



Will learning a foreign language help me excel in my future career?

A meta-analysis of publications on the motivation in Japanese and American students to study a foreign language

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## **Abstract**

This meta-analysis will investigate and compare existing research material on how Japanese and American high school students studying a foreign language are motivated by a belief that studying a foreign language will increase their future career opportunities. Reference material by appropriately versed authors will be used for this purpose. The concepts of attitude and motivation will be discussed together with the social context surrounding students from the two nations, such as the countries' historical backgrounds and past and present educational circumstances. The reviewed literature revealed that there have been various reasons for reluctance in both countries to teaching foreign languages in school; however, more recent research points towards a transition and, particularly in the case of the United States, a new understanding is taking shape in regards to the need also for native English speakers to learn foreign languages.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
1.Introduction.....	4
2.Background.....	6
2.1 Theoretical content.....	6
2.2 Reviewed Research studies.....	8
2.2.1 Michael Edwards: Japanese English Language Learners: Deficiency in Confidence.....	8
2.2.2 Liang Morita: Japanese University Students' Attitudes towards Globalisation, Intercultural Contexts and English. (2013).....	9
3. Method.....	11
4. Results.....	11
4.1 Attitudes and their effect on the motivation to learn a foreign language .....	11
4.1.1 Integrative motivation.....	13
4.1.2 Ethnocentricity.....	14
4.1.3 Social Influence.....	14
4.2 Historical background of foreign language learning and the school system today in the United States.....	15
4.3 Attitudes to learning a foreign language in American High School Students..	17
4.3.1 Integrative motivation.....	17
4.3.2 Ethnocentricity.....	17
4.3.3 Social Influence.....	18
4.4 Historical background of foreign language learning and the school system today in Japan.....	19
4.5 Attitudes to learning a foreign language in Japanese High School Students...	21
4.5.1 Integrative motivation.....	21
4.5.2 Ethnocentricity.....	22
4.5.3 Social Influence.....	22
5. Analysis and Discussion.....	24
6. Conclusion.....	26
Works Cited.....	30

## 1. Introduction

English has long been considered to be the lingua franca of the world (Sergeant 2009, 43). It would seem apparent that learning English could be a gateway to greater career opportunities or contribute to other extended possibilities in a person's life. It is logical to believe that Japanese students who have mastered English would be more attractive as employees both to companies in Japan, and also to international companies and one reason to surmise this is that teaching English in Japan through foreign language schools has grown to a multi-billion yen industry. Considering Japanese language teaching history, it appears that this development is quite recent, as the first reforms for the teaching of English in schools were not introduced until the early 1980s. There are reasons for this. Introducing a foreign language means bringing on-board another culture and Japan has, throughout history, attempted to find a balance between teaching its people sufficient English to manage those international relationships that would benefit the national economy while, at the same time, ensuring that English and the values connoted with it would not seep into the country and "defile" the Japanese culture.

Against this background, a meta-analysis will be performed which compares existing research material on Japanese students studying English as a foreign language and students with English as their native tongue studying a foreign language. The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of the motivation in Japanese students to study a foreign language, and how much of that motivation is based on their belief that it will help them further their future careers. The same review of literature will then be performed for a group of native English speakers, American students, and the results from this literature review will then be analysed and compared to gain an understanding of any differences that may be present the two student groups' beliefs that learning a second language will be beneficial for their future careers.

The work by Jensen (2007,12) shows that the American public believes that learning languages other than English is a "luxury" that should not feature as an essential component of the core curriculum and that it is certainly not important enough to be included in the K-12 spectrum. As is the case in Japan, the teaching of foreign languages did not become part of the core curriculum in the United States until quite late in history, when the Educate America Act from 1994 made foreign language learning part of the core subjects' curriculum. Students in

the United States have, of course, the benefit of having the lingua franca of the world<sup>1</sup> as their first language. For that reason, it is of value to review the spectrum of existing research in order to produce a clearer understanding of how and why English speaking students in America are motivated to learn a second language. This information can be used to further inform professionals, such as teachers or career advisers.

The Japanese government has throughout history made efforts to keep the country isolated from the rest of the world (Sergeant 2009, 67). The United States is, by contrast, a multicultural country. For such a nation, it could be argued that it would be beneficial to introduce the teaching of foreign languages in schools for another purpose; learning another language unavoidably also entails learning about the culture associated with that language, which could contribute to a greater openness towards, and understanding of, other cultures. The United States has a great many international relationships and understanding of the associated languages and cultures could be seen as advantageous for American students wishing to progress their careers. Looking at the two countries, Japan and the United States, it would appear that both nations could find benefits in learning English or another foreign language respectively.

One of the most important attributes when it comes to learning a foreign language is experiencing motivation to do so. Motivation is, to a great extent, built on our attitudes which, in turn, derive from a number of external factors. For the purpose of this essay, it is necessary to investigate literature on how attitudes are formed and how they affect students' motivations to study a foreign language. This essay will focus on the three main areas of attitude formation, set out by Atchade (2002, 45-50) (but also frequently referred to by the other authors in this literature review), in Japanese and American students respectively: integrative motivation, ethnocentricity and social influence. The students' sociocultural contexts are also of relevance when it comes to what attitudes they develop in respect of learning a foreign language. To obtain an understanding of how sociocultural values can be a part of attitude formation, it is critical to review literature on how history may have formed the general attitude of a society. Therefore, the educational history of the two countries regarding foreign

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<sup>1</sup> CSIZE ´ R, K. and KORMOS, J. 2009. *Learning Experiences, Selves and Motivated Learning Behaviour: A Comparative Analysis of Structural Models for Hungarian Secondary and University Learners of English*. In Dörnyei, Zoltan and Ushioda, Ema. *Motivation, Language Identity and the L2 Self*. Clevedon, GB: Multilingual Matters, 98-119

language learning will be discussed. Some attention will also be given to how much emphasis is placed on foreign language learning currently in the USA and Japan, as this may affect today's students' perceptions of learning a foreign language.

The main aim of this essay is to study existing research material to discover the extent to which it indicates that students from the two nations, Japan and United States, are likely to be motivated by a belief that learning a foreign language (English only for Japanese students and any other language for American students) will help them further in their future careers. To reach a conclusion on this, the available literature will be reviewed to answer to the following questions:

- What does the available literature show regarding how attitudes towards learning a foreign language are formed in the psyches of Japanese and American students and what effect do these attitudes have on their motivation to learn a language?
- How have history and social context contributed to shaping the attitudes in Japanese and American students according to the studied publications?
- How much emphasis does the reviewed material show is placed on teaching foreign languages in the core curriculum for each of the two countries?

This essay will start with a background section where the reviewed sources are presented in chronological order. The method used will then be described before the information that has been found in the reviewed sources are presented, divided into appropriate subsections for each country, in the results section. An analysis and discussion will follow where the information in the results section for the two countries is compared and contrasted. The essay will be finalised with a conclusion chapter which will review the process and suggest further research.

## **2. Background**

### **2.1 Theoretical content**

The following section will list the reference material that has been studied for the purpose of this meta-analysis, the theories presented in them, the purpose of their inclusion and possible weaknesses or critiques of their theories.

Experiencing motivation is important for successful second language learning. There are numerous publications available on the topic of motivation in second language learning. The reviewed material reveals that this is a concept which is not easily defined, although the various definitions may share some similar key points. Dörnyei (1998) displays this in his review of research from other authors, such as Gardner and MacIntyre. Gardner (2001) concludes that students' motivation and attitudes towards learning a second language are formed based on their past and present experience of language learning and also on their belief that learning a second language will be relevant for their future.

Atchade (2002) refers to the above mentioned work by Gardner in his discussion of the role of attitudes in second language learning; he bases his discussion on Gardner's concept of integrative motivation and two other factors that are relevant in the formation of these attitudes – ethnocentricity and social influence. Gardner further developed his research on integrative motivation in 2005 and also presented a fundamental model of language learning, the socio-educational model, where he explains the importance of motivation for successful second language learning and how the educational setting and cultural context influence motivation.

In the reviewed material by Taguchi et al (2009) the authors compare and evaluate Dörnyei's and Gardner's models for motivation in second language learning. They attempt to find a framework for motivation in second language learners that goes beyond the classic theoretical frameworks adopted by Gardner and his associates. Thus, they challenge Gardner's theories and investigate how more recent theories by Dörnyei can be considered more applicable. In particular, they attempt to validate Dörnyei's approach for a new second language motivation construct, the L2 Motivational Self System, which is based on a study on Hungarian students, in three Asian contexts. One of the three Asian countries in their study is Japan, which is one of the two target countries for this paper. They find that Dörnyei's approach is not country-specific and can thus be regarded as a prototype of general foreign language context.

Ryan (2009) has also based his research on Dörnyei's L2 motivational self-system. He applied Dörnyei's model in his studies on Japanese students and his discussion has been pertinent for this paper in order to secure a grasp of Japanese students' general mind-sets towards learning a second language. In particular, the work of Ryan has been used to investigate the social influences on Japanese students' attitudes towards learning a second

language. The study by Ryan, together with Seargeant's insight into the history of foreign language learning in Japan, helps to create a comprehensive overview of the past and current general opinion of second language learning in Japan. Seargeant (2009) also discusses in depth how Japanese culture may affect the attitudes of Japanese students towards learning a second language. The two articles by Morita (2013) and Aasness Lofsgaard (2015) are used in this essay to provide a more recent view of Japanese students' mind-set regarding the imperative for learning a second language. Both their articles demonstrate that little has changed in the years since Seargeant wrote his in-depth analysis.

Jensen et al (2007) investigate the situations and attitudes regarding second language studies in the United States. The authors have based their conclusions on existing research and their own research through interviews with language professionals. The information has been used in this essay to demonstrate that the motivation in American students' to study a second language is influenced by how much weight is given to languages in the core curriculum, the opinions of people surrounding them and the opinion of the public in general. The report from Modern Language Association of America (2007) also provides some insight into the past, present and future of language teaching in America.

## **2.2 Reviewed research studies**

### *2.2.1 Michael Edwards: Japanese English Language Learners: Deficiency in Confidence*

Edwards (2012) conducted a research study which is relevant for this essay. He compared a set of Japanese second language learners and a set of students from the United States studying Japanese. The focus of his study was to try and understand why Japanese students often regard themselves less capable of communicating in a second language than do their American university counterparts. Although that is not the particular focus for this essay, the study is still of relevance as it gives an indication of the difference in attitudes between American and Japanese students regarding how important the two groups respectively believe it is for their future that they learn a second language.

Both sample sets were given a questionnaire asking them to indicate their length of study, level of confidence in the target language and reason for studying their respective target language. Students from two universities, one in the United States and one in Japan,

participated in the survey, 100 students from each university.

The hundred students from California State University had all studied Japanese as a second language for less than three years and varied in age and gender. The Japanese students ranged in age from 18 to 22 and they had all studied English as a second language for a minimum of seven years. Both sexes were represented in the study. It is relevant to point out that the Japanese students studied English as part of their core curriculum, while it was not compulsory for the CSU students.

Of particular interest for this essay is question 4 of the survey: *Circle ONE of the following which BEST explains your reason for enrolling in your language course:*

- *It is required for my major*
- *For personal knowledge and growth*
- *It is easy for me*
- *No particular reason*
- *I'm interested in it*
- ***I feel it is necessary for my future***

One clear difference between the CSU students and the Japanese students was the indication of interest. Relatively speaking, there were significantly fewer Japanese students than CSU students who indicated that their reason for enrolling was personal growth and interest. There were, however, proportionally more who indicated necessity for the future as their motivation for enrolling.

Edwards concludes that Japanese students tend to experience a lack of confidence in their language skills in comparison with American second language learners. The reasons for this lack of confidence may rest with a cultural sense of modesty but, more importantly, the role of the teacher is crucial for students to develop a positive attitude towards learning English.

### *2.2.2 Liang Morita: Japanese University Students' Attitudes towards Globalisation, Intercultural Contexts and English. (2013)*

Morita conducted her study at Nagoya University in Japan. In the study she investigated undergraduates' attitudes towards globalisation, intercultural contexts and English. She has

previously conducted studies on the same topic, with a smaller sample of 55 students, and found that, although most students agreed that it was important to be able to function in intercultural contexts, the majority of students did not want this ability or expected that they would be in such an environment. Morita decided to probe more deeply into this issue with a larger sample group of 109 students.

The students in the sample were first or second year graduates. They were given a questionnaire developed by Morita. The questionnaire was written in Japanese and consisted of 14 Likert-type statements, such as “It is important to be able to function in intercultural contexts”. She found that most of the students (89%) agreed that Japan was affected by globalisation and 81.7% felt it was untrue that staying in Japan meant they would not be reached by the forces of globalisation (Morita 2103, 35). Also, 93.6% agreed that it was important to be able to function in intercultural contexts.

Morita allowed space for the students to comment each question and, corresponding with what Edward found in his study, many expressed concern about a lack of confidence in their English communication abilities. In line with Seargeant's discussion, Morita (2013, 38) also concludes that there is a need for a more communicative-based approach in English language education in Japan instead of the currently used grammar translation method.

The Grammar-translation method is the teaching of the second language grammar with focus on reading and writing, little or no systematic attention is paid to speaking or listening. The student's native language is maintained as the reference system in the acquisition of the second language. The method has been criticised for often creating frustration for students by the tedious experience of memorising endless lists of unusable grammar rules and vocabulary. Despite this critique, the Grammar-Translation method is still widely practiced, in part because it is relatively easy to apply and makes few demands on teachers (Liu and Shi 2007, 70). Morita (2013, 38) suggests that educators must prepare students for intercultural contexts by modifying their teaching methods to ensure students' knowledge and abilities to communicate in English.

### **3. Method**

The main method used in this research was the survey of existing publications to investigate the level of motivation in high school students that stems from the belief that learning a foreign language will enhance their future career opportunities. For the purpose of this essay, two countries will be compared. The first is a country in which English is the national language, but learning a foreign language is part of the school curriculum, specifically the United States. The second is Japan, a country where English is taught in schools as a foreign language.

It is common for individuals in the world today to speak more than one language. Some people may speak more than one language in the home if, for instance, they are children of immigrants. They have a natural gateway to learning another language. Gardner (2005,1) points out that a distinction is often made in the literature between second language acquisition and foreign language acquisition, with the definition that a language is a second language for an individual if it is readily available in that individual's environment and the language is deemed to be a foreign one for the individual if it is the language of a group with which the individual has little contact. For this paper, I have chosen to investigate the motivation in students from the category of foreign language students.

To find answers to the main question, namely if high school students in America and Japan respectively are motivated by the belief that learning a foreign language will help them further their future careers, it was necessary to study literature that discusses the three questions stated in the Introduction. It is also necessary to define certain terms, such as "attitudes" and "motivation". Efforts have been made first and foremost to use survey material from well-known authors with a profound knowledge of these topics, such as Gardner and Dörnyei. However, as both Gardner and Dörnyei performed most of their main research before 2005, reviewing research material from later dates has been a necessity.

### **4. Results**

#### **4.1 Attitudes and their effect on the motivation to learn a foreign language**

There are a number of factors that can affect students' motivation to learn a foreign language,

but, before taking that discussion further, it is necessary to attempt to define what is meant by motivation in relation to language acquisition. Motivation is a term that is used frequently in both educational and research contexts, but there appears to be little agreement in the literature with regard to the exact meaning of this expression. As pointed out by Dörnyei (1998, 117), however, it can be established that motivation has been widely accepted by both teachers and researchers as one of the key factors that influence the rate of success of second/foreign language learning. Motivation provides the primary impetus to initiate learning the second language (L2) and later the driving force to sustain the learning process. All the other factors involved in L2 acquisition presuppose motivation. As motivation is one of the key ingredients to successfully learning a second language, it is necessary to briefly discuss the concept in this essay. Gardner has defined what attributes a motivated individual displays (Gardner 2005, 9). A motivated individual:

- expends effort to achieve the goal, is persistent and attentive to the task at hand.
- has goals and desires. He or she has aspirations, both immediate and distal.
- enjoys the activity of striving for the goal.
- experiences positive reinforcement from his or her successes and dissatisfaction in response to failures.
- makes attributions concerning his or her successes or failures.
- is aroused when striving for the goal.
- makes use of strategies to aid in achieving the goal.

Simply put, the motivated individual expresses many behaviours, feelings, cognitions, etc., that the individual who is not motivated does not exhibit.

Attitudes contribute substantially to students' feelings of motivation. Chambers defines an attitude as follows: "An attitude is taken to mean the set of values which a student brings to the foreign language learning experience. It is shaped by the pay-offs that she expects. The values which a student has may be determined by different variables, such as the experience of learning the target language, of the target community, experience of travel, the influence of parents and friends and the attitudes which they may demonstrate and articulate" (Chambers 1999, 27).

Atchade (2002, 47) points to a causal relationship between attitudes and learning outcomes. Bartram follows the same line of thinking, but also highlights that there appears to be much

uncertainty about the exact nature of the relationship between the two terms attitude and motivation, as they are often used interchangeably. To attempt to separate motivation from attitude, he refers to Schiefele, who defines motivation as a combination of both motives and attitudes. Attitudes, according to Schiefele, represent an individual's more stable underlying disposition towards learning a language, whereas motives are the more immediate factors in a given situation, which guide behaviour in a particular direction (Bartram 2010, 37).

There are various constructs available in the reference material to categorise the concept of motivation, one of the most frequently used being Gardner's theory of integrative motivation. Integrative motivation will be discussed in this paper together with two other major areas that are commonly included in the reviewed material for this paper, for example in Atchade's (2002, 45-50). These three areas all contribute to shaping students' motivations to study a foreign language. Firstly, they will be presented and explained and, later in the discussion, they will be explored from American and Japanese perspectives respectively. The three areas are Integrative motivation, Ethnocentricity and Social Influence.

#### *4.1.1 Integrative motivation*

In *Integrative Motivation: Past, Present and Future*, Gardner refers to the students' integrative motivation as *the Future*, meaning that this is the use the individual believes he or she will have of the language once the education is finished (Gardner 2005, 4).

The concept of integrative motivation means that a student is more motivated to learn a foreign language if she believes that a personal gain can be achieved from learning the language and integrating with the culture speaking that language. One of these types of gains often consists of greater possibilities for future employment (Atchade 2002, 47). Bartram also discusses motivation from the perspective of future utility for the students and explains that the opinions differ on how relevant this is for young people of high school age. Some authors argue that the perceptions of future gains are only of significance in relation to adult motivation; it is, however, suggested that in the vast majority of researched material the utility factor is equally important when examining the attitudes of younger language learner. As an example, Bartram uses studies carried out in England (by Lee et al in 1998), which showed that most native English speaking students believed that learning languages was important because of the professional possibilities. It is relevant, however, to mention this was not sufficient to motivate them to study a language as they found English to be "enough". The

strength of English as a world language was perceived as undermining the usefulness of learning a foreign language (Bartram 2010, 87).

#### *4.1.2 Ethnocentricity*

Atchade (2002, 47) discusses the assumption that, to learn a new language, an individual needs to have a flexible and open attitude towards the norms of the new language and norms of social behaviour. An individual who considers the group to which he belongs to be more important than or superior to others (ethnocentric) is likely to develop a more negative attitude towards foreign language learning. Conversely, an individual who is open to the demands of a different language or culture, and perhaps is critical towards his own society, is predisposed to learn a foreign language and is likely to achieve greater success.

#### *4.1.3 Social influence*

Gardner refers to this element of the students' motivation as their *past*, meaning that the individual's past experiences, as well as family and cultural background, are considered important for learning a foreign language. When the student enters the classroom, he or she brings much of their emotional history and cognitive predispositions that can influence the learning experience. Gardner's second element, called *the present*, also falls under this category of social influences. "The present" refers to the fact that learning is also influenced by the present situation, such as the material, demands and requests presented by the teacher. It can affect the students' motivation if the lecture presentation is fun, dull, clear or confusing (Gardner 2005, 4). Bartram also states that the teacher is an important influencer of students' attitudes towards foreign language learning. In studies, teachers are often specified as the reason students like or dislike a language, and why their learning has improved or deteriorated. The teaching methodology, the textbook and the computers, count for little if a good teacher-student relationship is lacking (Bartram 2010, 43).

Atchade emphasises the importance that social influence has on the development of attitudes. Studies have shown that social context has certain relevance for learners' attitudes towards learning a foreign language. The social context includes influencers such as parents, teachers and other learners. If the learner's immediate family is negative towards learning a foreign language, it is likely that the learner will adopt a similar negative attitude. Learners who have

parents with a supportive attitude towards learning a foreign language are more likely to display a positive attitude towards foreign language learning. In a similar way, it is also necessary that the other students in the learner's environment have a correspondingly positive attitude as the learner. If, for instance, the other students are regularly absent from classes and make no effort, this is somewhat likely to affect the learner's opinion of the importance of learning a foreign language (Atchade 2002, 48).

Bartram also agrees that friends and peers influence students' attitudes towards foreign language learning. He argues that the pressure to conform to the norms of a group could sometimes make students reject languages. He supports his claims by using an example by O'Reilly-Cavani and Birk, who have also found that one of the key reasons for student demotivation and negative attitudes towards learning is the attitudes of friends and peers (Bartram 2010, 69).

Parents have a most significant influence on the general development of their children's attitudes and they have the ability to influence students' perceptions of foreign languages (Bartram 2010, 66). Parents who are supportive and encouraging show their children that they value foreign language learning and, when they communicate this to their children, they are likely to encourage positive attitudes in them and initiate their motivational process to learn a foreign language (Bartram 2010, 68). Bartram's discussion is of particular interest for this paper as he has specifically investigated the attitudes of learners between fifteen and sixteen years of age, and who are also the target group for this paper.

#### **4.2 Historical background of foreign language learning and the school system today in the United States**

The USA is a country without a national system for modern foreign language learning (MFLL) and it is up to each individual state to form a MFLL policy. Some federal legislation does exist, however, that supports language teaching, including Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994, which states: "This legislation encourages student achievement by the development of recommended goals and standards in the core subjects. Foreign languages are included in the core subjects" (Bartram 2010, 29). This legislation led to the establishment of a national standards framework for MFLL, produced by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages in conjunction with the US Department of Education

(ACTFL 2008). Despite this framework many commentators agree that the legislation has been implemented inconsistently and that the funding provided for MFLL is inadequate (Bartram 29). Forty states require that schools *offer* at least two years of MFLL, though it is not compulsory for students to take these courses. A press release by the US Department of Education (2006) revealed that only 44 per cent of American high school students were enrolled in foreign language classes.

Some commentators have argued that certain political events in recent years may have heightened the negative attitudes towards modern foreign language learning in the United States. In particular, events the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorism incident is believed to be of relevance. Although it has highlighted the need for more linguists to play a core role in national security issues, it has also increased the mistrust of difference (Modern Language Association of America 2007). The National Security Language Initiative, which was launched in 2006, would seem to support these claims. In particular it promotes the learning of “critical need foreign languages”, which are mainly languages spoken in countries where terrorists are believed to exist, such as Arabic and other Taliban languages. Since its introduction, many schools have received generous grants to “increase the number of Americans learning foreign languages critical to national security” (Bartram 2010, 31).

Jensen (2007, 11) refers to information from the American Council on Education (2002), which states that it is necessary for the United States to invest in an educational infrastructure that produces knowledge of languages and cultures, and must be able to steadily train a sufficient and diverse pool of American students to meet the needs of government agencies, the private sector and education itself. “A curriculum that excludes the study of foreign languages does not meet the current demands of globalization; it does not prepare our children for the roles they will play as adults and workers in an independent world; and runs the risk of permitting the United States to fall further behind other nations where foreign language study is more prevalent” (Jensen 2007, 11). In agreement with Bartram and other critics, Jensen also highlights that, although decision makers are aware of there being a compelling rationale to include foreign language in the core curriculum, the appropriate resources for such inclusion are not allocated (Jensen 2007, 11).

### **4.3 Attitudes to learning a foreign language in American High School Students**

#### *4.3.1 Integrative motivation*

Seargeant (2009, 106) states that the reason an individual is attracted to a language will relate to the beliefs he or she has about the purpose of that language and these will, in turn, influence convictions about the shape and nature of the language. Jensen follows a similar line of argument and highlights that students do not find sufficient motivation to learn a foreign language in the knowledge that it will benefit national security, international relations or the economy. To motivate American students, teachers must emphasise how learning a foreign language will lead to a new, more inclusive, view of the world, the United States' role in it and the opportunities such study would provide today's students (Jensen 2007, 12).

When learning a foreign language, the culture of that language comes along as part of the wider cultural context. The aim of the American national standards is to increase the integrative motivation in high school students, i.e. making them motivated to understand and want to integrate with students from other cultures. Studies performed between 1999 and 2004 to investigate how the teaching of culture has changed since the creation of the national standards have shown that the integration of culture is not as widespread as intended. To achieve the set goals, it is obvious that teachers must be provided with tools to deliver cultural instruction in the language classroom, otherwise the teaching of culture will not change (Jensen 2007, 23).

#### *4.3.2 Ethnocentricity*

Bartram claims that American ethnocentricity could negatively predispose American students to modern foreign language learning. If they learn from society to view culturally different people in a negative light, they also learn to depreciate the value of foreign languages they are studying (Bartram 2010, 30). A strong case is made by Acheson who suggests that a number of factors have created this situation in the United States with one of the major points being that American acceptance of English monolingualism, coupled with geographic isolation from the rest of the world and other languages, have resulted in these attitudes which depict the US as culturally and linguistically superior. These complexes contribute to inhibiting American attitudes to MFL (Bartram 2010, 30).

Contrary to Bartram's view, Jensen proposes some positive ethnocentric aspects that have become evident with the introduction of national standards for foreign language education. In recent years, educators have realised that the benefits attained by students through the study of languages extend beyond the practical one of proficiency in a non-native language to cognitive, academic and affective benefits and particularly attitudinal benefits, such as respect and appreciation of cultural diversity (Jensen 2007, 3).

#### *4.3.3 Social influence*

The problem with American students' poor interest in learning a foreign language seems to be related to the American sociocultural context and the way in which this appears to affect motivation and attitudes to learning a foreign language (Bartram 2010, 30). A study of how Americans view international education was conducted in 2003 for the American Forum for Global Education and the Asia Society by the FrameWorks Institute. The study found that the U.S public viewed international education as a luxury or a set of skills that can be postponed to postsecondary education. This general public view, i.e. that it is not particularly important to study a foreign language, is likely to dampen the motivation in American high school students to learn a foreign language.

Based on the previously mentioned survey by the FrameWorks Institute, members of the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages, responsible for the implementation of K-12 foreign languages standards in their respective states, proposed several critical steps for educators and policymakers to follow in order to achieve an attitude change in American students. These proposals include the development of cross-cultural competence in students by learning languages (i.e. the students should be able to view the world from the perspective of other people and to function comfortably among people of different cultures). They also advocate that greater use should be made of the language resources in America's ethnic and indigenous communities as well as to improve foreign language education in the United States through reforms in teacher training, curriculum and assessment, and the use of technology (Jensen 2007, 13).

By establishing a new frame for thinking about the value of language learning, and implementing new goals and objectives for language study for all students, it is believed that

citizens will be formed who are able to communicate and function across linguistic and cultural borders worldwide (Jensen 2007, 13).

#### **4.4 Historical background of foreign language learning and the school system today in Japan**

Japan is often said, historically, to have had a problematic relationship with the rest of the world. This relationship has been characterized by a process of regulating contact with the West and it has perpetuated an insular self-image. (Sergeant 2009, 65). As a response to the pressure exerted by the West to open itself up to foreign trade at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Japan embarked on its rapid modernization programme which involved emulating the West in its technological developments and social infrastructure. This policy of *wakon yousai*, or “Japanese spirit with Western learning”, was also therefore a responsive measure intended to preserve Japanese cultural identity and national sovereignty, while adapting to the global challenges. Prior to this, Japan’s national identity and indigenous culture had been protected by a policy of almost complete isolation from the rest of the world. (Sergeant 2009, 96).

A survey on English language teaching in Japan was performed in 1978 and it investigated subjects ranging from history and culture to methodology and linguistics. The survey revealed that Japan has a history of relative isolation from English-speaking people. English usage within Japan has been largely limited to the translation and critical study of foreign works. In general, reading comprehension skills have been fostered, while hearing and speaking skills have been less stressed. Even today, because university examinations require English reading comprehension, high schools often neglect the development of hearing and speaking skills (Sergeant 2009, 45). Similar studies on the state of language education in the country, performed at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, revealed that little had changed since the late 70’s in terms of prioritising reading comprehension and grammar and neglecting listening and speaking skills (Sergeant 2009, 45).

Throughout history, reforms have been proposed for English language teaching in Japan, and this occurred, for instance, during Yasuhiro Nakasone’s premiership in the mid-1980s. These reforms were introduced over the following two decades and stressed a transition towards a more communication-based language curriculum. While it could be perceived as a break from the previously favoured grammar-translation method, there appears to be a gross mismatch

between the supposed aims and the actual development (Seargeant 2009, 50). Nakasone is remembered for embodying many of the conflicting attitudes that structure the discourse of internationalism in Japan. In positioning Japan as an “international” power, Nakasone was insistent upon the need to promote and define Japanese values, and his premiership was punctuated by highly publicised acts of nationalism, many of which were interpreted by the international community as being overtly racist. He left power in 1987 and, two years later, his language reforms started to be implemented with the intention to: develop students’ abilities to understand a foreign language and express themselves in it, to foster a positive attitude toward communicating in it, and to heighten interest in language and culture, deepening international understanding (Seargeant 2009, 56).

While the reforms were mainly intended to affect government-run or accredited institutions, which constitute the official mainstream in Japan, there are also commercial language schools, called "eikaiwa". Foreign language schools are a multi-billion yen industry nowadays and operate extensive and aggressive advertising campaigns in both print and television, regularly featuring major Japanese and international celebrities in their promotions (Seargeant 2009, 96). Given that these organisations are primarily commercial businesses, the promotion of their services is likely to tend toward the saleable rather than the pedagogically sound. However, these establishments occupy such a prominent position in society that the image they promote of successful language teaching reflects what is perceived within society as being correct and desirable practice while also influencing the way in which the language is viewed. In terms of the shaping of the concept of the language in society, therefore, their influence is likely to be great (Seargeant 2009, 94). These institutions offer something that is desired by Japanese students, but not often included in the grammar-translation oriented public schools – communicative skills (Aasness Lofsgaard, 29). Specialising in communicative English, or “conversation classes”, these establishments draw students from all geographical, social and age groups, including those who are enrolled elsewhere in secondary or higher education English language programmes (Seargeant 2009, 96).

In 2003 an action plan to cultivate Japanese with English abilities was designed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Recognizing that the lack of sufficient English ability is putting many Japanese people at a disadvantage, MEXT has defined the English language requirements for all Japanese people and clarified the measures that should be taken by the government to establish a system for cultivating

Japanese with English abilities (Kashihara, 1).

While most Japanese elementary schools offer some kind of English education, there are no clear guidelines or requirements for teachers to adhere to. Some elementary schools might offer English lessons once a week, while others may have a session once every semester. This discrepancy makes it difficult for teachers in middle school, where there is a set national curriculum. It is also important to remember that learning the Latin alphabet may be an additional obstacle to Japanese learners of English (Aasness Lofsgaard, 27). As noted by Lofsgaard (2015, 29), it is apparent that the world is becoming increasingly globalised and internationalised and English is going to be the lingua franca for some time ahead. In order to keep up with the rest of the world, Japanese society has realised that proficiency in the English language is crucial. English education in Japan has to evolve to achieve this.

#### **4.5 Attitudes to learning a foreign language in Japanese High School Students**

##### *4.5.1 Integrative motivation*

Seargeant investigates messages from commercial English-learning institutions and universities and forms a general conclusion that learning English is viewed as a ticket to a greater or alternative (Western) future and greater mobility. A lack of English skills is seen to tie one to the expectations and limitations of Japanese society. The substance of nearly all the messages relates to social mobility and a desire for a perceived Western archetype of lifestyle. Instrumental motivation in these messages features the desire to increase one's income, but mostly the benefits are transposed away from the native culture and the discourse points in a Westerly direction (Seargeant 2009, 113). Seargeant reiterates an important point made by Kelsky from 1999 that many Japanese women are faced with persistent discrimination in the workplace based on gender and age and it is supported by a deeply entrenched gender division of labour in society. Women require alternatives and the opportunity for travel, study or to work abroad, offer such alternatives (Seargeant 2009, 114).

Edwards (2012) compares the questionnaire results from 100 American university students studying Japanese to the results of 100 Japanese university students studying English. Among the questions asked were why the students studied the second language, with one of the alternatives being "need for the future". What he found was that there was a clear difference

in the students' opinion of necessity for the future, where the Japanese students scored more highly (Edwards, 61).

#### 4.5.2 *Ethnocentricity*

The reference material surveyed for the previous section on integrative motivation in Japanese students shows some support for the suggestion that they appreciate the benefits of studying a second language; this has not, however, always been the case. Seargeant advances the notion that ethnocentricity may well be an important factor for the reluctance of the Japanese to learn English. A high level of proficiency in a foreign language would, it is feared, erode the uniqueness of the Japanese people (Seargeant 2009, 54). This kind of cultural stereotyping does not figure so overtly in more recent accounts, but it is still referred to.

Japanese ethnocentrism, and its possible consequences for English language education, is closely connected to the concept of *kokusaika*, which has been a concept of great relevance for the perception of the English language in Japan over the last two decades. *Kokusaika* is often literally translated as “internationalisation” and is believed to have come into prominence in Japan in the 1980s as a response by the government to foreign pressure for Japan to open up its markets. The primary goal of Japan’s internationalisation was to enhance its national economic interest and thus the more Japan became internationalised, the more nationalistic it became (Seargeant 2009, 54).

This theme has also found its way into the English language teaching debate. The grammar-translation and memorisation methods that are so popular in Japan are further evidence of tradition of insularity, as they reflect the one-way importation of knowledge and information which characterised Japan’s desire for modernisation while retaining its own identity. The continued patronage of the grammar-translation method by the exam system, the use of “decorative” English in advertising and popular culture and the often voiced suggestion that English is too difficult for Japanese people to learn, are all taken as evidence to support this line of argument (Seargeant 2009, 55).

### *4.5.3 Social influence*

It would seem that the one of the major “obstacles” to creating a positive attitude towards learning English in Japan lies in the history of Japanese society (a chronology of fractious international relations), in its current infrastructure and organisation (a hierarchal society with a language which explicitly encodes such social stratifications in its politeness code) and in the way it structures and enacts education (built around a critically important exam system), all of which are incompatible with successful English language teaching strategies. A pervasive impression emerges that English is something for which Japanese society itself will have to alter before it can be properly adopted and effectively taught. The pedagogical significance of this is that the “foreignness” of English as both code and cultural practice is foregrounded (Seargeant 2009, 60).

While the “official” discourse of language professionals might have a crucial impact on the way people orientate themselves toward the language (the attitudes they take toward it and the uses they make of it), this wider distribution of symbolic meanings also plays a significant role in the process and is an index of the spectrum of ideologies which contribute to the character of the language within society (Seargeant 2009, 64).

Taguchi et al. (2009, 69) show through their studies that, although Japan and China share some common features in educational context, the two countries differ in the level of importance accorded to English by the general population. Japanese industries had, in 2009, started to require potential candidates to possess English abilities; it is not always the case that English proficiency is as strongly related to successful job-seeking in Japan as it is in China, where proficiency in English has become a prerequisite for anyone who wants to compete in the global marketplace. Taguchi et al., refer to studies showing that Japanese students did not believe that identification with the target group was important. They may have an impression that it will become a necessity to use English in the “internationalised” society, but the inclination to work in the international community was modest. (Taguchi et al. 2009, 69). These studies and findings suggest that it is likely that the social influence to study English as a second language would still be quite modest even today, only a few years later.

Similar to Taguchi et al.’s findings are those of Morita at Nagoya University. Morita

researched Japanese university students' attitudes towards globalisation, intercultural contexts and English in 2013. She found in her research that, while most of the students' attitudes echo government rhetoric, they believe that globalisation is something from which they can opt out. In addition, the students also felt that the ability to function in intercultural situations is desirable, yet half of them do not think they will find themselves in such situations. The fact that researchers and the government recognise the future as likely to manifest as an intercultural environment which requires the use of English does not necessarily mean that university students share the perception (Morita 2013, 32).

## **5. Analysis and Discussion**

For the past 20 years, foreign languages have been part of the core subjects in the United States. This was established by the Educate America Act of 1994. However, the surveyed publications have shown that the legislation has not been thoroughly implemented as it has not been compulsory for students to undertake language studies. There are indications in the surveyed material that this lack of foreign language education may depend on a belief that learning a second language is not necessary when the native tongue is the lingua franca of the world. In recent years, however, because of events like 9/11, competence in a second language has received a higher status by the US government and the belief that foreign language learning is important has been strengthened.

While the United States may not have been inclined to include second language learning in its educational infrastructure, the country's population has always consisted of a mixture of people with different native tongues and from different cultures. The surveyed research material on language teaching history in Japan revealed that foreign language learning (English) has not had a prominent position in Japan either in the past. Preserving the "national soul", such as the national identity, traditions and culture, has historically been of profound importance in Japan and efforts have been made to teach English only to the extent that is necessary to manage foreign relations while still isolating the English language from the associated culture. As a result of this desire, the grammar-translation method of teaching and testing has been used in learning institutions in favour of teaching oral communication skills.

These circumstances have contributed to both American and Japanese students' limited opportunities for studying a second language and this, in turn, would also have affected their

respective society's general opinion of the importance of learning it. It has, however, become more apparent for both countries in recent years that learning a second language would be beneficial in today's increasingly globalised world. The United States has introduced second language learning in the core curriculum and an increasing interest in learning English has led to the emergence of numerous independent private institutions in Japan for English teaching. These changes in recent years are likely to result in more positive general mind-sets in both American and Japanese students in terms of believing that learning a second language will be beneficial for their future careers. It is fair to consider, however, that these changes will occur faster in the more multicultural America where the fear of losing the national identity when learning about and introducing other cultures is not as prevalent as it is in Japan. In particular, as the surveyed publications have shown that, while the understanding is clear in Japanese students that studying English would be beneficial for their future opportunities, their desire to do so is quite limited.

Another factor that has been compared between the two countries through compiling information from the publications is that of ethnocentricity and what effect it has on the students' motivation to learn a second language. This ties in with the above discussion where the various material has shown that a student's belief that their own culture is superior to others is likely to dampen the motivation to study a second language or learn about different cultures. The surveyed material indicates that ethnocentricity in American students, which is largely due to social influences, is likely to inhibit their desire to learn a second language and understand other cultures. Similarly, social influences have been a factor behind the reluctance in Japanese students to learn English and, in particular, to acknowledge the "English" culture. The reference literature has shown, however, that there has been a slight change towards a more positive mind-set in recent years. Much of this change is due to the introduction of commercial teaching institutions, and also the introduction of English-speaking Western television shows, movies and music.

Society as a whole has changed in both countries in recent years and they have become increasingly internationalised. Both the governments of the United States and Japan have realised that trying to isolate their country and culture from the rest of the world and other cultures simply is not realistic anymore. From a starting point where the United States saw little need to include second language learning in the core curriculum as there is a general belief that the rest of the world speaks English anyway, it has come to a point where people

having a fluency in a second language is highly attractive and it is viewed as vital for national security to ensure that there is a sufficient pool of bilingual inhabitants. This development, where the benefits of studying a second language are more defined, has definitely given having a fluency in a second language a higher status and constitutes a career opportunity in the United States. It is probable that this positive view will cascade down from government level to student level and enhance the motivation in American students to study a second language to a greater extent than before.

The review of the material focusing specifically on Japan and Japanese students revealed a similar pattern, where the country has been quite reluctant to introduce English and Western culture in the past, but has increasingly opened up in recent years due to the realisation that it is a necessity to compete on the global arena. Japanese students are better informed about the career opportunities that come with learning English as a second language. Seargeant (2009, 114) argues that Japanese women in particular, who may still experience limitations in the workplace because of social norms, can find opportunities to excel in their careers abroad. Today, Japanese students have far more opportunities than they had previously. Most Japanese elementary schools offer some kind of English education and there are private institutions that can provide the desired English education when the public system cannot.

## **6. Conclusion**

It has become apparent through conducting this study that there is a wind of change blowing in both the United States and Japan. Economic and social globalisation is linking people across linguistic and cultural borders. The world is shrinking, metaphorically speaking, and the key to any country's international success is to be found in its inhabitants' motivations and opportunities to learn other languages of the world and also develop an understanding of the culture associated with those languages. Through this review, it has become evident that both Japan and the United States are in a state of transition regarding the general attitudes to learning foreign languages and understanding other cultures.

The purpose of this meta-analysis was to attempt to answer the following three questions by surveying existing research material and publications from other authors and sources:

- What does the available literature show regarding how attitudes towards learning a foreign language are formed in Japanese and American students and what effect do these attitudes have on their motivation to learn a language?
- How have history and social context contributed to shaping the attitudes in Japanese and American students according to the studied publications?
- How much emphasis does the reviewed material show is placed on teaching foreign languages in the core curriculum for each of the two countries?

The publications studied in this essay are to some degree based on, or refer to, previous research and theories by two of the most influential scholars in terms of studies on motivation in second language acquisition – Robert Gardner and Zoltan Dörnyei. It may be considered that greater efforts could have been made to find sources presenting theories and discussions that are completely independent of the work of these two authors. Due to time constraints, this was not been achieved to the desired extent. Here, it should be pointed out that this critique concerns only the parts of this essay that refer to how attitudes are formed. For the other parts of the essay, such as the survey of literature on general attitudes in Japan and the United States, and also the historical information on second language teaching, the sources are independent from reference to a common source.

The surveyed material revealed that students in both the United States and Japan are strongly affected by their surroundings and their social influences. This includes immediate family, peers and teachers, as well as governmental measurements and the general opinions of society. These social influences have all previously worked to create a general attitude in students in both Japan and the United States to the effect that learning a second language, or learning about other cultures, is not necessary. Recently, the governments of both countries have come to a clear conclusion that it *is* necessary to learn another language to be able to compete and interact internationally. The reviewed material has indicated that this understanding has also been transferred to the two countries' students. It appears, however, that this has not necessarily led to any further actions of the students. It is recommended that both governments maintain the focus on second language learning and perhaps offer extra benefits for students studying the language that each government considers to be the most advantageous.

For the second question, namely the one regarding how history and social context has

contributed to shaping the attitudes in Japanese and American students, the surveyed publications have shown that Japan is a country in which the people have, for a very long time, understood that it is necessary to learn how to speak English in order to, for instance, manage its trade relationships. However, the Japanese government has gone to extraordinary lengths to try to separate the English language from its culture. Conversely, the United States has long regarded learning a second language as unnecessary as the native tongue is English, which is effectively the lingua franca of the world. This has undoubtedly helped to foster an attitude in American students that learning a second language is superfluous. Much due to increasing globalisation and recent security threatening events, this attitude has changed and the American government has become increasingly aware of the benefits of having a greater number of bilinguals among its citizens and, in particular, speakers of languages that are of particular interest for security. Bartram (2010,31) provides support for this view by referring to the National Security Language Initiative, which promotes the learning of “critical need foreign languages” - mainly languages spoken in countries where terrorists are believed to reside - such as Arabic and other Taliban languages.

The third aim of this essay was to research available reference material to determine how much emphasis is placed on teaching foreign languages in Japan and the United States today. The Japanese government now acknowledges that it would be beneficial for the country’s inhabitants to learn English to secure or advance their careers in Japan or abroad. The inhabitants themselves, however, appear to be stuck behind old customs and ideals, even if the attitudes are slowly becoming more positive in general. One phenomenon that supports this is the fact that teaching English has become such a lucrative industry in Japan.

Likewise, the sources reviewed in this paper indicate that the United States is also a country in transition. It is not surprising that this change has taken so long. For many years the country has enjoyed the benefits of being a nation with English, now widely viewed as the lingua franca of the world, as the main language. Other countries have come to the U.S and done business in English, so there has been no necessity to learn other languages. However, despite the dominant role played by the English-speaking world, the fact is that native speakers of English represent a very small percentage of the world’s population – and this trend will continue according to population experts (Jensen 57). The United States has become increasingly aware of that it will need to increase its inhabitants’ understanding of other cultures to remain competitive and integrate with the world, and national reforms have been

introduced to increase the learning of foreign languages in schools to prepare for future needs of foreign language speakers. This indicates that learning a foreign language will be afforded a higher status in the United States than it has previously enjoyed. This is also likely, in time, to alter the general public's perception that learning a foreign language is beneficial for future career opportunities. In the case of the Japanese students, the motivation to study a foreign language based on the belief that it will contribute to better career opportunities is not entirely inculcated into them yet either. However, based on the information found through this literature review, it is likely that it will be.

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