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JAPANESE STUDENTS' MINDSET AND MOTIVATION IN STUDYING ENGLISH GRAMMAR AND READING

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Abstract

This study probes the intrinsic and extrinsic types of the motivation of Japanese University students and sheds light on their mindset and beliefs about learning English Grammar and Reading. During 2016, a survey was administered to 260 students at a University in Tohoku, Japan. The findings revealed that 73% of participants tended to have a fixed mindset with a slight degree of growth mindset while 19% tended to favor a growth mindset with some degree of fixed mindset, 6% with a strong fixed mindset and 2% with a strong growth mindset. This suggests that these students need to be motivated to be more pro-failure and accepting of mistakes to succeed in learning English. During this research, the author also taught with the support of the Family Environment Mode Approach (FEMA) (Ocampo, 2015). The study confirmed that the FEMA approach promoted a feeling of relaxation in at least half the participants during classroom activities, despite the pressures they were facing due to Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) examination preparation. 98% of these students were also found to be extrinsically motivated in learning English grammar and reading, as they were included in their curriculum.

Keywords

Mindset, Motivation, Intrinsic, Extrinsic, Family Environment Mode Approach (FEMA)

1. Introduction

When Japanese learners are asked about their willingness to learn English, one might expect their answer to be either, “*Eigo wa muzukashii*” [English is difficult] or “*Watashi wa Eigo o hanasenai*” [I can't speak English]. When students hit an unexpected barrier such as failing a test or receiving a low score in an English exam, they fall back on the defeatist phrases just mentioned. The belief that English is difficult, particularly grammar and reading, results in a mindset that needs to be given greater attention by educators, especially since mindsets have a vital role in shaping people's thoughts and reactions. Mindset and social context are broadly influential and even affect medical encounters as recognized by Crum (2017). In her studies, she proved that changing the mindset and the qualities of the patient-provider relationship, such as empathy and understanding, could also produce measurable physiological improvement beyond effects of the actual treatment. It does so by boosting patient expectations, lowering anxiety, increasing psychological support, and improving patient mood.

Mindsets tend towards being either ‘fixed’ or ‘growth’ oriented. According to Dweck (Cimpain, Arce, Markman, & Dweck, 2007), a person with fixed mindset believes that failure is the limit of their abilities and that s/he lacks the ability required to succeed. Such individuals do not like to be challenged, stick to what they know and tend to give up and try something that they are confident in their ability to do. In the case of growth mindset, failure challenges the individual to grow, feedback is seen as constructive, and s/he readily tries new things. This is illustrated by Obe R., 2016 in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Growth Mindset and Fixed Mindset

These findings are supported by Ocampo (2015 & 2016) and applied to English language learning. She demonstrated the efficacy of the Family Environment Mode Approach (FEMA) framework, which promotes and develops a deeper level of intimacy, trust, support, and non-judgmental attitude towards language failure and mistakes. Through FEMA, Japanese EFL learners were able to alter their mindset gradually and move towards success in their English learning journey. Ilendo-Milewska A. I. (2017) also emphasized that it is beneficial to intensify the sense of emotional bonds with the teacher. This means that pupils need to experience the conditions supporting their growth towards a high level. These include especially: sharing responsibility for changing educational process, sense of certain limits in life and development, openness in relationships, understanding and acceptance, and sense of emotional bonds with the tutor. Effecting a change in mindset is a challenging task faced by educators. The self-motivated belief that English is difficult is the unseen wall Japanese EFL learners are building and which blocks their minds to appreciate the beauty of learning the language. The current research seeks to understand the influence of mindset on this process, particularly as it relates to the study of grammar and reading in a Japanese context.

2. Review of Literature

The influence of mindset and motivation on language learning represents an affective dimension that has been examined from a number of perspectives, notably by Dörnyei (Dörnyei, 1990; Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013), and MacIntyre (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; MacIntyre & Clement, 1996; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991, 1994). The work of these researchers provides a useful background when considering affect and learning from a wider perspective. Additionally, since 2000, a number of articles have appeared considering the role of emotion in English language teaching, including work by Murphy, who sees emotion as “essential for learning” (Murphy, 2011) and more recently Dewaele, who regards emotions as “at the heart of the foreign language learning process” (Dewaele, 2011).

Related work has dealt with child development (Smiley & Dweck, 1994) and the importance of praise (Mueller & Dweck, 1998; see also Cimpain, Arce, Markman, & Dweck, 2007, Gunderson et al., 2013). These authors show that individual differences in beliefs and natural traits emerge as early as preschool (Smiley & Dweck, 1994) and are shaped by messages that children receive from a number of sources, including parents, teachers, and culture. The

focus of parents' praise matters; young children who receive parental praise focused on their effort are more likely to have growth mindsets years later (Gunderson et al., 2013). Feedback from teachers, both praise, and criticism, also affects children's mindsets, depending upon whether the feedback focuses on the person or the process. Research into different types of feedback demonstrates that children who receive person-focused praise more often adopt fixed mindsets and display maladaptive responses to failure compared to children who receive process-focused praise (Mueller & Dweck, 1998; see also Cimpain, Arce, Markman, & Dweck, 2007).

Important work by Velez and Cano (2008) on verbal and nonverbal cues explains how these correspond to increased motivation of students. These authors emphasize the importance of teacher immediacy, which is a concept taken from implicit communication theory as expounded by Mehrabian (1981). Implicit forms of communication carry emotions and attitudes beyond speech, while explicit communication is conveyed verbally. Verbal and nonverbal immediacy in teaching has been well researched. Such studies offer guidelines for effective verbal immediacy in the classroom. These include the idea that a well-chosen syntax is more effective, such as syntax expressing probability (will), ownership (my/our class) and inclusiveness (we). As for nonverbal immediacy, affective language signaling closeness, warmth and belonging helps to create a positive atmosphere conducive to learning.

Dewey J. (1965 & 2016), emphasized that men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to a shared possession of these things. In a FEMA environment, these factors assist adults to consciously control the nature of education by controlling the environment in which they act, think and feel. Education never takes place directly, but rather indirectly by means of the environment. Whether we permit chance environments to do the work, or whether we design environments for the purpose makes a great difference. A classroom is a typical instance of an environment framed to influence the mental and moral disposition of its members. It is a unique social environment that has the potential to nurture the capacities and educational motivation of its inhabitants.

Ushioda (2005), examined motivation, pointing out that it is a factor that has been regarded as something that teachers 'do' to learners through a variety of motivational tricks and strategies. However, the current study, which includes the researcher's own work on FEMA (Ocampo 2015 & 2016), emphasizes the importance of fostering learners' motivation and feeling

of autonomy and aims to contribute to the existing literature on affective influences on motivation and language learning.

3. Methodology

In order to understand Japanese university students' motivation in studying English grammar and reading based on Dweck's models of fixed vs. growth mindset, written questionnaires were conducted. The researcher also carried out classroom observation in the role of participant observer applied her recently developed FEMA approach. Participants were 260 computer major, second and third year students (male = 230, female = 30) at a university in the Tohoku region of Japan during the spring and summer terms of 2016 and the winter term of 2017. Two questionnaires used in the study: Mindset Survey Analysis by Dweck (2008) (Appendix A) and Why do you study English? developed by the researcher based on the work of Brown, R.A. (2004) (Appendix B).

Students answered these questionnaires assessing their English learning attitudes, beliefs, goals, and reasons for studying English. There were two types of items. The first set stated 20 reasons for learning English and students indicated the degree to which they were studying for each reason, on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all for this reason*) to 5 (*absolutely for this reason*). The questionnaire about the reasons why students were studying English was originally written in English and translated into Japanese by a bilingual Japanese English teacher to ensure accuracy. The questionnaire items appeared in both Japanese and English (Appendix B). In the case of the Mindset survey questionnaire (Appendix A), it was written in English in order to form a part of students' preparation for taking the TOEIC examination. During the end of spring 2016, summer 2016, and winter 2017, during class time, students were asked to voluntarily answer the Mindset Survey questionnaire. In this case, 31 questionnaires were retrieved. Data was analyzed taking into consideration Dweck's idea of fixed vs. growth mindset models, the results of which appear in in the following section. As mentioned, during this project the Family Environment Mode Approach (FEMA). This approach promotes motivation by changing the classroom mindset to one where failure and mistakes are viewed and embraced as necessary parts of the language-learning journey. In addition, it can help to alleviate and decrease the possibility of off-task behavior by reducing the probability of encountering distraction and regulating students' emotional experiences. Ocampo (2015 & 2016) also emphasized the strength

of FEMA when fostering an atmosphere of mutual acceptance, constructive criticism and non-judgmental acceptance of language errors. In the current project, the researcher began by initially introducing FEMA to the students, and explaining the importance of a homely atmosphere that creates a stress-free environment. She also encouraged them to develop their growth mindset by embracing and loving failures and mistakes. Figure 2 illustrates this model, below (Obe R., 2016).

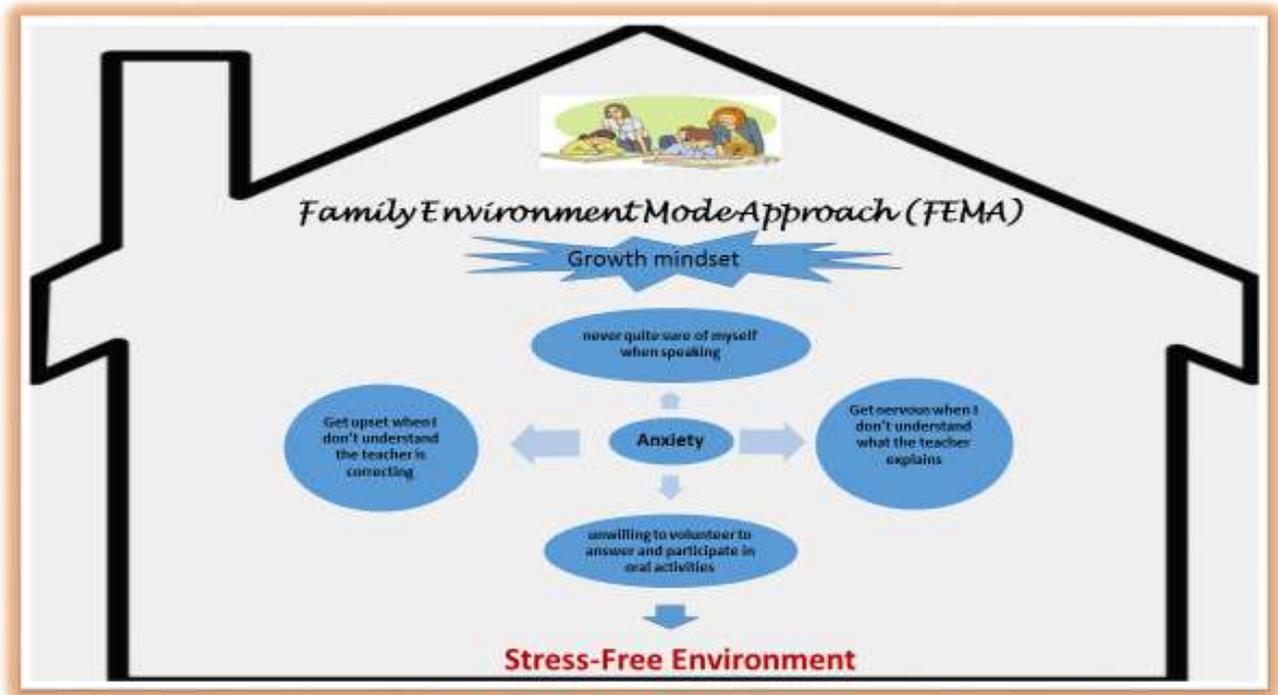


Figure 2: Family Environment Mode Approach Framework

4. Results and Discussion

Based on the result of the Mindset Quiz Survey, 81% of students were found to have a fixed mindset with some growth ideas while 19% of students were classified as having a growth mindset with some fixed ideas. As mentioned earlier, Dweck's conception of a fixed mindset is one in which students believe their basic abilities, their intelligence, their talents, are just fixed traits (Dweck, 2008). They have a certain predetermined amount and more. In contrast, with a growth mindset, students understand that their talents and abilities can be developed further through effort, good teaching, and persistence.

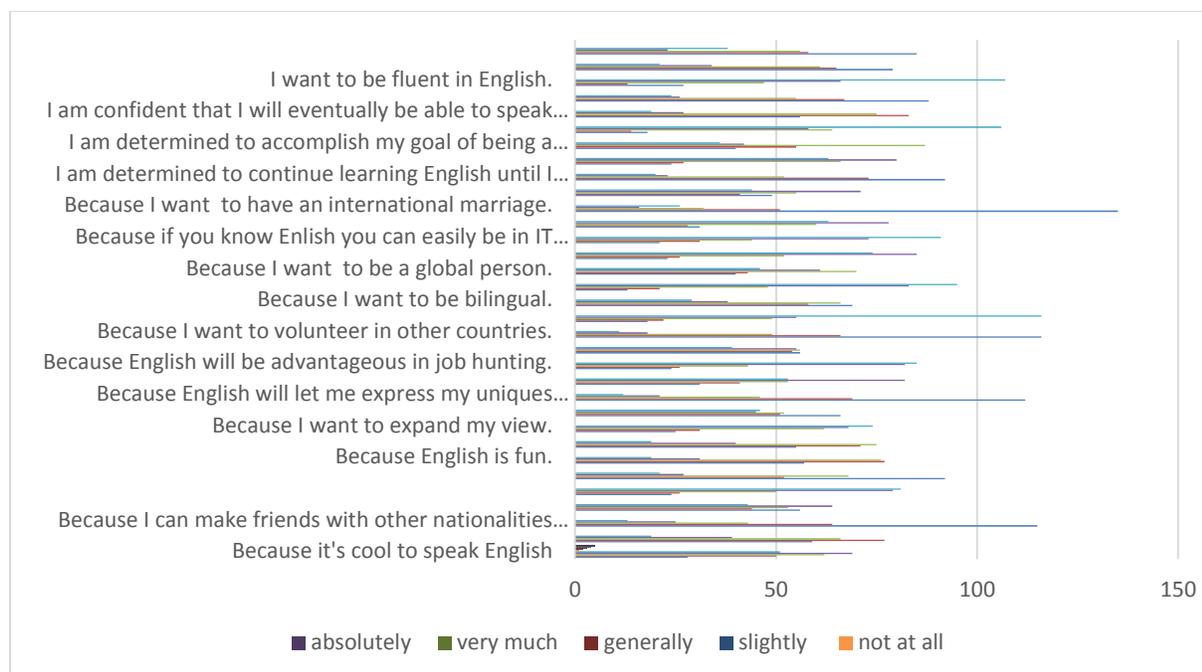


Figure 3: *Reasons why Japanese students study English*

This research also revealed (Figure 3) that the top factors that motivated the students to study English to be: (a) It is a required course, (b) They want to be fluent in understanding and speaking English, (c) They believed that the only thing preventing them from being fluent in English is because of their own lack of effort, (d) English is important for Information Technology (IT) (computer, the Internet, etc.), (e) It is advantageous in finding jobs, and (f) They want to expand their views for internationalization (See Appendix A).

Factors given a low importance or negative result in motivating English study appeared as follows: (a) Not wanting to have an international marriage, (b) Lacking the desire to volunteer in other countries, (c) Not wanting to make friends with other nationalities using social media such as Facebook, Twitter, etc. Students who appraised English study negative had the perception that using the language would prevent them from expressing their unique personality. They did not wish to have a job using English and were not determined to continue learning English as they age. In addition, they felt that a lack of agency in the education process was causing them to fail to learn English. In fact, if English weren't a required course many would not study it at all. They lacked interest in English and had no desire to become bilingual.

How can we best understand findings indicating such a low degree of students' motivation for studying English grammar and reading? To be motivated means to be moved to

do something. A person who feels no impetus or inspiration to act is thus characterized as unmotivated, whereas someone who is energized or activated toward an end is considered motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, people's motivation varies between each level of motivation and in the orientation of that motivation. It may help to consider that there are two main types of motivation namely: instrumental (extrinsic) versus integrative (intrinsic) motivation. Researchers (e.g. Gardner, 1983, p.203; Wilkins, 1972, p.184) have explained and clarified what is meant by an "integrative motivation" as: learning a language because the learner wishes to identify himself with or become integrated into the society of the target language". In other words, a learner is interactively motivated when s/he learns a language because s/he wants to "know more of the culture and values of the foreign language group, to make contact with the speakers of the languages, to live in the country concerned. Instrumental motivation, in contrast, is defined by Gardner & Lambert (1972) as "learning a language because of someone or less clearly perceived utility it might have. In other words, a learner is instrumentally motivated when s/he wants to learn a language in order to do such things as pass an examination, to use it in one's job, to use it on holiday in the country, Instrumental motivation is generally characterized by the desire to obtain something practical or concrete from the study of a second language. Given that instrumental motivation was low amongst the participants in the current study, careful strategies need to be designed if Japan's MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) is to achieve its aim of improvement students' ability to communicate in foreign languages like English (Hasegawa H. 2017).

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

What this study has revealed, and particularly the finding that that the majority of students who participated in the survey had fixed mindset, is alarming and calls for more serious consideration of the issue by teachers and researchers. Despite being given the opportunity to respond in either Japanese or English, very few participants in the study were willing to challenge themselves and use English in their responses. A student who believes that she has a difficulty learning languages will do so unless she amends her mindset. As long as she maintains it, she may even have a vested interest in doing poorly. To protect her self-concept, holding onto the feeling of being right about something may offer some small satisfaction. Given this situation, we need to understand both how fixed mindset originates and develop and promote effective strategies on how to amend it.

Chomsky (2015), stated that to be truly educated and fulfilled a human being needs the ability to inquire and create constructively and independently without external controls. To be truly educated from this point of view means to be in a position to inquire and to create on the basis of the resources available to you, which you've come to appreciate and comprehend. However, the real challenge lies in finding ways of sustaining motivation through the process of learning a language. Aside from the inevitable detriments to motivation posed by institutionalized learning (e.g. coursework requirements, examination pressures), steady increases in the cognitive burden of language learning may also have negative consequences. In this case, the term 'mental realization' and 'appreciation' are more elaborate names for the realizing sense of a thing. The role of the teacher is crucial in helping to amend the mindset of students and help them understand that learning English, particularly grammar and reading, requires direct experience using the language if their goals are to be obtained.

There are various ways to change, to reframe limiting beliefs. In addition to programmatic approaches to encouraging growth mindsets, the language that teachers and practitioners employ in their interactions with adolescents offers opportunities to encourage youths' incremental beliefs. Even in small day-to-day interactions, focusing feedback and praise on students' effort and progress can be a powerful way to encourage youth. Such behavior encourages them to be resilient when they encounter challenges in pursuit of their goals. Another possibility is through mental imagery. Students who are trying to learn to speak a foreign language can visualize themselves speaking the language fluently and interacting with people. Then when they are actually in such a situation, they will, in a sense have been there before. As there exists a very close relationship between our feelings and our mental images, including self-images, if students experience a strong mental image of themselves performing language-learning tasks successfully, this can go a long way towards reducing negative beliefs. Additionally, there are several reasons why a language teacher should acknowledge the individual standpoint from which a learner approaches the language tasks at hand and language learning process. From a communicative point of view, learning goals are bound to vary from one learner to another and so a teacher, whenever possible, should try to take these individual motivations into consideration.

The researcher strongly recommends creating a family-like classroom environment atmosphere based on FEMA and cultivating a stress-free ambiance that leads to the students to

embrace failure and mistakes towards the development of a growth mindset. This project served to affirm the author's confidence that applying FEMA is a positive over-arching approach. Based on this she recommends (a) Focusing students' minds on loving failure/mistake as part of English Grammar and Reading learning journey, (b) Engaging in positive self-talk and being a model to other students, encouraging them to think that mistakes are acceptable as no one is perfect anyway, (c) Having them motivate themselves with incentives and self-rewards and developing an empathic, positive attitude towards mistakes, (d) Engendering a 'test-loving mind' by in students by allowing quizzes, with the exception of the final examination, to be done as open book pair work, and (d) Privileging student-centered activities interactive learning environments. The researcher seeks encourage the belief than everyone can become smarter if they work at it. Although, the importance of a growth mindset seems clear, one also needs to be cautious not to allow of the negative impact a fixed mindset, which can appear unexpectedly in certain situations. The resulting detrimental effect on skill development and growth and motivation should not be underestimated. To understand this process more fully in the near future, the implementation of a larger scale mindset survey with careful explanation and guidance woven into the research design is highly recommended.

Finally, while the current study focused on students in a grammar and reading class, it would be helpful to examine the impact of mindset on classes such as listening and speaking, English for specific purposes or extensive reading. Future work considering these aspects in Japan and in other locations from an intercultural perspective will contribute greatly to our understanding of motivation in the English language classroom.

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Appendix A

Mindset Survey Analysis

Attitudes about learning & intelligence survey. By each statement, mark strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. Mark these choices for what you have felt after the implementation of Family Environment Mode Approach (FEMA) in the class.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Your intelligence is something very basic about you that you can't change very much.				
2. No matter how much intelligence you have, you can always change it quite a bit.				
3. You can always substantially change how intelligent you are.				
4. You are a certain kind of person, and there is not much that can be done to really change that.				
5. You can always change basic things about the kind of person you are.				

6. Music talent can be learned by anyone.				
7. Only a few people will be truly good at sports – you have to be “born with it.”				
8. Math is much easier to learn if you are male or maybe come from a culture who values math.				
9. The harder you work at something, the better you will be at it.				
10. No matter what kind of person you are, you can always change substantially.				
11. Trying new things is stressful for me and I avoid it.				
12. Some people are good and kind, and some are not – it’s not often that people change.				
13. I appreciate when parents, coaches, teachers give me feedback about my performance.				
14. I often get angry when I get feedback about my performance.				
15. All human beings without a brain injury or birth defect are capable of the same amount of learning.				
16. You can learn new things, but you can’t really change how intelligent you are.				
17. You can do things differently, but the important parts of who you are can’t really be changed.				
18. Human beings are basically good but sometimes make terrible decisions.				
19. An important reason why I do my school work is that I like to learn new things.				
20. Truly smart people do not need to try hard.				

Adapted from: <http://www.classroom20.com/forum/topics/motivating-students-with>

Appendix B

Why do you study English?

Please answer the following questions honestly.		
Gender:	Male	Female
Please answer the questions below using the 1-5 step scale, ranging from 1=not at all for this reason, to 5=absolutely for this reason.		
1 = not at all for this reason		
2 = slightly for this reason		
3 = generally for this reason		
4 = very much for this reason		
5 = absolutely for this reason		
1.	[]	Because it's cool to be able to speak English.
2.	[]	Because I like English.
3.	[]	Because I can make friends with other nationalities using FB or twitter
4.	[]	Because I want to travel to foreign countries.
5.	[]	Because it will be difficult to find a good job without a good knowledge of English.
6.	[]	Because I would like to have a job where I use English.
7.	[]	Because English is fun.
8.	[]	Because English is interesting.
9.	[]	Because I want to expand my view.
10.	[]	Because I want to watch American movies without subtitles.
11.	[]	Because English will let me express my unique personality.
12.	[]	Because I want to be a cultured person.
13.	[]	Because English will be advantageous in job hunting.
14.	[]	Because I want to have foreign friends.
15.	[]	Because I want to volunteer in other countries.
16.	[]	Because it is a required course.
17.	[]	Because I want to be bilingual.

18. []	Because it's necessary.
19. []	Because I want to be a "global person".
20. []	Because it's useful for finding a job.
21. []	For IT (computers, and internet etc.) IT
22. []	Because of internationalization.
23. []	Because I want to have an international marriage.
24. []	Because I want to understand English song lyrics.
25. []	I am determined to continue learning English until I get old.
26. []	It is very important to me to be able to speak and understand English well.
27. []	I am determined to accomplish my goal of being able to speak and understand English well, no matter how much time and effort it takes.
28. []	The only thing that can prevent me from becoming as fluent in English as I want to, is a lack of my own effort.
29. []	I am confident that I will eventually be able to speak English as fluently as I want to.
30. []	If I fail to learn English, it will be because of things that I have no control over.
31. []	I want to be fluent in English.
32. []	English doesn't interest me.
33. []	If English weren't a required course I wouldn't study it.

Adapted from: Brown R.A. (2004). Motivation for Learning English among University Students.