<Research Article>

Language Learning Motivation Research in *ARELE*
A Review of Research Trends and Characteristics

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1. Introduction

Language learning motivation is a major topic in L2-related fields such as second language acquisition (SLA) and English language education, and has been widely discussed and empirically investigated by both researchers and language teachers worldwide. Initially, the main focus of language learning motivation research emerged as a social psychology research topic, with studies conducted in the French bilingual context in Canada (Gardner & Lambert, 1959). Since then, motivation in language learning theory has developed as an interdisciplinary research area, combining theories from social psychology, educational psychology, and many other disciplines.

Examples of notable theories used in language learning motivation research include self-determination theory (Noels et al., 2003), which was adapted from psychological disciplines (Deci & Ryan, 1985), and the L2 motivational self system (Dörnyei, 2009), which was developed to replace social-psychological theories with reference to learners' possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Recent language learning motivation theories are characterized by more situated, complex, and dynamic aspects of the concept, and the research methods used to investigate and observe motivation have dramatically changed over the past several decades (see Al-Hoorie, 2017 for an overview of the historical background of language learning motivation research).

To identify language learning motivation research and explore how global research trends have changed, Boo et al. (2015) reviewed articles and book chapters published internationally between 2005 and 2014. They found that the number of publications on language learning motivation dramatically increased over the 10-year period, and identified changes in the research methods and theoretical frameworks. Also, they found that Asian countries are now the top producers of studies on language learning motivation. Particularly, according to their findings, 38 out of 416 studies (11.34 %) were conducted in the Japanese EFL research context (Boo et al., 2015, p. 151).

However, although many studies conducted in Japan were included, Boo et al.'s (2015) review approach was limited in that their database was compiled from international journals and internationally-published books. Therefore, locally-published academic journals, as well as books published in Japan were not considered in their review. Furthermore, Boo et al.'s (2015) review did not consider resources published in languages other than English. Since students' motivation to learn

English is largely affected by contextual factors such as social context and school settings, different types of resources other than academic journal articles would be worth being considered in order to capture more detailed characteristics of Japanese EFL learners' motivation. In the field of English language education in the Japanese EFL context, practical reports and brief research reports written by researchers and practitioners working in different school settings are published. Thus, these types of publications may provide new insights to what was discussed by Boo et al. (2015).

As a preliminary study of a large-scale review project which aims to capture more detailed characteristics of Japanese EFL learners' motivation, this study aims to review trends of language learning motivation research published in *Annual Review of English Language Education in Japan (ARELE)*. By reviewing *ARELE* published by the Japan Society of English Language Education (JASELE), this study focuses on the research trends in a journal which has a wide range of readership (e.g., primary and secondary-level teachers, and researchers) in the Japanese research context.

ARELE contains several review studies conducted by researchers. The first was Mizumoto et al.'s (2014) review of themes, methods, and outcomes of articles published in *ARELE*. Similarly, Aoyama et al. (2018) comprehensively reviewed the use of quantitative research methods and reporting practices published in *ARELE* volumes 13–28 to evaluate the appropriateness of quantitative research reports published in *ARELE*. Moreover, Takaki et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review on quantitative research designs and tests, and synthesized treatment effects reported in the same period as Aoyama et al.'s (2018) review. This study focuses on the research trends on motivation, adopting data collection methods applied in previous review studies in *ARELE*.

2. Method
2.1 Database Search

To compile an article pool, this study extracted research on language learning motivation from the entire collection of articles published in *ARELE* between 1990 and 2020. First, on the J-Stage online database (https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/search/advance/arele/-char/en), articles published in *ARELE* (Volumes 1–30: A total of 593 articles were published at the point of database search) were searched. To extract studies on language learning motivation, articles which include either "動機づけ (literal translation of *motivation* in Japanese)" or "motivation" were searched in August–September 2020 (Figure 1). Since there are articles which refer to L2 learners' motivation in the main text, even though they do not aim to investigate language learning motivation, this study limited the search range to "Article title" and "Abstract".

Furthermore, titles and abstracts of the latest volume (Volume 31) were manually searched to retrieve articles that met the same criteria, since the latest volume was not included in the J-Stage database when the database search was conducted. In addition, articles including keywords related to L2-specific motivational theories (e.g., *L2 selves, Self-determination theory*) were manually searched.

Forty-eight articles were identified and entered into a spreadsheet, then manually screened for studies on motivation based on the contents. Finally, 34 articles were included in the final article pool and reviewed further (see Appendix for the full list of studies included).

Figure 1

A Screenshot of Database Search Screen on J-Stage Database

2.2. Analysis

Based on the coding framework (Table 1), 34 papers selected from all *ARELE* volumes were reviewed. Since this is a preliminary study for a large-scale project, it also aimed to develop a framework for further large-scale reviews of language learning motivation research conducted in the Japanese context. Therefore, a framework for recording studies was adapted from items used in Boo et al.'s (2015) large-scale review, as well as additional narrative descriptions of methods and theories.

Table 1

Items Reviewed and Coding Framework

Aspect	Description
Article information	Year of publication, Article type, Publication language
Focus of research	1: motivatION, 2: MotivatING, 3: DEmotivation
Intervention	1: Study with intervention, 2: No intervention
Theoretical background	Described in a narrative form
Participants	1: Primary, 2: Junior high school, 3: High school 4: University-level, 9*: Other (e.g., school teachers) *Narrative descriptions were added if 9: Others was selected
Data collection method	1: Questionnaire (e.g., questionnaires which ask participants about their motivation either based on Likert-type scale items or free-writing items), 2: Interview, 3*: Multiple (e.g., a combination of questionnaire and interview), 9*: Other (e.g., observation and interview) *Narrative descriptions were added if 3: Multiple or 9: Others were selected

Data analysis	1: Quantitative (e.g., descriptive analysis, basic inferential statistics, correlational analysis, factor analysis, structural equation modeling, cluster analysis), 2: Qualitative (e.g., qualitative content analysis, categorization of concepts emerged from participants' interviews), 3: Quantitative and qualitative (i.e., using both quantitative and qualitative methods in a study)
Details of analysis	Described in a narrative form

For instance, drawing upon Boo et al.'s definition, studies which aim to understand the theoretical construct of motivation were coded as *motivatION*, and ones exploring practical techniques to improve learners' motivation were categorized as *motivatING*. Also, studies focusing ether on the theoretical constructs or practical aspects of demotivation were coded as *DEmotivation*. Table 1 shows the characteristics of each study in the article pool.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Number of Publications

A total of 34 relevant articles were published in *ARELE* volumes 1–31. The first motivation study to appear in *ARELE* was Matsukawa and Tachibana's (1996) comparative study of Japanese and Chinese high school students' motivation for learning English. Considering the long history of language learning motivation research outside of Japan (e.g., social-psychological aspects of language learning motivation), the emergence of motivation as a research topic in the field of English language education, particularly in *ARELE,* came relatively later compared to research contexts outside of Japan. To examine the origin of motivation research in the Japanese context, additional reviews of studies published in other Japan-based journals will be needed in the future.

Table 2 shows changes in the number of publications between 1996 and 2020. As mentioned above, the first study appeared in 1996 (volume 7), but volumes 1–11 (–2000) only included two published studies. After 2000, the number of relevant articles rapidly increased. In each of the periods 2001–2005, 2006–2010, 2011–2015, and 2016–2020, seven to nine papers were published. After 2014 (volumes 25–31), one or more language learning motivation studies were published in *ARELE* each year.

Table 2

Changes in the Number of Publications in ARELE

Period	Volumes	k	Details
–2000	–11	2	1996 (1), 2000 (1)
2001–2005	12–16	8	2003 (4), 2004 (3), 2005 (1)
2006–2010	17–21	7	2006 (3), 2009 (3), 2010 (1)
2011–2015	22–26	9	2011 (2), 2012 (2), 2014 (1), 2015 (4)
2016–2020	27–31	8	2016 (1), 2017 (4), 2018 (1), 2019 (1), 2020 (1)

According to Mizumoto et al.'s (2014) review of research themes, which was based on clustering 300 of the most frequent words extracted from titles and abstracts, studies that focused on motivation were more popular in volumes 13 to 24 (2002–2013), compared to the volumes before that (–2001). Therefore, the analysis of articles observed in this study supported Mizumoto et al.'s (2014) findings that the number of motivation studies in *ARELE* began increasing in the early 2000s.

3.2. Target Participants

Of the 34 studies, 17 (50.0 %) focused on university-level learners, seven focused on high school-level (20.6 %), three focused on junior high school-level (9.0 %), and one focused on elementary school-level. The number of studies conducted in the context of university English courses was remarkably high, compared to other school types. Since it is sometimes difficult for researchers (particularly those who are not affiliated with education-related faculties) to conduct research in schools, it is natural that a greater number of studies are conducted at the university teaching level. In addition to school learners, seven studies (17.6 %) analyzed motivation in people outside of a student context. For example, Ohata, Kawamoto, and Honda (2015) collected data from 106 junior high school and high school teachers to investigate teachers' perceptions of motivational strategies' effectiveness. Similarly, several studies focused on motivational factors among teachers (e.g., Nakamura & Shimura, 2015; Nakamura et al., 2017).

Table 3 shows the population changes across the studies published in volumes 1–30. The most striking feature was that over the past 10 years (2011–2020), 13 of 17 studies (89.5 %) focused on university-level English learners, and no studies focused on primary, junior high, or high school learners. By contrast, participants of studies published before 2011 were mostly non-university students. For instance, between 2001 and 2010, high school-level learners were the most popular target group, accounting for 40.0 % of studies, and studies conducted in primary and junior high schools were also observed.

Table 3

School Level and Number of Publications

School level	Number of publications (%)				
	–2000	2001–2005	2006–2010	2011–2015	2016–2020
Primary			1		
Junior high school	1		2		
High school	1	4	2		
University		2	2	4	9
Other		2		2	2

Note. Others include studies of people outside of a student context (e.g., teachers at primary, junior high, and high schools).

Boo et al.'s (2015) global review reported a similar imbalance in the distribution of target participant groups. The authors explained that it is easier for researchers to conduct studies in their universities. However, given the present study's finding of a drop in the number of primary, junior high, and high school studies, and the absence of studies on elementary, junior, or high school populations published in the 2011–2015 period, there might be other reasons, such as a shift in researchers' and/or readers' interests related to language learning motivation.

3.3. Theoretical Framework

As mentioned earlier, language learning motivation research derives from many research disciplines, including social psychology, educational psychology, and second language acquisition, and there have been several major shifts in the views of language learning motivation. An important finding was that the *ARELE* studies' theoretical frameworks differed slightly from those of Boo et al. (2015).

The major language learning motivation theories mentioned earlier were successfully adapted to the Japanese research context. For example, self-determination theory (Noels et al., 2003) and L2 motivational self system (Dörnyei, 2009) were widely used in many different studies (e.g., Konno, 2011). Moreover, in the most recent study in the record, Sugawara and Sato (2020) focused on the notion of vision. However, along with major language learning motivation theories, some studies adopted theories from educational psychology and other disciplines. For instance, Maeda (2003, 2004) examined and validated the two-factor model of motivation in the context of English language education.

Another theoretical framework feature was that there were fewer studies from the viewpoint of motivation as a complex and dynamic system (Dörnyei et al., 2015). In Boo et al.'s (2015) global research trends, the number of studies from a complex and dynamic systems perspective increased during their research period. However, in *ARELE*, only Sugawara (2017) discussed complexity perspectives.

Furthermore, some studies combined two or more theoretical frameworks, such as L2 motivational self system and self-determination theory (Konno, 2011; Nishida & Yashima, 2017). This tendency was also observed in Boo et al.'s (2015) review. The advantage of combining different theories is that it allows researchers to observe motivation from different perspectives.

3.4. Research Design

Study focus was explored by drawing upon Boo et al.'s (2015) study-type classification, where motivatION versus motivatING and DEmotivation are important aspects to consider in the Japanese EFL context (Ushioda, 2013). Table 4 shows the number of studies with a different focus as well as studies that included an intervention.

Of 34 studies, 26 (76.5 %) focused on motivation, investigating the characteristics of, or relationships among motivation-related factors. Conversely, seven studies (20.6 %) investigated motivating learners by examining the effectiveness of motivational teaching strategies. For example, Konno (2014) conducted an intervention study from the viewpoint of self-determination theory and L2 motivational self system, to compare motivation levels in university students.

Only one study published in *ARELE* investigated demotivation, while many language-learning demotivation studies were conducted within a Japanese EFL context and published internationally (e.g., Kikuchi, 2009; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). The only *ARELE* demotivation study, Tsuchiya (2015), also examined the effectiveness of an intervention that employed collaborative learning to motivate learners.

Table 4

Focus of Research and Existence of Intervention

	Number of studies (%)		
	MotivatTION	MotivatING	DEmotivation
Intervention			
Yes	0 (0 %)	7 (20.6 %)	1 (2.9 %)
No	26 (76.5 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)

Results showed that most studies focused on motivation characteristics among English learners, with less attention paid to the effect of teaching on motivation, such as the use and effectiveness of motivational strategies in language classrooms. As Lamb (2017) pointed out, it is important for researchers to collaborate with groups of teachers to investigate theoretically-supported motivational practices that support teachers and learners. Since a number of studies have examined motivation characteristics in Japanese EFL learners and relationships among motivational factors, the next task for researchers investigating both theoretical and practical aspects of language learning motivation is to explore how we can motivate learners to study English. It will also be important for researchers in the Japanese context to collaborate with teachers, and conduct research in non-university teaching contexts.

3.5. Data Collection Method and Analysis

Table 5 summarizes the research methods used in the 34 studies. Questionnaires were the most frequently used data collection method for motivation research in *ARELE* ($k = 30$, 88.2 %). Only one study employed interviews (2.9 %) and four (8.2 %) combined different data collection methods, such as observation and interviews. Since language learning motivation was hugely affected by psychometric approaches developed in the psychology field, questionnaires have been a popular data collection tool. However, recent discussions on complexity theory in language learning motivation research have emphasized the importance of qualitative approaches (Pigott, 2013; Ushioda, 1994). To

better understand motivation, which is a multi-faceted and situated concept, more diverse approaches will be needed in future research.

Table 5

Data Collection Method and Data Analysis

Item	*k*	Example
Data Collection Method		
Questionnaire	30	
Interview	1	
Multiple	3	Observation and semi-structured interview
		Questionnaire and free discussion
Data Analysis		
Quantitative	27	*t*-test, ANOVA, correlation, regression
		factor analysis, structural equation modeling
		cluster analysis, chi-square tests
Qualitative	2	M-GTA, SCAT, text-analysis
Quantitative + Qualitative	5	

Note. Questionnaire category includes both self-rated (e.g., Likert scale) and open-ended (e.g., free-writing) questionnaires.

Quantitative data analysis of questionnaire data was the most frequently observed analysis pattern. Statistical methods that examine linear relationships between factors, such as exploratory factor analysis, structural equation modeling, regression analysis, and correlational analysis were the most popular quantitative analysis methods. Analytical approaches applied to qualitative data included analyses based on major coding frameworks such as grounded theory (GTA).

The above findings imply that, although a growing body of research outside Japan employs qualitative and mixed-methods approaches (Boo et al., 2015), the mainstream approach to motivation research in *ARELE* analyzes quantitative and linear relationships between motivational factors, rather than complex and dynamic relationships.

4. Conclusion: Future Directions of Motivation Research in ARELE

4.1. Summary of Findings

This study identified the following characteristics in the 34 *ARELE* studies reviewed:

- Motivation studies in *ARELE* emerged for the first time in late 1990s, and began to increase in the 2000s.

- Half of the *ARELE* studies collected data from university-level English learners; there were no published studies on primary, junior high, and high school-level learners between 2011 and 2020. In addition to the studies on students' motivation to learn English, studies on English teachers' motivation were found.

- Self-determination theory (Noels et al., 2003) and L2 motivational self system (Dörnyei, 2009) were frequently used as the key theoretical framework in *ARELE* published studies. Very few

studies from the perspective of language learning motivation as a complex and dynamic system (CDST) were observed.

- Studies that focused on "motivatION" were predominant, and studies on "motivatING" and "DEmotivation" were less popular, with very few studies in this category observed. Studies with interventions (i.e., focusing on the effectiveness of teaching on learners' motivation) were also rare.

- Questionnaires were the most popular data collection method, with few studies employing interview or combined data collection methods. Statistical methods that analyze linear relationships between factors were used most frequently.

4.2. Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the review findings, future language learning motivation research where both researchers and teachers engage in discussions of English language education in Japan will be particularly beneficial for *ARELE*.

As this study revealed, motivation studies published in *ARELE* mostly involved university-level English learners. Particularly in recent years (2011–2020), there has been less attention on primary, junior high, and high school English learners. Although it is difficult for researchers to gain access to classrooms because of ethical considerations, there are many teachers who belong to JASELE, so classroom-based research and constructive discussions by teachers themselves could add new insights to existing knowledge of Japanese EFL learners' motivation, and lead to more effective interventions for motivating learners. For example, action research and exploratory practice by teachers can closely observe learners, allowing learners' longitudinal motivational dynamics to be captured.

From a methodological perspective, more flexible research methods need be applied to future research on language learning motivation. Data collection and analysis approaches have tended to be biased toward conventional methods developed in the early days, which may not be suitable for capturing learners' motivation from the perspective of motivation as a complex and dynamic concept. Boo et al.'s (2015) classification of motivation research methods included an "innovative approaches" category for newly-developed methods and methods adapted from different disciplines, to better understand motivation (e.g., MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011). For the future development of motivation research, new approaches that better capture motivational characteristics should be introduced.

In terms of the differences in the research trends observed in this study and Boo et al.'s (2015) review of articles published internationally, there were clear differences in some aspects of research. For instance, quantitative research method was preferred in the studies published in *ARELE*, while studies included in Boo et al.'s (2015) review. Thus, in the future studies, it would be important to consider why these differences were observed.

4.3. Limitations

Although this study identified the characteristics of language learning motivation research published in *ARELE*, there are limitations which need to be considered in future review studies on language learning motivation research in Japan.

Since this study aimed to serve as a preliminary study for a larger-scale research project, the search target was limited to *ARELE*. The readership of *ARELE* include researchers and practitioners who work in many different educational levels and contexts (e.g., primary and secondary school teachers, and researchers). Thus, it was assumed that the review of *ARELE* may capture what people in these different contexts are interested in terms of language learning motivation. However, compared with other journals on English language education published in Japan (e.g., *JACET Journal*), *ARELE* has a relatively shorter history. From the viewpoint of a comprehensiveness, other journals may represent the historical changes of research trends in language learning motivation research.

4.4. Concluding Remarks

This study reviewed and identified the trends and characteristics of motivation research published in previous volumes of *ARELE* and compared them with Boo et al.'s (2015) review of global research trends. The findings identified characteristics and revealed changes in research trends. In addition, it identified issues in previous language learning motivation studies that need to be reconsidered in future studies. The review findings suggested factors to consider for future research that will benefit *ARELE* and similar journals' readers, which include both researchers and teachers.

It is important to note that the resulting suggestions are not meant to force researchers to follow the global research trends discussed in the paper. Rather, it is important that the review results revealed the "local" trends within the context of the academic society that researchers and teachers join. In addition, the review identified the characteristics of *ARELE* from the viewpoint of language learning motivation. In future research, it will be worth comparing motivation research trends in *ARELE* and other journals publishing articles on English language education in the Japanese context and discussing what should be continued as a research tradition and what should be improved.

Acknowledgement

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Appendix. List of articles included in the analysis*

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