

Engaged, Resistant, or Both? Rethinking Motivation in Language Learning

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Engaged, Resistant, or Both? Rethinking Motivation in Language Learning

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Abstract:

This research note summarizes a series of JSPS-funded research projects (2017–2029) investigating foreign language learner motivation among Japanese university students. Drawing on data from multiple phases, this research note introduces how students of English as a Foreign Language experience engagement, resistance, and mixed motivational states in university language classrooms. Central to this work is the development and use of the Linguaculture Motivation Profiler (LMP), a 45-item instrument designed to measure these motivational patterns. Findings from Japan-based quantitative studies are outlined, including the identification of distinct motivational profiles and evidence for the empirical validity of mixed-state motivation. This note is written for language educators and researchers interested in motivation and aims to share insights, encourage collaboration, and promote classroom-based applications of this research. Future directions include international validation of the LMP, cross-cultural data collection, and integration of qualitative perspectives to enrich the understanding of learner motivation.

Key terms:

- **Complex dynamic systems theory (CDST)** is a theory that views systems as interconnected and always evolving, rather than static and isolated. Applied to foreign language learning, CDST sees the process of learning a foreign language as made up of many interacting components—cognitive, emotional, social, and contextual—that continuously influence each other. Motivation emerges from these dynamic interactions and develops in non-linear, often unpredictable ways over time. CDST emphasises the importance of relationships and context, making it especially useful for understanding the fluctuating nature of learner motivation in language learning.
- **Linguaculture** refers to the inseparable connection between language and culture, emphasising that language use always carries cultural meanings and patterns. It highlights that learning a foreign language involves adjusting to unfamiliar cultural norms and ways of thinking, as well as learning the associated words and grammar. This term shifts focus from language as isolated knowledge to language as lived cultural practice.
- **Linguaculture Resistance**
Linguaculture resistance is the psychological pushback learners may feel when encountering the unfamiliar cultural meanings embedded in a new language. It is not seen as failure or lack of motivation, but as a normal part of the learning process. This concept helps explain behaviours such as emotional withdrawal, hesitation, or rejection of the language-learning experience.
- **Adaptive Demands**
Adaptive demands refer to the emotional, cognitive, and social challenges that arise when learners must adjust to the demands of foreign language learning—such as classroom pedagogy, textbooks, interactions with peers, and unfamiliar language or cultural patterns. These challenges can create internal friction, including resistance, uncertainty, or confusion, but they also drive growth and transformation. In language learning, managing adaptive demands is central to sustained engagement and personal development.

1. Introduction: Background of The Research Projects

Educators teaching foreign languages often observe a wide range of student behaviours within and across classes. Some students may appear curious and engaged at times, yet hesitant or withdrawn at others. Educators commonly form judgments based on classroom participation, homework completion, or students' plans to continue using the language outside the classroom (e.g., watching movies, making friends, studying abroad). However, without a closer examination of the reasons behind these behaviours, it is easy to label students simply as 'motivated' or 'demotivated.' Such labels risk offering a narrow and static view that overlooks learners' actual experiences, their interpretations of classroom demands, and the emotional or cultural challenges shaping their responses. This oversimplification leaves important questions about the quality and effectiveness of education unaddressed. It can lead to missed opportunities for deeper understanding of motivation and to pedagogical decisions that unintentionally alienate rather than support learners.

This research note introduces the approach taken in a series of interrelated projects funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) that investigate foreign language motivation, specifically English, among Japanese university students through a complex dynamic systems theory (CDST) lens. These projects challenge the view of students being simply 'motivated' or 'demotivated'. Instead, the projects aim to conceptualise foreign language learning motivation as an emergent, dynamic, process shaped by the psychological demands of foreign language learning. The significance of this research lies in deepening our understanding of the psychological dynamics involved in foreign language learning, recognising it as a process of inner change and personal development that involves both challenges and rewards. This perspective encourages learner-centred curriculum design and teaching methods that are sensitive to the emotional and motivational struggles learners face, ultimately fostering more personalised and effective approaches that sustain student engagement. By advancing a theoretical model that integrates complex systems thinking, this work reconceptualises motivation as a self-regulating, adaptive system, offering a fresh and nuanced perspective to the psychology of language learning — a field increasingly attentive to the dynamic, context-dependent, and culturally situated nature of motivation.

Since 2017, three JSPS-supported projects involving the author, Dr. Joseph Shaules (Keio University), Dr. Gabriela Schmidt (Nihon University), Dr. Sumiko Miyafusa (Toyo Gakuen University), and Dr. Takayoshi Ikeda, a research collaborator specialising in statistical analysis, have carried out work into foreign language learning motivation with the approaches mentioned in the previous paragraphs. The following sections summarise these projects and their contributions.

Project 1 (JSPS number 17K02982, 2017–2020)

This project developed the concept of linguaculture resistance as a core theoretical lens for understanding motivation in foreign language learning. Drawing on intercultural adjustment theory, it conceptualised resistance not as failure, but as a normal psychological response to the adaptive demands of engaging with a new linguaculture. This framework positioned resistance alongside engagement as part of a dynamic motivational system. The project aimed to understand why some students appear disengaged or resistant,

revealing that negative attitudes often reflect unconscious psychological resistance rather than a simple lack of effort. The motivational constructs of engagement, resistance, and mixed states (co-occurring engagement and resistance) were developed and tested. A key outcome was the creation of the Linguaculture Motivation Profiler (LMP), a validated quantitative instrument measuring learner motivation in these terms.

Project 2 (JSPS number 22K00714, 2022–2025)

Building on the foundation of linguaculture resistance, this project empirically examined the dynamic interplay of engagement and resistance in Japanese university learners. Its primary aims were to identify common motivational patterns—learner profiles—and statistically validate the construct of mixed states. While originally designed to include qualitative methods, the project focused on quantitative analysis. It empirically confirmed that engagement and resistance are distinct yet coexisting dimensions of motivation, and identified four predominant motivational profiles characteristic of the Japanese university context.

Project 3 (JSPS number 25K04315, 2025–2029)

The ongoing project extends this research through international collaboration with educators in countries such as India and Poland. Its primary objective is to compare motivational patterns across these national contexts to investigate the cultural specificity or universality of psychological resistance and mixed states. It aims to refine the LMP instrument for cross-cultural use and explore pedagogical implications to foster learner self-efficacy and emotional resilience in foreign language learning worldwide.

The following research note introduces the theoretical framework that underpins this research and presents a practical model for understanding motivation in terms of a CDST. It also outlines the development of the instrument designed to measure foreign language motivation, shares key findings from classroom-based studies in Japanese universities, and discusses implications for teaching practice. Ultimately, the goal is to support more responsive, learner-centred pedagogy and to promote dialogue around the emotional and psychological dimensions of foreign language education.

2. Background and Theoretical Framework: Rethinking Motivation in Foreign Language Learning

As Ushioda (2020, p. 21) observes, “the challenge of motivating students and keeping them motivated” remains one of the most enduring concerns in education. This is especially true in foreign language classrooms, where learners may appear engaged, hesitant, or resistant—sometimes all within a single class period. Motivation is widely regarded as a key factor in language learning success or failure (Hadfield & Dörnyei, 2013), yet understanding what truly drives—or hinders—learners remains a complex task.

In Japan, a recurring theme in the literature is the apparent lack of motivation among university

learners of English as a Foreign Language. Studies have found that many students perceive English as irrelevant to their daily lives (Lafaye & Tsuda, 2002; Morita, 2013), while educators often cite poor learner attitudes as a major demotivating factor in the classroom (Sugino, 2010). The concept of demotivation, understood here as a “negative process that prevents learners from progressing” (Gao & Liu, 2022), has received sustained attention (Agawa et al., 2011; Kikuchi, 2013, 2015). Related research has examined negative psychological influences, including low self-confidence in using English abroad (Burden, 2020), and classroom-related social anxiety (Otsman & Xethakis, 2021).

While such studies offer insight into the challenges that Japanese university learners face, there is a risk that demotivation research unintentionally portrays learners as deficient or lacking, contributing to a narrative of inadequacy. This research takes a different stance: resistance is not failure—it is a natural response to the demands of foreign language learning. Instead of labelling students as simply “motivated” or “demotivated,” this project sees motivation as psychologically complex, shifting, and adaptive (Shaules et al., 2020). This research seeks to understand the internal tensions, shifting states, and situational challenges that shape how learners approach foreign language study. Ultimately, the goal is to help both educators and learners recognise—and respond to—the natural fluctuations in motivation that occur in classroom life.

What is Motivation in Foreign Language Learning?

Defining motivation is challenging, as the concept is complex and multifaceted. Reeve (2018) describes it as a desire to bring about change in one’s behaviour, thoughts, emotions, self-concept, or environment. Chow and Hsu (2024) similarly characterise it as a striving, a push, or a pull toward action. Broadly, motivation can be summarised as the internal and external forces that initiate, sustain, and direct behaviour toward learning goals. But these definitions raise a core question: What do we really mean when we ask whether a student learning a foreign language is ‘motivated’?

Several major motivational theories have shaped answers to this question. Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 1985) distinguishes between *intrinsic* motivation (driven by personal interest) and *extrinsic* motivation (driven by rewards or external pressure). Gardner’s Socio-Educational Model (1985) introduced the influential distinction between *instrumental* (practical) and *integrative* (socio-cultural) motivation. While foundational, these theories often focus on relatively stable traits or long-term goals. More recently, perspectives from the psychology of language learning have shifted toward more contextual, moment-to-moment, and person-in-environment understandings of motivation. A key influence is CDST, which draws on systems thinking from fields such as physics and ecology. In foreign language education, CDST emphasises how learning emerges through continuous interactions among cognitive, emotional, and environmental factors (Larsen-Freeman, 2011). Rather than seeing motivation as fixed or linear, CDST presents it as dynamic and responsive to changing conditions. This shift has led to new models of motivation. For example, the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2009) offers a process-oriented view of motivation, framing it around learners’ self-concepts—particularly how they envision their ideal future selves using the target language, while avoiding negative outcomes, and how they are influenced by their current learning experiences. Dörnyei et al.’s (2015) notion of Dynamic Motivational Currents (DMCs)

draws on CDST to explain how intense, goal-directed motivation can emerge and evolve in response to the classroom environment, social relationships, and internal thoughts. This perspective highlights how motivation fluctuates within tasks, across lessons, and over time.

Building on this systems-oriented view, subsequent research has explored how motivation intersects with emotion. MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) showed that Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) are not opposites but distinct emotional states that can coexist. A learner can feel nervous and enthusiastic in the same moment—highlighting the emotional and psychological complexity of language learning. Similarly, Henry and Davydenko (2020) explored how learners simultaneously feel pulled toward and away from learning goals, showing that mixed motivation exists among foreign language learners.

These ideas have shaped how motivation is understood in the three JSPS-funded research projects described in this research note. Drawing on CDST, this research aims to develop a more nuanced, multi-layered, and contextualized view of foreign language motivation. Rather than asking whether students are “motivated,” the key question becomes: *How are students responding—right now—to the demands of the learning environment?* This research builds on that orientation. It does not treat motivation as a fixed trait, but instead focuses on how learners respond—cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally—to the ongoing challenges of language learning. These responses can vary across activities, within a single lesson, or over the course of a semester.

In this view, motivation is understood as an adaptive process. It reflects how learners interpret and respond to new content, changing expectation, and the demands of the classroom. Learners may engage or resist depending on how they feel, what they believe about themselves, and what the task requires. These reactions can vary across activities, even within a single lesson. Recognising this, the research described here seeks to shed light on these patterns—and to provide educators with tools to help learners navigate the cognitive, emotional, and cultural demands of foreign language learning.

2.1 The Linguaculture Approach: Language Learning as an Adaptive Challenge

A central framework guiding this research is the concept of linguaculture, originally proposed by Friedrich (1989), which emphasises that language and culture are inseparable. Language is not just a neutral system for communication—it embodies the shared meanings, values, and experiences of cultural communities.

Shaules (2019) illustrates this with the metaphor of the linguaculture tree: the visible parts—leaves, branches, trunk—represent words, sounds, and grammar, while the roots symbolise the deeper cultural meanings that give language its life and context (see Figure 1). Just as a tree depends on its roots for nourishment, language draws meaning from shared cultural understandings. Focusing only on the linguistic surface without attending to these cultural roots risks missing the full complexity of language use.

Building on this metaphor, the linguaculture approach views foreign language learning as a process of adapting to unfamiliar linguistic and cultural patterns. Learners must adjust not only to new vocabulary and grammar but also to communication styles, social norms, and cultural expectations that may feel unfamiliar or even unsettling. This creates what Shaules (2019, p. 72) calls adaptive demands—psychological pressures that arise when learners integrate foreign language and culture into their existing

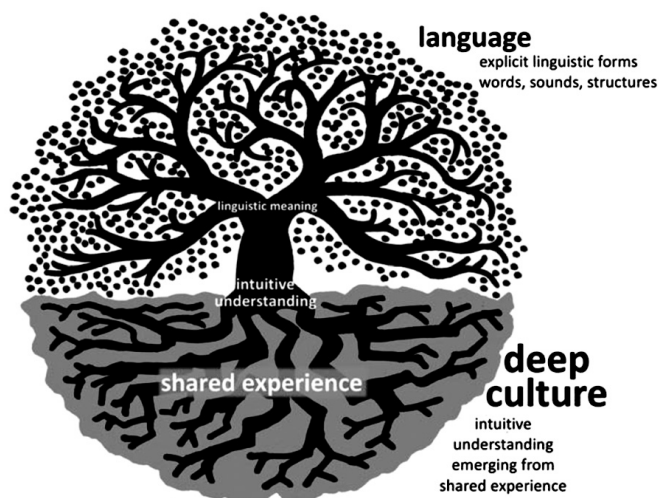


Figure 1. The linguaculture tree (adapted from Shaules, 2019)

frameworks. From this perspective, language learning is both a psychological and intercultural challenge. It involves emotional, social, cultural, and cognitive dynamics that make the process deeply personal—and at times destabilizing. Successful language acquisition requires “changing deeply embodied habits of mind, behavior, and self” (Shaules, 2023, p. 40).

Motivation, in this view, is not a fixed trait but an emergent response to these adaptive demands—whether through curiosity and engagement, withdrawal and resistance, or a mixture of both. This perspective moves beyond static explanations and situates motivation within the dynamic and context-sensitive process of linguaculture learning, emphasising how language, culture and, and learner psychology interact in real classroom settings.

2.2 Engagement, Resistance, and Mixed States: A Dynamic Model of Motivation

To capture how learners respond to the adaptive demands of linguaculture learning, this research draws on the psychological distinction between approach and avoidance motivation (Elliot, 2008). Approach motivation drives individuals toward positive experiences, avoidance motivation prompts withdrawal from threats or discomfort. Though often treated as opposites, this research takes the stance that approach and avoidance motivations frequently coexist and shift over time. Elliot and Covington (2001) describe this interplay as fundamental to human behaviour, though it has received limited attention in language learning research. Research by Henry and Davydenko (2020) and Papi et al. (2019) shows that learners often feel both approach and avoidance at once—for example, being eager during one task but hesitant during another, depending on perceived safety or difficulty.

Motivation is understood as a balance between engagement and resistance. Engagement is defined across four interrelated dimensions (adapted from Reeve, 2018):

- Behavioural engagement: effort and persistence despite challenges
- Emotional engagement: positive feelings like interest and enjoyment, and low anxiety or boredom
- Cognitive engagement: deep thinking and learning strategies beyond memorisation
- Agentic engagement: proactive efforts to shape the learning environment (e.g., asking questions or sharing opinions)

These dimensions offer a multifaceted picture of engagement—both visible behaviour and internal psychological processes.

Resistance, by contrast, refers to withdrawal or hesitation in the face of linguistic or cultural challenges. It can appear cognitively, emotionally, or behaviourally, and often emerges in response to confusion, discomfort, or perceived threat. As Shaules (2007, p. 150) explains, resistance involves “an unwillingness to change in response to the adaptive demands of a new cultural environment. This doesn’t mean that one doesn’t change, but that if one does so it is done unwillingly.” Resistance may be triggered when learners perceive tasks as irrelevant, intimidating to their self-image, or socially risky. While it can inhibit learning in the short term, resistance also signals moments when learners are grappling with meaningful adaptive challenges—moments that, if supported appropriately, can lead to growth.

A key contribution of this research is the identification and modelling of mixed-state motivation—states where engagement and resistance co-occur. For example, a learner might show curiosity and effort (engagement) in a speaking activity while also feeling self-conscious and hesitant (resistance). Or, they want to study abroad (engagement), but avoid regular language practice (resistance). These mixed states reveal that motivation is not an either/or phenomenon but a dynamic, shifting process. This view helps explain seemingly contradictory behaviours like enthusiastic participation followed by silence, or visible effort alongside emotional withdrawal. Recognising mixed states allows educators to respond with empathy and flexibility, creating classrooms that are both supportive and appropriately challenging.

2.3 Emergent Motivation: A Dynamic, Self Regulating System

This research conceptualises learner motivation as an emergent, self-regulating system, continuously balancing engagement and resistance as learners respond to the adaptive demands of linguaculture learning. These expressions are not static outcomes but active expressions signals of how learners navigate unfamiliarity.

Figure 2 illustrates this ongoing process: learners oscillate between engagement, resistance, and mixed states, shaping how they interpret tasks, interact with peers, and position themselves within the classroom.

Grounded in the linguaculture framework (Shaules, 2019), this model emphasises that motivation arises from learners’ efforts to integrate new language-culture patterns into their systems. This view aligns with CDST (Dörnyei et al., 2015; Larsen-Freeman, 2011), which sees motivation as continuously fluctuating through interacting cognitive, emotional, social, and cultural factors.

From this perspective, several implications for classroom practice emerge. Rather than labelling

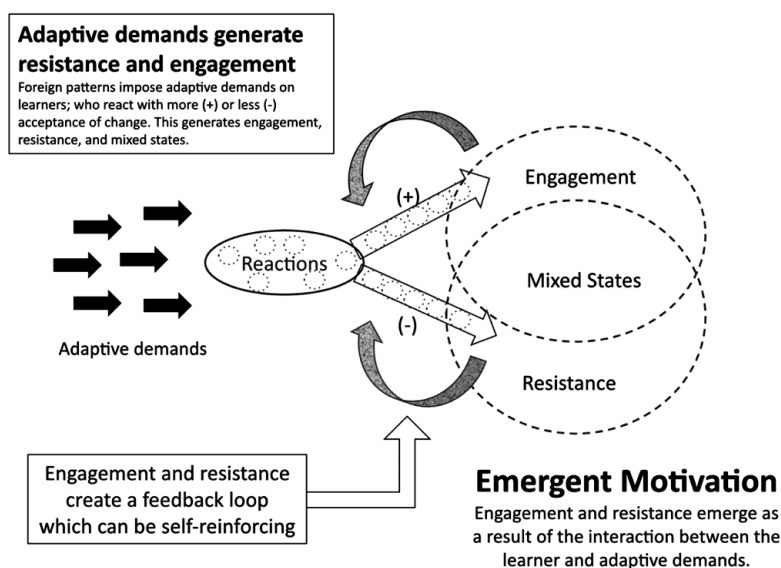


Figure 2
Emergent Motivation

students as “motivated” or “unmotivated,” educators can:

- Design tasks that alternate between challenge and consolidation.
- Use reflective prompts to help learners recognise their own motivational shifts.
- Cultivate a classroom culture where both openness and hesitation are both seen as normal responses to the learning demands.

By supporting learners to manage these dynamic motivational states, educators can foster not only language competence but also psychological resilience and intercultural flexibility.

3. Key Findings and Insights

This section summarizes three central outcomes from the research projects until now: the development of the Linguaculture Motivation Profiler (LMP), the empirical validation of mixed-state motivation, and the identification of motivational profiles among learners. Together, these findings shed new light on how engagement and resistance coexist in foreign language learning and suggest ways educators can better address the complex motivational realities faced by students.

3.1 The Linguaculture Motivation Profiler (LMP)

The LMP is a quantitative tool designed by the research team to capture learners’ motivational experiences of foreign language study, specifically focusing on the interaction of engagement, resistance, and

mixed motivational states. Currently implemented as a Google Form, the LMP takes approximately 10 minutes for learners to complete and gives educators immediate visual feedback, typically via pie charts. The 4-point Likert scale makes interpretation straightforward, allowing educators to easily identify areas of motivational strength and concern. To capture fluctuations over time, repeated administration—such as at the beginning and end of a semester—is recommended.

The LMP originated from an initial pool of 54 items informed by prior exploratory studies (Shaules, 2017). The LMP was explicitly designed to measure three dimensions of motivation:

- Engagement: Positive feelings of purpose, enjoyment, and confidence in learning a foreign language.
- Resistance: Feelings of avoidance, frustration, or discomfort often associated with stepping outside one's linguistic and cultural comfort zones.
- Mixed states: Coexistence of engagement and resistance to learning—distinct from average motivation, these states reflect internal conflict or ambivalence.

Through six rounds of factor analysis using responses from over 590 university students in Japan, the tool was refined to a final set of 45 items: 13 demographic questions and 32 core motivational items. Of the motivational items, 14 measure resistance, 11 mixed-state motivation, and 7 engagement. Each is rated on a 4-point Likert scale: strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. Table 1 below shows all 45 items of the final version of the LMP.

Table 1. The Linguaculture Motivation Profiler

Demographic items	
Q1	To which gender do you most identify?
Q2	What is your age?
Q3	What is your nationality? (Please indicate the nationality of your <i>main</i> passport.)
Q4	What is your first language?
Q5	Have you taken any English proficiency tests within the last 2 years?
Q6	What is your English proficiency level?
Q7	Do you know any other foreign languages?
Q8	In which area of Japan are you currently living?
Q9	In the past, where have you studied English?
Q10	Where are you currently studying English?
Q11	(University students only) What is your major?
Q12	How many years have you studied English?
Q13	What is your total time spent outside your home country?
Items Q14–Q45 were answered using a 4-point Likert scale: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly agree.	
Items to identify motivation in terms of engagement, resistance and mixed-states	
Q14	I will not use English in the future, so I am not motivated to learn it.

- Q15 I want to use English abroad, but I do not like to use English in my English class.
- Q16 I am not sure why I have to study English.
- Q17 I try to study English hard, but I can't understand well so I don't make an effort.
- Q18 I study English for my personal enjoyment.
- Q19 I do not try as hard as I know I should.
- Q20 The English education system has made me dislike English.
- Q21 Learning English is not worth the effort.
- Q22 I would like to speak English better, but I cannot get motivated.
- Q23 I think I should study English more, but actually I do not.
- Q24 This is Japan, so I should not have to learn English.
- Q25 It is not fair that Japanese are forced to learn English.
- Q26 Learning English is a good investment of my time.
- Q27 Foreign movies or music makes me interested in learning English.
- Q28 I often feel like giving up on learning English.
- Q29 I want to learn English, so I can become an international person.
- Q30 I feel learning English is less important than people say.
- Q31 I do not think English will ever be useful to me.
- Q32 I do not think I can ever be successful at learning English.
- Q33 I want to speak English fluently, but practicing is too much trouble.
- Q34 There is too much English study in Japanese schools.
- Q35 I have studied English for a long time, but have made little progress.
- Q36 It is fun to express my ideas using English.
- Q37 I want to speak English fluently, but I do not like practicing English.
- Q38 Studying English has traumatised me.
- Q39 Learning English excites me.
- Q40 I would like to use English more, but I do not have the confidence to do so.
- Q41 If I was not required to study English, I would stop.
- Q42 I am interested in learning English because I know people who use English.
- Q43 I really dislike having to study English.
- Q44 I hate studying English in school, but I like using English in real life.
- Q45 I want to speak more English, but I feel shy.
-

3.2 Data Collection and Participation Demographics

A total of 1,408 university students across Japan completed the final LMP through a collaborative network of educators. After securing ethics approval from their institutions, these educators administered the LMP in their classes. Participation was anonymous, and all students gave informed consent in Japanese.

- **Gender and Age:** 46% female, 53% male, 1.1% undisclosed. Nearly all participants (99%) were aged 18–22
- **Nationality and First Language:** 97% were Japanese nationals and reported Japanese as their first language. The rest included Chinese (1.7%), Korean (0.3%), or other (0.6%)
- **English Proficiency:** Most had taken a proficiency test within the previous year. CEFR levels ranged widely:
 - C2 (IELTS 8.5–9.0): 1.7%
 - C1 (IELTS 7.0–8.0): 2.3%
 - B2 (IELTS 5.5–6.5): 8.3%
 - B1 (IELTS 4.0–5.0): 32%
 - A2 (IELTS 3.0): 28%
 - A1 (IELTS 2.0): 16%
 - Other/Unreported: 13%
- **Academic Background:** 49% studied languages, culture, or international studies. Others included engineering (24%), medical sciences (17%), and business/social sciences (8.2%).

This diversity allowed for robust testing of the LMP’s framework and exploration of motivational patterns across learner groups.

3.3 Empirical Validation of Mixed-State Motivation

A central contribution of this research is the empirical validation of mixed-state motivation—where learners simultaneously engagement and resistance. This challenges assumptions that these dimensions lie on a single continuum, with more of one meaning less of the other (i.e. motivated vs demotivated). Instead, the data showed that engagement and resistance can co-occur, reflecting internal conflict. For example, a learner may want to improve yet feel anxious, or enjoy learning but still avoid participating.

We computed mixed-state scores (m-scores) for all 1,408 responses, capturing the degree to which learners endorsed both engagement and resistance items. A practical threshold was applied: learners with scores of 50 or above were classified as “higher mixed state,” while those below 50 were “lower mixed state.” This classification is not truly binary but is used here to illustrate the broad spectrum of mixed motivation. Within each range (0–49 for low mixed, 50–100 for high mixed), scores progress in single increments (e.g., 0, 1, 2 ... 48, 49, 50 ... 99, 100), reflecting subtle differences in the intensity of mixed motivation. Even at the lower end of the lower mixed group, traces of both motivational orientations can appear; at the upper end of the higher mixed group, learners may experience intense and simultaneous attraction and aversion to language learning. This gradation reinforces the idea that mixed motivation is not an on–off switch, but a fluid and highly individualised experience. Learners’ motivational patterns shift depending on their context, emotional state, and personal history with language learning.

By looking at these distributions, we gain a more nuanced understanding of how engagement and resistance co-exist—and how they shape each learner’s journey. From a practical standpoint, this distribution reflects what educators often observe: learners may appear interested but hesitant, or enthusiastic in some situations and avoidant in others. The LMP makes such patterns visible and measurable.

From a statistical standpoint, analysis of the 1,408 respondents showed a statistically significant moderate negative correlation between engagement and resistance ($r = -0.64$, $p < .001$), supporting the view that while these constructs are related, they are not simply opposite ends of a single continuum. When separated by mixed-state classification, the correlation was weaker among higher mixed-state learners ($r = -0.50$) than lower mixed-state learners ($r = -0.68$), indicating that engagement and resistance are less tightly linked for those experiencing more internal motivational conflict.

Regression analysis showed that engagement negatively predicted resistance ($\beta = -0.50$, $p < .001$), and lower mixed-state learners showed significantly less resistance than higher mixed-state learners ($\beta = 6.86$, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that while increases in engagement can reduce resistance, the relationship is dynamic, not linear. Rather than a simple trade-off, the process is complex and variable—more akin to “walking against the wind” or taking “two steps forward, one step back.” For example, a mixed-state learner who increases engagement (taking two steps forward) may still experience resistance (taking one step back). This dynamic reflects the psychologically demanding and adaptive nature of language learning, where effort and progress often coexist with frustration and setbacks.

These findings support the theoretical model underpinning this research: engagement and resistance are distinct, interacting forces—not merely opposite ends of a single continuum. Mixed-state motivation reflects learners’ evolving emotional landscapes—often messy, yet entirely normal. Understanding these patterns can help educators interpret hesitation not as apathy, but as an active struggle with ambivalent motivation.

3.4 Motivational Profiles Identified by the Linguaculture Motivation Profiler

Further analysis of the same dataset explored whether learners could be grouped into distinct motivational profiles. The aim was not to classify learners but to capture meaningful constellations of motivation—patterns that reflect how individuals navigate complex and often conflicting feelings toward language learning. Importantly, these profiles are not just academic labels; they offer practical insight into how students feel about learning English and how educators might better support them.

Using cluster and latent variable methods, the team tested K-means clustering, Latent Profile Analysis (LPA), and Latent Class Analysis (LCA). Ultimately, LCA was selected as the most robust and interpretable approach for our data. LCA was chosen because it could use all categorical survey responses while providing a probabilistic, nuanced classification of learners’ profiles, making it more suitable than LPA (which requires continuous data) and more flexible than K-means (which forces hard, non-overlapping clusters). The analysis revealed four distinct motivational profiles. Each profile reflects different combinations of engagement, resistance, and mixed motivational states. This analysis revealed the complexity of participants’ motivation—some students are very motivated but still have doubts, while others are putting in effort despite strong internal resistance. Here’s a summary of the four profiles identified:

- **Discouraged but Enthusiastic Learners** (37.5% of the total sample)

Representing the largest group, these learners display moderate to high engagement while also experiencing notable resistance.

- **Engagement:** 53% Agree, 34% Strongly Agree
- **Resistance:** 50% Strongly Disagree, 40% Disagree
- **Mixed:** 38% Agree, 19% Strongly Agree

They are motivated but often discouraged by challenges or personal setbacks. Their internal conflict is palpable—they want to succeed, but emotional or psychological barriers can block consistent progress. This profile highlights the emotional complexity learners face, indicating a need for reflection on their motivations and recognition of the psychological challenges inherent in language learning.

- **Discouraged Learners** (24% of the total sample)

These learners report high resistance and low levels of enthusiastic engagement.

- **Engagement:** 61% Agree, only 5% Strongly Agree
- **Resistance:** 74% Disagree (i.e., agree with resistant statements)
- **Mixed:** 53% Agree

This group is marked by high resistance and relatively low engagement. While they may put effort into their studies, these learners tend to struggle with confidence and question the value or feasibility of language learning. Their responses suggest significant psychological barriers, emphasising the importance of providing emotional support and a secure learning environment to foster motivation.

- **Enthusiastic Learners** (21.3% of the total sample)

These learners exhibit the highest levels of engagement combined with very low resistance.

- **Engagement:** 64% Strongly Agree
- **Resistance:** 85% Strongly Disagree
- **Mixed:** 45% Strongly Disagree, 25% Disagree

These students are typically what educators think of as “highly motivated” as the results show a strong expression of engagement, a rejection of demotivating feelings, and a generally positive attitude toward English study. While not completely free of doubts, their responses reflect a

strong emotional and cognitive commitment to learning.

- **Hesitant Learners** (17.2% of the total sample)

These learners express a mix of motivation and resistance and exhibit high internal conflict.

- **Engagement:** 33% Agree, 18% Strongly Agree
- **Resistance:** 41% Disagree
- **Mixed:** 46% Strongly Agree

Characterised by a balance of engagement and resistance, these learners express uncertainty and doubt about their abilities and motivations. They have not fully disengaged but experience internal conflicts that can hinder consistent effort. Supporting this group involves helping them process and reflect on their mixed feelings to encourage a more stable motivational state.

These profiles illustrate the diverse motivational landscapes that learners inhabit, underscoring the necessity for differentiated pedagogical approaches tailored to each group's specific needs. Here are the key takeaways from the motivational profiles:

- 1) **Engagement and resistance often coexist.**

Many learners show both motivation and hesitation, highlighting the emotional complexity of language learning.

- 2) **Different learners need different kinds of support.**

Understanding the blend of engagement, resistance, and mixed states within each profile helps educators tailor instruction—from classroom interactions to syllabus design and assessment strategies.

- 3) **Mixed states are common, not a sign of confusion.**

Each profile displays signs of internal conflict. Mixed-state motivation is not a marginal or exceptional case—it is central to how students can experience language learning.

By identifying these four profiles, the LMP helps educators see beyond surface-level behaviours. Instead of labelling learners as simply motivated or not, educators can better understand the motivational currents beneath students' performance—where encouragement, emotional insight, and practical pedagogy all play a role.

4. Pedagogical Implications

This research has clear implications for language educators seeking to better understand and support

student motivation. One of the most important findings until now is that Japanese university students—regardless of proficiency or background—experience both engagement and resistance. These forces are not opposites on a single continuum but dynamic, coexisting aspects of motivation that shift over time. For educators, this means that fostering engagement is only half the story. Equally important is recognising and responding to resistance—especially when it emerges as frustration, avoidance, or low confidence.

The LMP offers a practical tool to make these dynamics visible. Rather than acting as a test of ability or a fixed measure of motivation, the LMP provides a snapshot of learners' internal experience at a given moment. It reveals the emotional and psychological effort that students invest in adapting to new linguistic and cultural norms. Particularly, from the linguaculture approach to foreign language learning, where learning a language also means engaging with unfamiliar ways of thinking and behaving, the LMP highlights the very struggles that accompany adapting and adjusting to the adaptive demands of learning.

Importantly, learners' motivational patterns are not static. Within a single classroom, students will likely fall into different motivational profiles—some highly engaged but struggling with anxiety, others feeling resistant despite good intentions. These profiles may change over the semester as learners encounter new challenges or gain confidence. The LMP can serve as a diagnostic tool at the start of a course, helping educators understand the range of motivational states present. It can also be used formatively—administered again later in the term to track changes and adapt teaching accordingly.

From a pedagogical perspective, the goal is not to eliminate resistance but to help learners manage it. Resistance is not necessarily a sign of failure—it may indicate that students are grappling with unfamiliar norms, experiencing self-doubt, or navigating conflicting expectations. These are natural responses to the psychologically demanding process of language learning. Rather than trying to “motivate” students in a traditional sense, educators can create environments where learners feel safe to explore, make mistakes, and persist through discomfort. In such environments, resistance can gradually soften, while engagement grows. In practice, this means designing activities that support both motivational dimensions. For high-resistance learners, structured tasks, emotional reassurance, and consistent feedback can provide a sense of security. For more engaged learners, meaningful challenges and opportunities for autonomy can deepen commitment. Reflective practices—such as journaling, small group discussions, or learner-teacher dialogues—can help students articulate and process their inner conflicts. Sharing LMP results (anonymously or in aggregate) with learners can also promote peer dialogue and awareness.

Finally, the LMP can support practitioner research. Educators can use it as part of action research cycles to continually understand their learners' motivational needs and iterate curriculum accordingly. Used thoughtfully, the LMP becomes more than a survey—it becomes a bridge between theory and classroom practice, helping educators respond to the emotional and psychological dimensions of learning that often go unnoticed.

5. Future Directions & Conclusion

Building on the current project's foundation, the next phase will expand internationally to examine motivational dynamics across diverse cultural and educational contexts. With collaborators in India, Poland,

and other countries, this research aims to validate an English-language version of the LMP and administer it to university learners in each country. This will enable the comparison of motivational profiles—engagement, resistance, and mixed states—between Japanese students and their international peers. By identifying both universal and context-specific patterns, the research will contribute to a more nuanced, globally informed understanding of foreign language learning motivation. Ultimately, this work seeks to promote pedagogical approaches that are sensitive to learners’ psychological needs across cultures. In parallel, future research will also include qualitative methods, such as interviews and reflective journaling, to complement and deepen the survey-based findings. These interpretive studies will provide valuable insight into students’ personal experiences, helping us better understand how they navigate the emotional and psychological challenges of learning a foreign language and culture.

In conclusion, this research contributes to the field of foreign language learning motivation by highlighting its dynamic and context-sensitive nature. Grounded in the linguaculture learning approach, it views motivation as an evolving response to the social, cultural, and linguistic challenges learners encounter. By shedding light on how students navigate moments of engagement and resistance, the LMP offers a valuable tool for both researchers and educators. It supports a more responsive and compassionate approach to language education—one that recognises the complexity of learners’ inner experiences and encourages pedagogical strategies attuned to their evolving needs.

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