Profilng motivational trajectories – a mixed-methods study

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This paper presents a longitudinal investigation of second language learning motivation in undergraduate students taking English courses at one University in Japan. The main objectives of the study were threefold: first to investigate individual motivational orientations and trajectories over time; second to identify ‘critical incidents’ in students’ past experiences with English that may help explain differences in motivational trajectories; and third to attempt to relate those descriptions to eventual L2 learning outcomes. In a mixed-methods design the study adopted a two-stage procedure: Stage 1 employed a self-report survey to measure motivational orientations in an entire cohort of students at two time points: once on entry to the University and again after completion of the compulsory English program two years later. This was subsequently used to produce individual motivational profiles that tracked four dimensions of motivational orientation: Internationalism; Grade-Orientation; Attitudes to Native Speakers; and Interest in English media; along with TOEIC scores submitted over two years. Stage 2 then used narrative elicitation with selected students to highlight critical incidents in their experiences with English, both before and during their time at the University. To facilitate fullest possible participation, interviews were conducted in the students’ first language (Japanese) by a peer research assistant using narrative elicitation methods. The outcome of Study 1 was a set of longitudinal profiles that showed remarkable consistency over time (i.e. reliability) and are thus useful for drawing comparisons between individuals. Stage 2 then facilitated in-depth interpretation of the profiles with relation to themes that emerged from narrative accounts provided by the students themselves. Overall, the study is thought to provide strong insights into the formative processes underlying motivation in Japanese EFL learners.

Keywords: EFL, Japan, motivation.