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Motivational influences affecting female long-term learners of English in Japan

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Kathryn Mary Watabe

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Abstract

This study explores the influences that have affected the motivational development of a group of adult Japanese female long-term learners of English. The participants in this study are representative of large numbers of Japanese women who continue to invest significant amounts of time and money into learning English over many years but whose circumstances mean that they do not appear to fit traditional theories of motivation in which integrative or instrumental factors are central. This study also shows that in order to understand the development of motivation in long-term learners it is necessary to consider the individual within the context of a range of wider social forces. I use the *Life Stages* approach to better understand the way in which the learning situation and experiences of these women have been affected by the reality of their social and domestic roles during different periods in their lives as English students.

This study also supports Dörnyei's theory of the Ideal-L2-Self (2009) as more useful than previous theories of integrativeness, which do not appear to be relevant to the context of these learners, in understanding the motivational development of these women. The study found that the Ideal-L2-Self changed for these women as they moved through the different Life Stages but that it was the Ideal-L2-Self that was able to sustain their interest in studying English despite negative and frustrating learning experiences. The study found that while these women may by some measures not be considered to be serious English students due to the fact that they did not seek to integrate into an English-language community, the experience of being long-term learners of English had been significant in the lives of these women. In particular, as mature students of English, these women have been able to participate in a socially sanctioned activity that allows them to develop an aspect of themselves that is separate to their domestic roles.

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