school often leaves students burned out by the time they enter university. For many, university represents their first opportunity to experience freedom, which can shift their attention away from academics and toward personal interests or social activities. Additionally, students often enroll in university due to societal or familial expectations rather than intrinsic motivation, leading to unclear academic goals and higher levels of "amotivation" (Manalo et al., 2006).

3. Methodology

The survey was conducted by two university teachers during the spring term of 2024. It involved six English Communication classes (three per teacher) at Muroran Institute of Technology (MuroranIT). MuroranIT is a national university situated in Hokkaido, northern Japan. The university has approximately 3,000 students who pursue engineering, hard science degrees and other technology related degrees. The English Communication course at MuroranIT is compulsory for all students and takes place over a period of 15 weeks. The course content is targeted towards second year undergraduate students and classes have about 26 students per class. The survey was paper based and students completed it at the end of a normal class period. Participation was wholly optional. The questionnaires were anonymous. The survey was administered in accordance with the university's ethical guidelines for conducting research.

Several studies have used surveys to investigate language learning motivation among Japanese EFL learners (Agawa and Takeuchi, 2016) and thus it has proved to be a useful tool in developing knowledge in that area. The survey used in this study was offered in Japanese to maximize participant comprehension.

Table 1*Survey Structure with Response Types*

Section	Statement / Question	Response Type
Motivational Statements (Likert Scale)	I want to learn English to communicate with international students at this university.	6-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree)
Motivational Statements (Likert Scale)	I want to learn English to communicate with people from English-speaking countries.	6-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree)
Motivational Statements (Likert Scale)	I feel that learning English is important for my future career.	6-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree)
Motivational Statements (Likert Scale)	I want to learn English for traveling abroad.	6-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree)
Motivational Statements (Likert Scale)	I think that including cultural topics in English classes makes them more interesting.	6-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree)
Motivational Statements (Likert Scale)	I am more motivated to learn English because of my interest in English-speaking countries.	6-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree)
Exposure to English Speakers	How many foreign English speakers, excluding teachers, have you met?	Open-ended numerical response
English Proficiency (TOEIC)	Which of the following is your TOEIC score range? (e.g., 100-199, 200-299, etc.)	Multiple-choice (TOEIC score range selection)

To assess the participants' motivations for learning English (see Table 1), a Likert scale was utilized. The Likert scale is a well-established and reliable tool for measuring attitudes and perceptions in language learning research (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). It provides a structured format in which participants indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with specific statements, using a six-point scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, as was the case in this study. The Likert scale allows for a scaled measurement of participants' perspectives by capturing variations in motivation levels rather than limiting responses to “yes” or “no” choices. This makes it particularly useful for understanding the reasons why Japanese university

students engage with English learning, such as career aspirations, cultural interests, and opportunities for international communication. To further analyze students' motivations, the mean and standard deviation of responses were calculated. Each Likert response was assigned a numerical value: Strongly Disagree was coded as 1, Disagree as 2, Somewhat Disagree as 3, Somewhat Agree as 4, Agree as 5, and Strongly Agree as 6. This numerical coding enabled a more detailed quantitative analysis beyond basic responses. The mean provided insight into the central tendency of participant responses, indicating the overall level of agreement for each motivational factor. The standard deviation was calculated to assess variability in responses, helping to identify whether participants' motivations were widely shared or varied significantly across the sample. This statistical approach allowed for a clearer understanding of key motivational trends and the extent to which external and intrinsic factors influenced students' engagement with English learning.

Initially the results were transcribed manually from the paper questionnaires into CSV files. The data was based on 122 respondents across the six classes and each respondent was labelled as A or B to correspond with the teacher's class. These files were then uploaded to JASP to conduct statistical analysis across the different data sets. JASP is open-source statistical software supported by the University of Amsterdam and is similar to SPSS. This allowed for descriptive statistics to be generated based on the results data and gave insights into Means and Standard Deviations (SD) and allowed for Spearman Rank Correlations tests. Following Boone and Boone (2012), the Likert-scale responses in this study were treated as interval data. While individual Likert-type items are ordinal, research supports the use of parametric statistical analysis when multiple Likert-type items are combined into a composite measure. This approach allows for the calculation and use of means and standard deviations, facilitating comparisons across motivational factors. Graphs were also generated in Microsoft Excel based on the initial CSV files. Again, the graphs were generated based on the responses of all 122 participants.

4. Results

As stated previously, the study aimed to explore participants' motivations and perspectives regarding learning English, specifically focusing on factors such as communication, career importance, cultural interests, and exposure to English speakers. The survey involved 122 participants ($N = 122$), and their responses were combined to generate descriptive statistics (Table 2) and subsequent discussions on a statement-by-statement basis presented here after.

Table 2*Descriptive Statistics Table for Likert Style Survey Statements 1. N=122.*

Statement	Mean SD	
I want to learn English to communicate with international students at this university.	4.2	1.3
I want to learn English to communicate with people from English-speaking countries.	4.8	1.2
I feel that learning English is important for my future career.	5.4	0.8
I want to learn English for traveling abroad.	4.9	1.2
I think that including cultural topics in English classes makes them more interesting.	4.7	1.3
I am more motivated to learn English because of my interest in English-speaking countries.	4.6	1.3

Note: Responses were measured on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 6 = *Strongly Agree*).

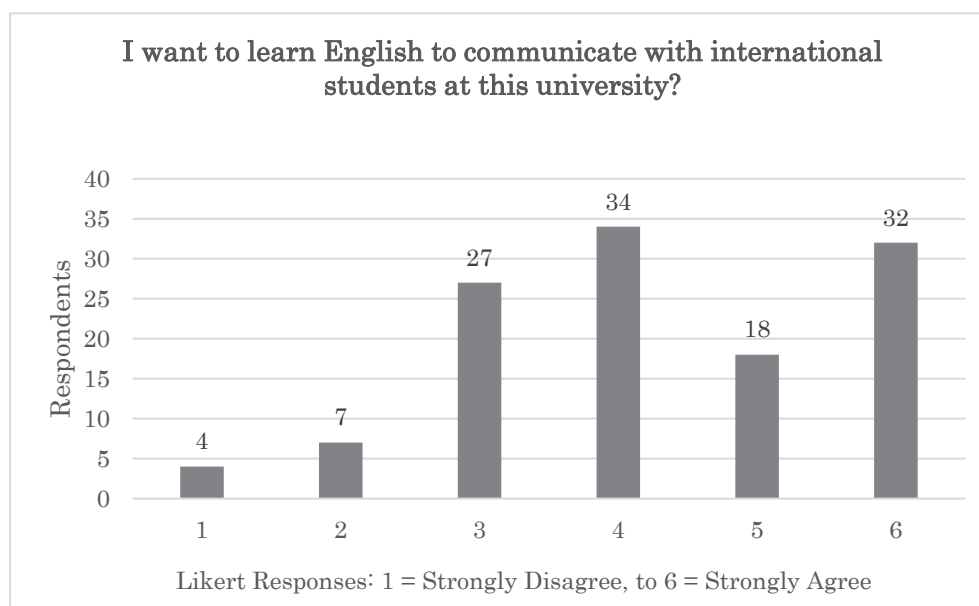
4.1 Communicating with International Students

Statement: I want to learn English to communicate with international students at this university.

The mean response (see Table 2) was 4.2 (SD = 1.3), suggesting a moderate level of interest in using English for interactions within the university context. The mean value of 4.2 falls between "somewhat agree" and "agree," indicating that while there is a general inclination towards using English for communication with international students, it is not a strongly held priority for many respondents. The bar chart in Figure 2 provides more detail on the distribution of responses. 34 participants (27.9%) responded with a 4, while 32 participants (26.2%) selected 6, indicating that a significant portion of respondents agree or strongly agree with the importance of English for communication with international peers. However, 27 participants (22.1%) selected 3, indicating a degree of ambivalence, and a smaller number (7 participants, 5.7%, and 4 participants, 3.3%) selected 2 or 1, reflecting a lack of interest. The diversity in responses suggests that participants' experiences and goals regarding social integration in the university context vary significantly, with some placing higher emphasis on these interactions while others do not prioritize them as much.

Figure 2

Results for Communicating with International Students within the University.



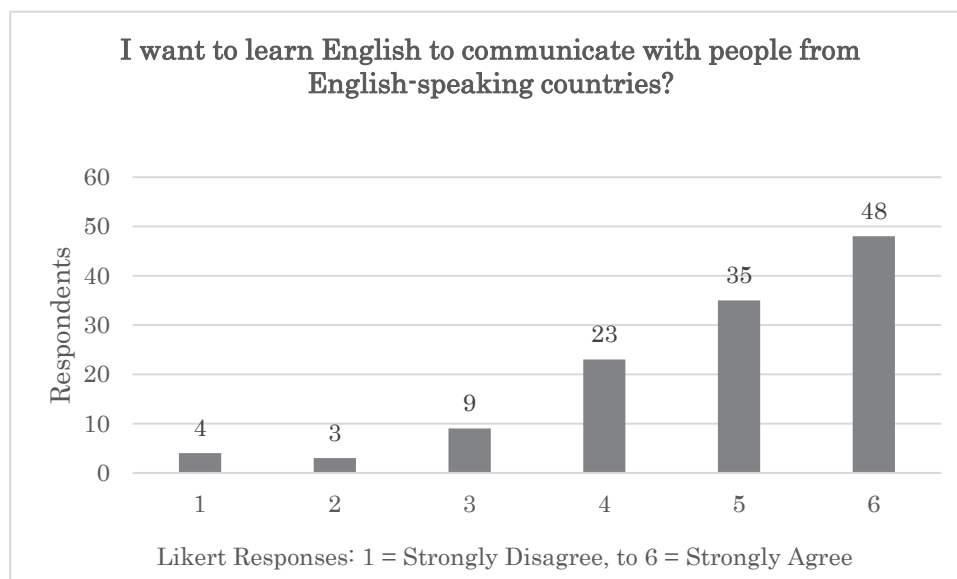
4.2 Communicating with People from English-Speaking Countries

Statement: I want to learn English to communicate with people from English-speaking countries.

The mean score (Table 2) was 4.8 (SD = 1.2), indicating a relatively high motivation for using English to communicate beyond the local environment. The mean value of 4.8 suggests that most respondents are inclined towards communicating with native English speakers, with many participants agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. Figure 3 provides more detail on the distribution of responses. 48 participants (39.3%) selected 6, indicating strong agreement, and 35 participants (28.7%) selected 5, indicating agreement. Additionally, 23 participants (18.9%) selected 4, suggesting moderate agreement. A smaller number of participants selected lower values: 9 participants (7.4%) selected 3, 3 participants (2.5%) selected 2, and 4 participants (3.3%) selected 1, reflecting a lack of interest. The slightly lower standard deviation compared to the previous statement shows more consistency in responses, implying that most participants have a shared desire for cross-cultural communication.

Figure 3

Desire to Communicate with People from English-speaking Countries.



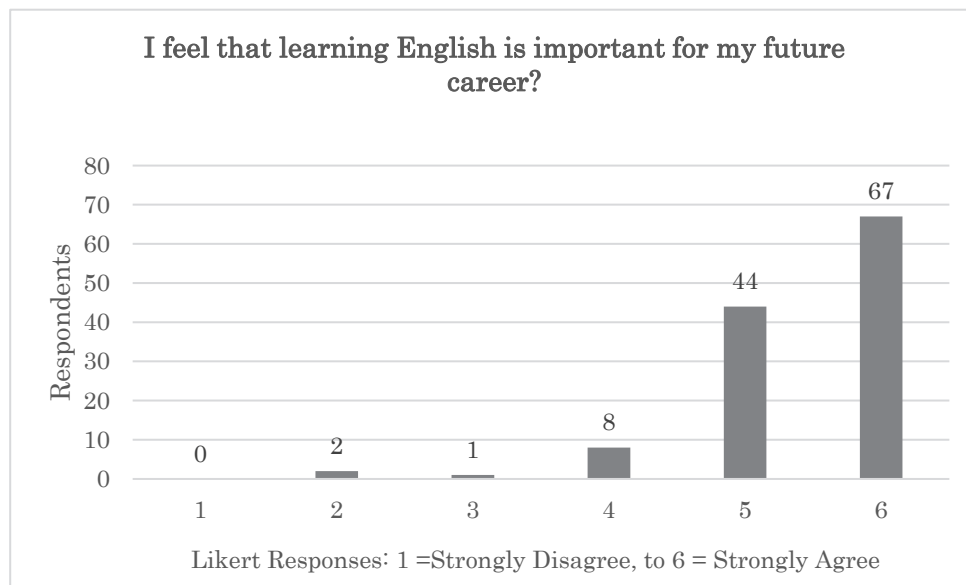
4.3 Importance for Future Career

Statement: I feel that learning English is important for my future career.

The mean score (Table 2) was 5.4 (SD = 0.8). This high mean score reflects a very strong consensus among participants regarding the importance of English for career development. The mean of 5.4 is close to "strongly agree," indicating that most participants view English proficiency as a crucial skill that could significantly impact their job prospects and professional growth. Figure 4 provides more detail on the distribution of responses. 67 participants (54.9%) selected 6, indicating strong agreement, and 44 participants (36.1%) selected 5, indicating agreement. A smaller number of participants selected lower values: 8 participants (6.6%) selected 4, 1 participant (0.8%) selected 3, and 2 participants (1.6%) selected 2. No participants selected 1. The relatively low standard deviation suggests a high degree of agreement, with most participants aligning closely in their recognition of the career benefits of English. This high level of extrinsic motivation to learn English for career-related reasons suggests that practical, career-oriented benefits are one of the strongest drivers of English learning for this group.

Figure 4

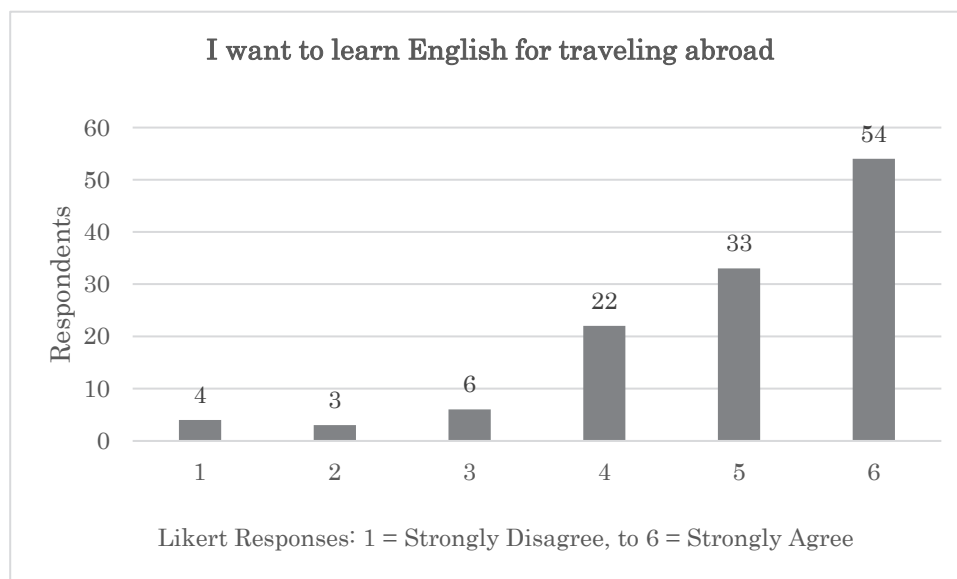
Importance of English for Students' Future Careers.



4.4 Traveling Abroad

Statement: I want to learn English for traveling abroad.

The mean score (Table 2) was 4.9 (SD = 1.2). This indicates that a significant number of participants see English as an important tool for traveling abroad. A mean score of 4.9 falls between "agree" and "strongly agree". Figure 5 provides more detail on the distribution of responses. 54 participants (44.3%) selected 6, indicating strong agreement, and 33 participants (27.0%) selected 5, indicating agreement. Additionally, 22 participants (18.0%) selected 4, suggesting moderate agreement. A smaller number of participants selected lower values: 6 participants (4.9%) selected 3, 3 participants (2.5%) selected 2, and 4 participants (3.3%) selected 1, reflecting a lack of interest. The moderate standard deviation suggests that while most participants agree on the value of English for travel, there are some variations in the degree of importance placed on it, possibly due to differences in personal travel experiences or aspirations.

Figure 5*Importance of English for Traveling Abroad.*

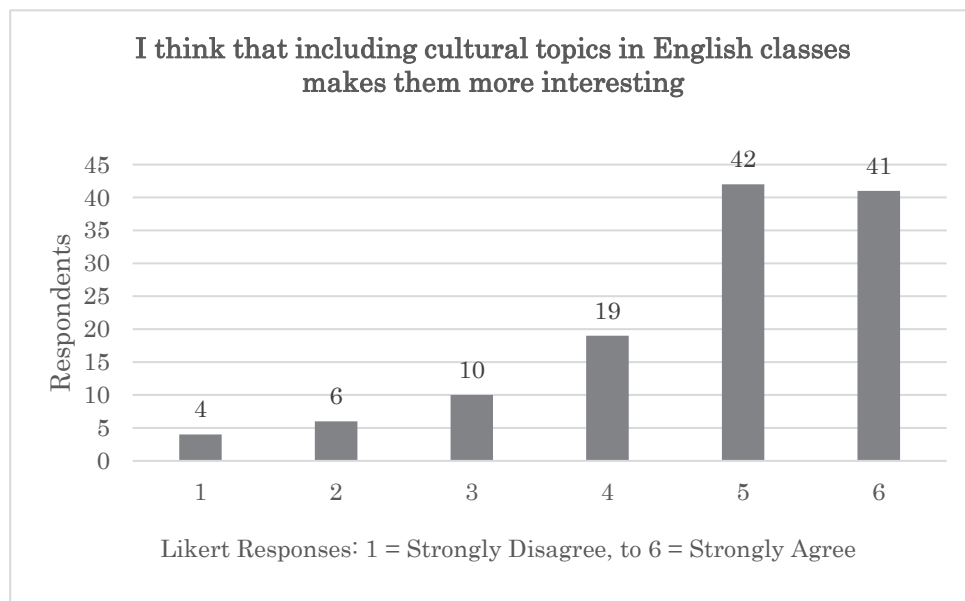
4.5 Inclusion of Cultural Topics in English Classes

Statement: I think that including cultural topics in English classes makes them more interesting.

The mean response (Table 2) was 4.7 ($SD = 1.3$). This suggests moderate positive agreement among participants regarding the inclusion of cultural topics in English classes. The mean score of 4.7 suggests that participants generally find cultural topics to be an enriching element of English education, making classes more engaging and relevant. Figure 6 provides more detail on the distribution of responses. 42 participants (34.4%) selected 5, indicating agreement, and 41 participants (33.6%) selected 6, indicating strong agreement. Additionally, 19 participants (15.6%) selected 4, suggesting moderate agreement. A smaller number of participants selected lower values: 10 participants (8.2%) selected 3, 6 participants (4.9%) selected 2, and 4 participants (3.3%) selected 1, reflecting a lack of interest. Including cultural aspects in language education may help create a richer learning experience by contextualizing language use, but not all participants may value this equally. When compared with responses to the statement on the importance of English for students' future careers ($M = 5.4$, $SD = 0.8$), it becomes evident that career-related motivations hold stronger significance. This variation shows the need for a balanced approach in curriculum design that addresses linguistic skills, cultural knowledge and professional applicability to address varied learner needs.

Figure 6

Inclusion of Cultural Topics for Greater Interest.



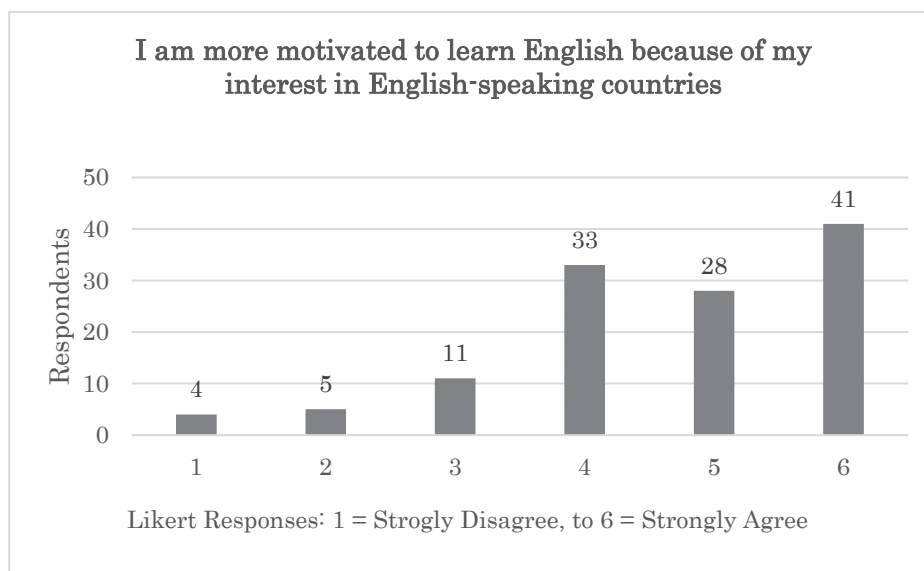
4.6 Interest in English-Speaking Countries

Statement: I am more motivated to learn English because of my interest in English-speaking countries.

Figure 7 shows that 41 participants (33.6%) selected 6, indicating strong agreement, while 28 participants (23.0%) selected 5, indicating agreement. Additionally, 33 participants (27.0%) selected 4, suggesting moderate agreement. A smaller number of participants selected lower values: 11 participants (9.0%) selected 3, 5 participants (4.1%) selected 2, and 4 participants (3.3%) selected 1, reflecting a lack of interest. This suggests that the variation in responses is because some participants are strongly motivated by an interest in English-speaking countries, while others are less influenced by this factor.

Figure 7

Motivation to Learn English based on interest in English-speaking Countries.



4.7. Exposure to English Speakers

Question: How many foreign English speakers, excluding English teachers, have you met?

(Note: Participants were free to write any number they wished in a blank space for this question and thus the X-axis in Figure 8 reflects those values.)

Table 3

Number of Foreign English Speakers met Excluding Educators. N=122

How many foreign English speakers, excluding English teachers, have you met?	
Mean	9.32

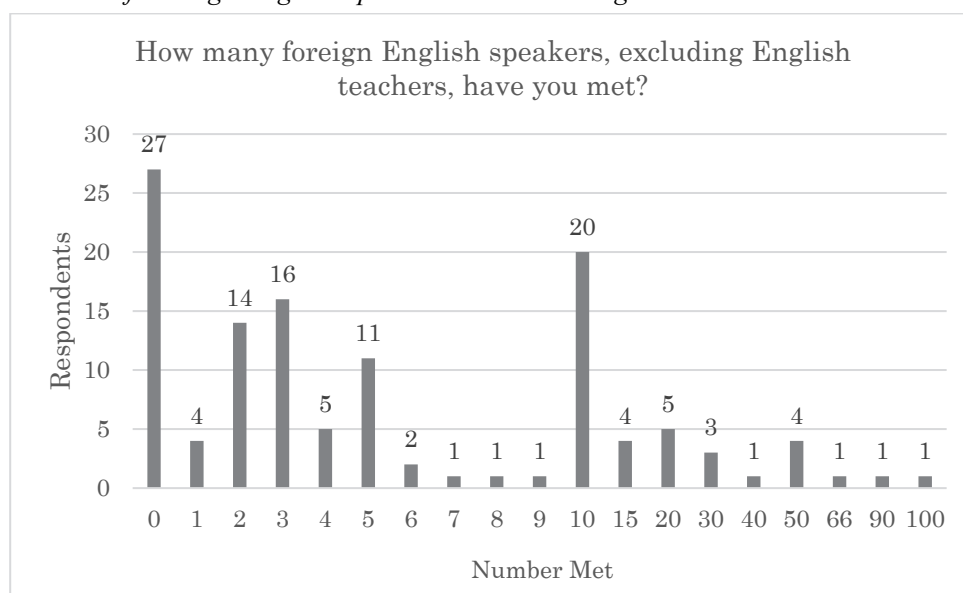
The mean response (Table 3) was 9.32, indicating that participants have had varied exposure to foreign English speakers. And the results indicate that the majority of students are not meeting many foreign English speakers, excluding English teachers. Geographical factors may play a part in this given Muroran being located in Hokkaido. According to the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO, n.d.), foreign visitors to Hokkaido in 2023 comprised much smaller numbers compared to more southerly destinations like Tokyo or Osaka. For example, only 5.2% of Australians and 2.7% of Canadian visits came to Hokkaido. Using these JNTO figures as an indicators means there

are less English speaking foreigners for students to encounter in Hokkaido generally, and thus, Muroran.

Figure 8 provides a detailed breakdown of the number of foreign English speakers participants have met. A smaller number of participants reported having met higher numbers, such as 5 participants (4.1%) who met 15 speakers, and individual participants reported meeting 30, 40, 50, 66, 90, and 100 foreign speakers (each at 0.8%). This variation indicates differing levels of opportunity for exposure, which may impact participants' comfort and proficiency in using English in real-life communication contexts. Those with more frequent interactions with foreign English speakers are likely to feel more comfortable and motivated in their English language learning journey compared to those with little or no exposure.

Figure 8

Number of Foreign English Speakers met Excluding Educators.



4.8 TOEIC Score Range

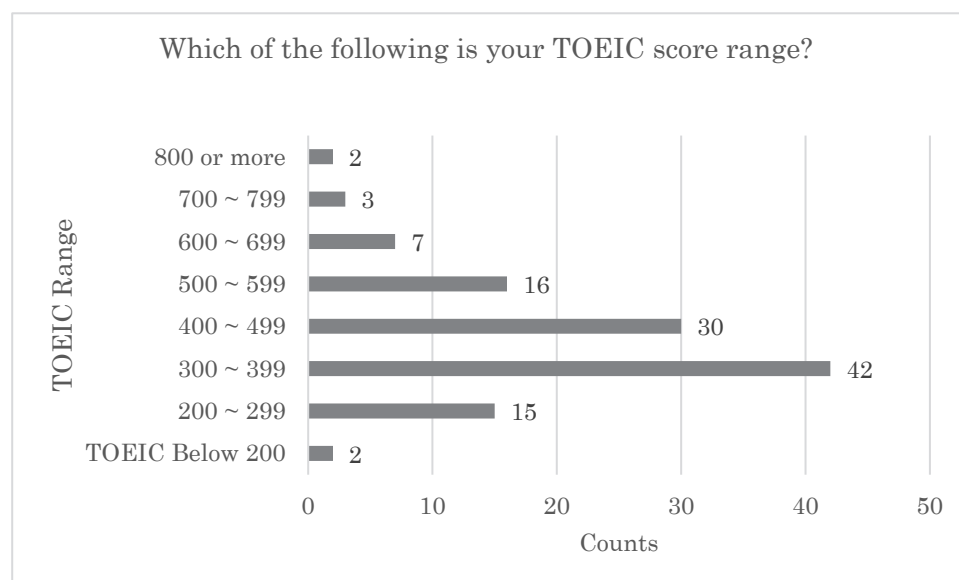
Question: Which of the following is your TOEIC score range?

The responses to the TOEIC score range (Figure 9) question showed significant variation among participants, reflecting a broad spectrum of English proficiency levels. It is important to note that the TOEIC test assesses listening and reading skills, meaning that these scores do not reflect participants' speaking or writing abilities. The most common TOEIC score range was 300-399, selected by 42 participants (34.4%). These results indicate that the majority of participants equate to A2 on the CEFR scale, which is high beginner level, with relatively few achieving high scores that indicate advanced proficiency. This variation shows the need for differentiated learning strategies to

accommodate students across different proficiency levels, ranging from beginner to intermediate, with targeted support for those aiming to reach advanced levels.

Figure 9

Respondent TOEIC Score Range.



4.9 Spearman Rank Correlation Tests

This study also looked at the connection between respondent TOEIC scores and the number of foreign English speakers people had met excluding English teachers. A Spearman's rank correlation test was used to examine this aspect. That test checks how strongly two variables are linked. The test showed a Spearman correlation coefficient of 0.2746, which means there is a weak positive link between the two variables. The p-value was 0.0027, which is below 0.05, indicating that the results are statistically significant. In simpler terms, this means it is unlikely the relationship happened by chance. The findings suggest that students with higher TOEIC scores might have met more foreign English speakers.

Further Spearman rank correlation analysis revealed some interesting associations (Table 4) between TOEIC scores and motivations for learning English, as measured by responses to the six Likert-scale statements. For example, a positive relationship was found between TOEIC scores and the desire to learn English to communicate with international students at the university, with a statistically significant p-value of 0.033. Additionally, a moderate correlation was observed between TOEIC scores and the aspiration to communicate with people from English-speaking countries, indicating that individuals with higher TOEIC scores are more inclined to view English as a useful tool for international communication. The correlation between TOEIC scores and the desire to learn English for traveling abroad was positive and statistically significant showing a connection between higher TOEIC scores and travel-related language goals.

Table 4

Spearman Rank Correlation Test Results for TOEIC Score and Likert Statements

Likert Statement	Spearman Correlation	P Value
I want to learn English to communicate with international students at this university.	0.198	0.033
I want to learn English to communicate with people from English-speaking countries.	0.36	< 0.001
I feel that learning English is important for my future career.	0.087	0.351
I want to learn English for traveling abroad.	0.26	0.005
I think that including cultural topics in English classes makes them more interesting.	0.099	0.289
I am more motivated to learn English because of my interest in English-speaking countries.	0.281	0.002

5. Discussion

The survey results provide valuable insights into the motivations of participants learning English within the English Communication I course. The data suggests a diversity of reasons for learning the language, However, these motivations are not uniformly distributed, and various factors influence participants' interests and priorities.

One interesting finding is the moderate level of interest in using English for communication internally with international students at the university. While some participants expressed a strong desire to engage with international peers, others were more ambivalent. This may be due to factors such as a lack of confidence or limited opportunities for interaction during classes. A key potential issue here is that undergraduate international students at the university are predominantly from China and have a sufficiently high level of Japanese that it may negate the need to use English to communicate with Japanese students. Addressing these barriers through institutional support, such as structured language exchange sessions with native speakers or expanding English circles, could encourage greater engagement and interest in using English within the university context. That context being that there are currently no English/Foreign language majors offered at MuroranIT, and English is compulsory rather than elective in most cases.

The desire to communicate with individuals from English-speaking countries showed higher motivation, with many participants indicating strong agreement. This suggests that the broader appeal of cross-cultural communication, perhaps fueled by globalization, career opportunities, and personal aspirations, is an important factor. Participants seem to view English

as a bridge to connect with others globally. Courses aiming to support English language learning could benefit from emphasizing the value of these global connections in their curriculum.

The survey results align with SDT in how external and internal motivation influence English learning. Many students demonstrated instrumental motivation, recognizing the value of English for their careers. With a mean score of 5.4, participants clearly recognize the importance of English proficiency for career advancement. Specific career paths, such as roles in multinational corporations, international trade, cutting edge technology and engineering, require English skills for effective communication and collaboration. These findings suggest that emphasizing the career-oriented benefits of English could further motivate learners. Offering targeted career-specific English training or workshops could further address the needs of students aspiring to work in sectors where English is critical. While intrinsic motivation was present in students with a strong interest in English-speaking cultures, its role appeared to be more limited. Additionally, opportunities for autonomy and real-world engagement, which are useful for sustaining motivation, may be restricted due to the aforementioned geographical context, limiting exposure to foreign English speakers.

Interestingly, travel also emerged as a key motivator, with many participants indicating that English matters to them for navigating and experiencing foreign environments. Those with prior travel experience are likely more motivated due to the perceived utility of English during their travels. This implies that experiential learning opportunities, such as study abroad programs or international internships, could further enhance motivation for learning English. Institutions might consider creating more opportunities for real-world application of English skills, which could solidify its perceived value among learners.

The inclusion of cultural topics in English classes was generally viewed positively, with participants indicating that such topics make classes more engaging. This points to the importance of integrating cultural content into language education to spark interest and deepen understanding. However, the variation in responses also suggests that not all participants equally value cultural content, which may indicate differing personal interests or goals from English lessons. A balanced approach that combines both practical skills and embraces elements of cultural understanding could cater to a wider range of learners.

The analysis of TOEIC scores showed a wide range of English proficiency levels, with the majority of participants falling into high beginner categories. This variation emphasizes the need for differentiated instruction that accommodates learners at different stages of proficiency. Teachers should consider offering tailored support for both lower-level learners needing foundational skills and higher-level learners seeking advanced proficiency.

Additionally, the data on exposure to foreign English speakers indicates a disparity in opportunities for real-world language use. A significant portion of participants reported limited interactions with foreign English speakers, which may limit their practical

language skills and confidence. Creating more opportunities for participants to interact with native English speakers, either in person or via video interaction (Jauregi & Canto, 2012), could help bridge this gap and enhance practical learning experiences and “enhance knowledge of the target language” (Jauregi & Canto, 2012, p. 155). Research has shown that “peers, for example, do not provide as much feedback as native speakers and the feedback they provide can be faulty” (Adams, 2018, p.3).

6. Conclusion

The survey results demonstrate that English learners have multiple motivations, including career aspirations, cross-cultural communication, and travel. The data suggests that participants face various challenges, such as differing proficiency levels and limited opportunities for practical language use with foreign English speakers. Universities should prioritize addressing these challenges by offering enhanced overseas-focused English training, and differentiated learning strategies to accommodate varying proficiency levels in mixed ability classes. Creating further opportunities for practical application in English speaking countries, such as language exchange programs or internships, is essential for enhancing learners' confidence and competence. Supporting English learners can help build towards their success both within and beyond the classroom, but this would necessitate further funding from governmental bodies to be done in a comprehensive manner.

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