FACTORS THAT IMPACT ON THE ACADEMIC MOTIVATION OF JAPANESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN JAPAN AND IN NEW ZEALAND

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In Japan, there is a pervasive concern about the low academic motivation of many university students. In an effort to gain some understanding of the factors that might contribute to this problem, the present study examined the motivation profiles of Japanese university students in both locally-based and foreign-based (New Zealand) universities. The participants were 302 Japanese university students (121 studying in Japan, and 181 in New Zealand) who were administered a Japanese translation of the Academic Motivation Scale and a questionnaire. Although the two groups manifested no differences in their apparent motivation toward self-improvement and knowledge acquisition, the Japan-based group was found to be significantly higher in amotivation. The results suggest that this higher amotivation level could be due to the Japan-based students possessing more negative views and outlook, and enrolling for extraneous reasons and not necessarily of their own volition. These findings are discussed particularly in consideration of possible ways of addressing the problem.

Key words: academic motivation, amotivation, Japanese university students, exam hell

It is commonly taken for granted that, as with any other form of human endeavour requiring sustained effort over a period of time, fluctuations will occur in the motivation levels of university students as far as their academic efforts are concerned. Hence, it is not usually considered grounds for serious concern when a student does little or no study for a period of time as it is assumed that the student will subsequently resume putting in the required effort as coursework deadlines and tests approach. It only becomes a serious concern when the student’s academic motivation failure persists for long periods of time.

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to the extent that it undermines the student’s ability to successfully complete his or her course of study and/or to gain any benefit at all from being enrolled in university studies.

In Japan, there is a pervasive view that a significant proportion of university students lack the necessary academic motivation: the students study extremely hard to gain entry to university but, once there, the majority do very little in terms of academic work. The motivation problem of university students in Japan has been described and/or investigated in numerous studies (e.g., Kobayashi, 1989; Minato, 1995; Nakajima, 1995; Shimoyama, 1992, 1996; Tetsushima, 1993; Ushiogi, 1988). The problem has, in some cases, been referred to as “student apathy,” and Simoyama’s (1996) review of studies on this topic sheds some light on its identification, examination, and apparent increase over the past forty years. Simoyama pointed out, for example, that the favourable economic conditions in Japan during the late 1950s resulted in greater numbers of people enrolling in tertiary studies in the 1960s. The first symptom for concern, with regard to unexpected impairment in performance, probably occurred in 1964 when — for the first time — an unusually high number of students in national universities failed their courses.

A wide range of explanations has been put forward as to why the problem in academic motivation occurs amongst Japanese university students. Ushiogi (1988), for example, argued that motivation amongst Japanese students is low because university education is now commonplace: unlike the olden days, education no longer guarantees rewards like wealth. He noted that, for most Japanese, education is no longer a passport to escape poverty as most of them come from families that are not suffering from, or even experiencing, poverty. This view is congruent with comments made by the General Manager of Japan Youth Research Institute (reported in Science Daily, 2006) that students in Japan do not consider study effort as necessarily leading to a happy life. Another perspective on this problem was provided by Tetsushima (1993) who used a more clinical approach and focused on internal psychological factors, reporting that identity confusion and an inadequate focus on the reasons for entering university are strong influences on the occurrence of apathy. Shimoyama (1992) took more of the typical social condition of Japanese students into account when he explained that, when they come to university, these students are experiencing freedom for the first time — after going through what would seem like endless years of “examination hell” (i.e., spending most of their waking hours on examination-related study and preparation) just to gain entry to a university. Thus, the students tend to extend their decision making as far as their future careers are concerned so that they can live through and complete their adolescent development — at the inevitable expense of their academic performance.

Irrespective of the reason that is subscribed to, there appears to be general agreement about the tendency for increasing numbers of university students in Japan to display the symptoms of low motivation: both Nakajima (1995) and Shimoyama (1992) reported that the number of tertiary students who fail their courses has been on the increase. This trend in university student performance is perhaps not surprising in light of the manner by which many students apparently conduct themselves on a daily basis. Although it cannot be taken as depicting the conduct of all university students, Ushiogi’s (1999) description of the typical day for a female university student is quite telling. His investigation
revealed that the student would stay at university for an average of 5 hours and 9 minutes, largely attending classes; the student would do no self-directed study at all, but would spend an average of 3 hours and 22 minutes on various activities such as part-time work, talking to friends, and shopping; the student would also get an average of only 6.5 hours of sleep as she would not go to bed until 12:30 am but would get up at 7 o’clock the following morning.

In more serious cases of motivational failure, the student would not even attend classes anymore — as in the case of a Mr S, described by Minato (1995). Upon entering university, Mr S started spending a lot of his time writing poems, reading and discussing literature unrelated to his studies, and taking part in the activities of an environmental problems club. These extracurricular activities could have probably been viewed positively as extending Mr S’s repertoire of skills and understanding — except they were all he spent his time on after failing a couple of courses during his second year. He did not attend classes anymore during his repeat year. He was reported to have indicated that he wanted to obtain good grades but at the same time did not want to study hard. He continued to fail his courses for two more years as he maintained the same pattern despite promises made to his father and a university counsellor that he would resume attending classes. In Mr S’s case, there was eventually a favourable outcome: he improved his attitude toward his university education after he took up a part-time tutoring job and had to convince a high school student who did not want to go to school anymore about the merits of continuing his studies.

Outside of Japan, the concern about the low academic motivation of many Japanese university students is not common knowledge. Japanese students, often along with other students from Asian countries, are often viewed as high in both academic achievement and motivation, particularly compared to their counterparts in the United States (e.g., Bacon & Ichikawa, 1988; Chen & Uttal, 1988; Stevenson, Lee, & Stigler, 1986). However, the comparisons that have been carried out have focused on students below the university level — and students below the university level in Japan do work very hard in general (as noted earlier), achieve good academic results, and are typically not considered as a group to be concerned about in terms of academic performance.

There are two important areas that have not been investigated in previous studies on the problem of low academic motivation amongst Japanese university students. First, it has not been established whether this is only a ‘local’ problem — in other words, whether only the Japanese students in universities in Japan manifest generally low academic motivation. There is no indication at all in studies such as that of Ngo and Malz (1998) that Asian American students (including Japanese American students) show anything but normal — if not higher — levels of academic motivation. Ngo and Malz’s study, however, used as participants students of Asian immigrant heritage who were already living in the United States; as far as the present authors are aware, no investigation has been carried out on the academic motivation of Japanese students who are in foreign universities only for the duration of the degree they are enrolled in (i.e., those who are considered as international rather than domestic students). Differences in the academic motivation of Japanese students in locally-based versus foreign-based universities could imply
important differences in the environmental perceptions of and attributions made by these students. On the other hand, a lack of difference in motivational profiles could suggest that the students’ societal and educational experiences prior to entering university are the major determining factors in the levels of academic motivation they manifest at university.

A second important area that has not been investigated concerns the aspects of academic motivation that may be detrimentally affected in the general Japanese university student population. No measure has previously been undertaken, using a psychometric assessment tool such as an academic motivation scale, of the levels that Japanese university students might evidence on different dimensions of motivation (e.g., intrinsic, extrinsic, amotivation). The present study therefore examined the academic motivation profiles of Japanese university students in both locally-based and foreign-based (in New Zealand) universities using a Japanese-translated version of the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS; Vallerand, et al., 1992). It is hoped that obtaining a more detailed view of the academic motivation profiles of Japanese university students, as well as finding out any differences that study location could make, would enable a better understanding of the factors that might directly contribute to the identified problem amongst these students. In turn, such an understanding could contribute to devising more appropriate multi-level (i.e., societal, educational, institutional, etc.) strategies for addressing the problem.

**Method**

**Assessment Instrument and Questionnaire:**

The AMS was used in the present study to examine Japanese university students’ academic motivation levels. Vallerand et al. (1992, p. 1003) described the AMS as a “measure of motivation toward education … based on the tenets of self-motivation theory.” The scale comprises 28 items which provide scores on seven subscales: three types of intrinsic motivation, three types of extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. Intrinsic motivation pertains to the desire to undertake an activity for its own sake, and for the pleasure and satisfaction that can come from participation. Extrinsic motivation refers to engagement in various kinds of behaviour not for their own sake but to achieve other ends. Amotivation pertains to perceiving no contingencies between outcomes and one’s own actions.

The three types of intrinsic motivation that the AMS provides scores in are intrinsic motivation (1) to know, (2) toward accomplishment, and (3) to experience stimulation (Vallerand et al., 1992). Intrinsic motivation to know refers to the desire to perform an activity for the pleasure and satisfaction that comes with learning, exploring, or trying to understand something new (e.g., “I like reading books for the sheer pleasure of finding out new information.”). Intrinsic motivation toward accomplishment entails engagement in an activity for the pleasure and satisfaction that is experienced in trying to accomplish or create something (e.g., “I work hard on my assignments for the pleasure I get while trying to surpass myself.”). Intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation refers to taking part in an activity to experience stimulating sensations that comes from the very engagement with the activity (e.g., “I attend classes so I can experience the excitement of a stimulating class discussion.”).

The three types of extrinsic motivation measured by the AMS are extrinsic motivation (1) identified, (2) introjected, and (3) externally regulated. Extrinsic motivation identified pertains to situations where the behaviour that is engaged in has become valued and judged as important for oneself, as well as being internalised or perceived as chosen for oneself (e.g., “I’ve chosen to study tonight because it is something important to me.”). Extrinsic motivation introjected applies when one begins to internalise the reasons for taking part in an activity to experience stimulating sensations that comes from the very engagement with the activity (e.g., “I attend classes so I can experience the excitement of a stimulating class discussion.”).

The three types of extrinsic motivation measured by the AMS are extrinsic motivation (1) identified, (2) introjected, and (3) externally regulated. Extrinsic motivation identified pertains to situations where the behaviour that is engaged in has become valued and judged as important for oneself, as well as being internalised or perceived as chosen for oneself (e.g., “I’ve chosen to study tonight because it is something important to me.”). Extrinsic motivation introjected applies when one begins to internalise the reasons for taking a particular action, but the action is not viewed as truly self-determined (e.g., “I study the night before exams because that is what good students are supposed to do.”). Extrinsic motivation externally regulated refers to situations where the behaviour is regulated through external means such as rewards and constraints.
(e.g., “I study the night before exams because my parents force me to.”).

Vallerand et al. (1992, 1993) put forward arguments for the usefulness of the AMS in educational research on motivation, based on data they had gathered on its reliability (internal consistency and temporal stability), and factorial, current, and construct validity. Fortier, Vallerand, and Guay (1995) also used items from the AMS to compute and measure the construct of autonomous academic motivation in a study that investigated the relationship of this construct to school performance in high school students. Although Cokley (2000) expressed concerns about the ability of the AMS to distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (as his investigation found them to be significantly and positively intercorrelated), Cokley, Bernard, Cunningham, and Motoike (2001) found some support for the scale’s construct validity and concluded that its “seven-factor structure seems to be accurate” (p. 118).

In the present study, a parallel and independent back-translation procedure — similar to that used by Vallerand et al. (1992) to translate the original French version of the AMS to English — was used to translate the English version of the scale to Japanese. Two bilingual academics (fluent in both Japanese and English) independently translated the AMS to Japanese; the two Japanese translations were then given to two other bilinguals who independently translated them back to English without looking at the original English version. Discussions were then held about differences between the Japanese versions and, based on the English back translations, how to best avoid different and inappropriate interpretations of the concepts used in the scale. From this, a preliminary Japanese version of the scale was constructed, which was then given to a small group of bilingual Japanese university students for comment and suggestions about clarity and language use. Based on the feedback from the students, further minor modifications were made to the wording of the Japanese translation before it was finally administered to the participants of the study.

Together with the AMS, a questionnaire (also in Japanese) was administered to the participants that sought demographic details, agreement/disagreement responses to items relating to reasons for enrolling at university, personal views about self, views about the future, and views about university education and society, as well as what they wanted to do after graduating from university. The English version of the items in this questionnaire is included in the Appendix.

Participants and Procedure:

The participants were 302 Japanese university students (all Japanese-born); 121 of the students were from a large national university in the Kansai area of Japan, while 181 were from six of the eight government universities in New Zealand (NZ). One hundred and seventy (170) of the students were female, and 132 were male; 64 of the students from the Japanese university were female and 57 were male; the corresponding figures for the students from the NZ universities were 106 female and 75 male. The mean age of the students was 22.90 years ($SD = 4.02$ years); 21.55 years ($SD = 2.73$ years) for those in the Japanese university, and 23.81 years ($SD = 4.47$ years) for those in NZ universities. Two hundred and fifty-seven (257) of the students were enrolled in undergraduate degrees (109 in Japan, and 148 in NZ), and 45 were at the graduate level (12 in Japan, and 33 in NZ).

All the universities chosen to solicit students from in both Japan and NZ are government universities of high standing and academic standards. No polytechnic universities or preparatory colleges were included. It was deemed important to include only highly regarded universities to reduce the likelihood of students being poorly motivated as a consequence of failing to enter other universities that they would rather be in. Likewise, the decision to include only universities of high academic standards was made to avoid the inclusion of students who may have low academic motivation largely because of the relatively lower academic expectations in their institution.

The students were invited to participate in the study via classes they were attending, personal invitation through contact university personnel known to the researchers, or (in NZ only) a letter that was mailed to some of the participants (which included the questionnaire and a post-paid return envelope). The students participated in the study in an anonymous manner, which meant that they were not required to provide their names or other information that could be linked back to them on the scale or questionnaire they completed. The researchers also did not keep records of the student lists from which the participants came, so there was no possibility of attributing any of the particular responses made to any individual participant.

The statistical analyses undertaken included exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, correlations between the AMS subscales and responses to the other questionnaires administered, and analyses of variance in order to test for differences between the Japanese- and NZ-based samples.
The Fit Between the Data Collected and the AMS Model

Confirmatory factor analysis was undertaken to find out how well the data collected fitted the AMS model of academic motivation with its seven factors. The goodness of fit was assessed using a number of criteria. First, the chi-square ($\chi^2$) statistic was used to test the null model against the hypothesised model of the AMS (cf. Cokley et al., 2001). Second, the $\chi^2/df$ ratio was calculated as, according to Kline (1998), this reduces the sensitivity of the $\chi^2$ to sample size. The closer the ratio is to 0, the better the data fit the model. According to Hair, Anderson, Tathan, and Black (1992), the ratio should ideally be between 1 and 2; Kline, however, considered a ratio of less than 3 as acceptable.

With the data collected in the present study, the $\chi^2$ (337, $N = 300$) value was 950.958, which was significant at $p < .001$, suggesting that the data did not fit the model well (cf. Schumacker & Lomax, 1996). However, the $\chi^2/df$ ratio equalled 2.82, which is below 3 and suggests that the fit of the model is acceptable once sample size has been accounted for.

The normal fit index (NFI; which compares the lack of fit of the hypothesised model to that of the null model, as described by Bentler & Bonett, 1980, and Kline, 1998) and the comparative fit index (CFI; which uses the noncentral $\chi^2$ and is less likely to be affected by sample size, as described by Bentler, 1990) were also calculated. The NFI was found to be .806, while the CFI was .865 — both being just under the .90 or higher index value that Bentler (1995) and Byrne (1994) considered as indicative of an adequate fit between data and hypothesised model. Hence, according to the NFI and CFI indexes, the fit was only marginal.

Finally, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; which estimates the lack of fit in a model compared to a perfect model, as described by Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001) was also calculated. The RMSEA value obtained was .078, indicating a reasonable fit (which requires a value below .10, according to Browne and Cudeck, 1993).

Overall, therefore, there were indications from this analysis that there was a moderate, acceptable fit between the data collected in the present study and the AMS model. The fit is only marginal according to the NFI and the CFI, but both the $\chi^2/df$ ratio and the RMSEA returned a reasonable fit verdict.

Comparisons between Japanese and New Zealand data

Factor analysis was also undertaken on the data collected via the questionnaire (see Appendix). Only items with loadings of .4 and above were interpreted and included in subsequent comparisons between the Japan- and NZ-based data. Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) advised that only variables with loadings of .32 and above be included, and Comrey and Lee (1992) noted that loadings above .45 could be considered fair.

In analysing the complete set of data (students from both Japanese and NZ universities), the responses to items about reasons for enrolling at university (“I have enrolled at university because ...”) produced three factors. The first factor related to extraneous reasons for enrolling (including three items: I do not want to work yet; I cannot think of anything else to do at this time of my life; I would like to be involved in university
sport or music life), the second to encouragement to enrol (including four items: My teachers/parents/friends encouraged me to; Most of my friends have also enrolled at university), and the third to self improvement (including two items: I believe I have the ability to succeed at university; I want to further develop my skills and abilities at university).

Table 1 shows the overall and location-based means of the students on the factors identified through the items in the questionnaire administered. As shown, the Japan-based students scored significantly higher on both extraneous reasons for enrolling, and being encouraged to enrol. No differences between the groups were found as far as the third factor of self-improvement was concerned.

A one-factor model best represented the students’ responses to the questionnaire items on “Your personal views about yourself” and “Your views about your future;” goodness of fit: $\chi^2 = 97.76$ ($df = 20$), $p < .001$. This factor, which can be considered as having a positive view about oneself and the future, included five items from the questionnaire (I am comfortable about the direction my life is taking at the moment; I am comfortable with who I am; I feel that I have good control about what happens in my life; I am looking forward to the future; I think my working life in the future will be exciting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>$F(1, 300)$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having extraneous reasons for enrolling at university</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>67.20***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>8.77</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>6.07</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receipt of encouragement as reason for enrolling at university</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>7.75</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>27.04***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>8.95</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>6.96</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire for self improvement as reason for enrolling at university</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>6.91</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>6.77</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a positive view of oneself and the future</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>16.57</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>19.44***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>15.40</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>17.34</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a positive view of university education and society</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>12.56</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>16.97***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>11.74</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>13.11</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** $p < .001$. 

and challenging). The NZ-based students scored significantly higher on this factor compared to their counterparts in Japan (see Table 1).

The students’ responses to the questionnaire items on “Your views about university education and society” generated a single factor; goodness of fit: $\chi^2 = 48.70 \ (df = 9), p < .001$. This factor, which can be considered as having a positive view toward university education and society, included four items (I think what I am taught at university will be useful to me in the future; I think most of my university instructors care about the progress that students make in their studies; I think I can make an important contribution to society; I think the society I live in will allow me to make an important contribution to it). On this factor, the NZ-based students scored significantly higher than their Japan-based counterparts (see Table 1).

On the AMS, there were also some interesting differences between the Japan- and NZ-based students. Whilst the groups did not differ in intrinsic motivation toward accomplishment and extrinsic motivation identified, the Japan-based sample scored significantly higher in amotivation, intrinsic motivation to know, and intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation. On the other hand, the NZ-based sample scored significantly higher in extrinsic motivation introjected and extrinsic motivation externally regulated. Details are shown in Table 2.

It is interesting to note some apparent differences between the means obtained in the present study and the AMS means reported by Vallerand et al. (1992, p. 1014: from 745 Canadian students, mean age = 21.0 years) and Cokley et al. (2001, p. 115: from 263 US students, mean age = 23.45 years). The means of both Japanese groups of the present study appear to be generally lower in extrinsic motivation externally regulated. However, the mean score of the NZ-based Japanese students in extrinsic motivation introjected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Motivation</th>
<th>Japan-Based Mean</th>
<th>Japan-Based SD</th>
<th>New Zealand-Based Mean</th>
<th>New Zealand-Based SD</th>
<th>F(1, 300)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic Motivation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Know</td>
<td>21.81</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>20.44</td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td>6.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toward Accomplishment</td>
<td>11.38</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>12.25</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Experience Stimulation</td>
<td>11.83</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>9.78</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>17.17***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic Motivation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified</td>
<td>14.78</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>15.57</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introjected</td>
<td>17.19</td>
<td>6.80</td>
<td>21.36</td>
<td>7.98</td>
<td>22.28***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Externally regulated</td>
<td>11.07</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>13.14</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>15.91***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amotivation</td>
<td>10.26</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>7.85</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>20.84***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .05$.  *** $p < .001$.  

Table 2. The Japan- and New Zealand-based Student Means and Standard Deviations on the Types of Motivations Assessed by the Academic Motivation Scale
appears to be higher. Likewise, the Japan-based students’ mean score in amotivation appears to be higher compared to the Canadian and US means reported. These observations suggest that a comparison of the academic motivation profiles of students from different ethnic and cultural groups may be worthwhile and could contribute towards a better understanding of issues relating to their academic performance. However, proper statistical analyses and discussion of these apparent differences in comparison to the Canadian and US groups are outside the parameters of the present study.

On the questionnaire about what the students of the present study wanted to do after graduating from university, the two highest responses of “hope it eagerly” for the Japan-based cohort were “To continue in a graduate course” (47.1% from this group) and “To get a job in a Japanese company” (16.5% from this group). For the NZ-based cohort, the two highest responses of “hope it eagerly” were for “To work in a foreign country, outside of Japan” (34.3% from this group) and “To continue in a graduate course” (23.2%). Table 3 shows the top five choices that the Japan- and NZ-based students made for “hope it eagerly” and “would like just to do so.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Japan-Based Students’ Choices</th>
<th>New Zealand-Based Students’ Choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Hope It Eagerly”</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. To continue in a graduate course (47.1%)</td>
<td>1. To work in a foreign country, outside of Japan (34.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. To get a job in a Japanese company (16.5%)</td>
<td>2. To continue in a graduate course (23.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Other (9.1%)</td>
<td>3. To get a job in a foreign-affiliated company (21.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. To become a government officer (5.8%)</td>
<td>4. To become a school teacher (12.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. To become a local government officer (5.8%)</td>
<td>5. To get a job in a Japanese company (10.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Would Just Like To Do So”</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. To become a local government officer (24%)</td>
<td>1. To work in a foreign country, outside of Japan (33.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. To become a government officer (23.1%)</td>
<td>2. To get a job in a foreign-affiliated company (26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To continue in a graduate course (22.3%)</td>
<td>3. To continue in a graduate course (24.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. To get a job in a Japanese company (22.3%)</td>
<td>4. To get a job in a Japanese company (23.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. To become a school teacher (15.7%)</td>
<td>5. To become a school teacher (13.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlations Between Factors

An examination of the relationships between the students’ scores on the identified factors for enrolling at university and their scores on “views about themselves and their future” and “views about university education and society” revealed that enrolling for the sake of self-improvement was significantly correlated with both of the latter two factors concerning their views, whilst enrolling for various extraneous reasons was significantly
negatively correlated (see Table 4). This indicates that students who enrol for university studies because they would like to further develop their skills and knowledge are more likely to possess a positive view about themselves and their future, as well as a positive view about university education and the society in which they live. As mentioned earlier, whilst the Japan- and NZ-based students did not differ in their scores on enrolling for the sake of self-improvement, the Japan-based students were higher in their scores on enrolling for various extraneous reasons.

An examination of the relationships between the factors noted above and the AMS revealed that the students’ scores on enrolling for the sake of self-improvement significantly correlated with all types of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, whilst being significantly negatively correlated with amotivation. On the other hand, scores on enrolling because of received encouragement significantly correlated with extrinsic motivation introjected and externally regulated, as well as amotivation. Scores on enrolling for various extraneous reasons were significantly correlated with intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation, extrinsic motivation externally regulated, and amotivation; and significantly negatively correlated with intrinsic motivation toward accomplishment and extrinsic motivation identified. These results are shown in Table 5.

The students’ scores on the factor concerning the possession of a positive view about themselves and their future was found to significantly correlate with all types of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, whilst being significantly negatively correlated with amotivation. The same results were found with the students’ scores on the factor concerning possession of a positive view about university education and society at large. These results are depicted in Table 5.

These findings suggest that the desire for self-improvement as a reason for enrolling at university promotes a positive view about oneself and one’s future, as well as about university education in general. All these promote higher levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In contrast, both extraneous reasons for enrolling at university, and possessing encouragement from others as the major drive for enrolling, appear to contribute to amotivation.

**Table 4. Correlations Between Students’ Scores on Reasons for Enrolling at University and Their Views on “Self and the Future” and “University Education and Society”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Having a positive view of oneself and the future</th>
<th>Having a positive view of university education and society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having extraneous reasons for enrolling at university</td>
<td>–.256**</td>
<td>–.169**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receipt of encouragement as reason for enrolling at university</td>
<td>–.108</td>
<td>–.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire for self improvement as reason for enrolling at university</td>
<td>.375**</td>
<td>.451**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < .01.**
The present study found that despite there being no differences between the Japan-based and NZ-based Japanese university students’ apparent motivation toward the development of skills and knowledge (e.g., as indicated by their equivalent scores on intrinsic motivation toward accomplishment), the Japan-based students were significantly higher in their levels of amotivation. This means that as a group they have a greater tendency to perceive few contingencies between outcomes and their own actions: in other words, what they do and what happens — in this case, where academic endeavours are concerned — would appear to them as being largely unrelated.

The most immediate question that comes to mind is: Why might this be the case? The data obtained in this study point to the Japan-based students possessing higher scores on factors that are significantly correlated with, and hence appear to promote, amotivation. These factors are enrolling at university for various extraneous reasons, and because they have been encouraged by others to do so. The Japan-based students also possessed lower scores on factors that were found to significantly negatively correlate with amotivation — namely, possessing positive views of oneself and one’s future, and possessing positive views of university education and society in general. Hence the findings suggest that because the Japan-based students have more negative views and outlook, and are more likely to have enrolled for extraneous reasons and not necessarily of their own volition, they manifest higher levels of amotivation.

### Table 5. Correlations Between Types of Academic Motivation and Students’ Reasons for Enrolling at University and Views

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Motivation</th>
<th>Reason: Encouraged to Enrol</th>
<th>Reason: Self-Improvement</th>
<th>View of Self &amp; Future</th>
<th>View of University Education &amp; Society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Know</td>
<td>-.025</td>
<td>.396**</td>
<td>.329**</td>
<td>.437**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toward Accomplishment</td>
<td>-.140*</td>
<td>.327**</td>
<td>.300**</td>
<td>.341**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Experience Stimulation</td>
<td>.124*</td>
<td>.230**</td>
<td>.156**</td>
<td>.213**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified</td>
<td>-.162**</td>
<td>.400**</td>
<td>.442**</td>
<td>.477**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introjected</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>.167**</td>
<td>.376**</td>
<td>.151**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Externally Regulated</td>
<td>.129*</td>
<td>.199**</td>
<td>.237**</td>
<td>.151**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amotivation</td>
<td>.409**</td>
<td>.261**</td>
<td>-.309**</td>
<td>-.511**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* * p < .05. ** p < .01.

**DISCUSSION**

The present study found that despite there being no differences between the Japan-based and NZ-based Japanese university students’ apparent motivation toward the development of skills and knowledge (e.g., as indicated by their equivalent scores on intrinsic motivation toward accomplishment), the Japan-based students were significantly higher in their levels of amotivation. This means that as a group they have a greater tendency to perceive few contingencies between outcomes and their own actions: in other words, what they do and what happens — in this case, where academic endeavours are concerned — would appear to them as being largely unrelated.

The most immediate question that comes to mind is: Why might this be the case? The data obtained in this study point to the Japan-based students possessing higher scores on factors that are significantly correlated with, and hence appear to promote, amotivation. These factors are enrolling at university for various extraneous reasons, and because they have been encouraged by others to do so. The Japan-based students also possessed lower scores on factors that were found to significantly negatively correlate with amotivation — namely, possessing positive views of oneself and one’s future, and possessing positive views of university education and society in general. Hence the findings suggest that because the Japan-based students have more negative views and outlook, and are more likely to have enrolled for extraneous reasons and not necessarily of their own volition, they manifest higher levels of amotivation.
The next question that this raises is: What might have brought about the differences on these factors between the Japan-based and NZ-based groups? The answer to this question can only be speculated upon, but there are a few possibilities that on their own or in combination could be considered as viable explanations. It is very likely, for example, that the Japanese students studying in NZ universities had put more thought into their reasons for studying at university — as this is almost inevitable when one makes a big decision such as the one they made of leaving familiar surroundings, family and friends to pursue studies in a foreign location. They were therefore more likely to have clarified for themselves their study expectations and motivations, and there are indications in the data gathered in this study to support this: the NZ-based students were higher in their externally regulated extrinsic motivation, suggesting that they were clearer about the rewards and constraints that regulate their study behaviours. In contrast, as reported earlier, the Japan-based students scored significantly higher on having been encouraged by others to enrol at university: hence, they may not have thought as much about their own study motivations and expectations.

Associated with the explanation provided above is the likelihood that the NZ-based Japanese students would have ‘invested’ more into their education in terms of effort (e.g., improving their English language skills levels), as well as monetary and other sacrifices like that already noted of leaving familiar surroundings behind. If they had in fact invested more into their university education, then it would provide at least one possible explanation for the more positive views about university education that the NZ-based cohort were found to have in this study. Attribution and cognitive dissonance theories (see, for example, Aronson & Mills, 1959; Festinger, 1957) suggest that individuals tend to value an item more when it cost them something (including effort). While it can be argued that both the NZ-based and the Japan-based students invested considerable effort in getting into university by going through years of “examination hell”, it can equally be argued that the Japan-based students were more likely to have held views that their university education was “commonplace” — as previously noted, Ushiogi (1988) believed that many students in Japan tend to hold such a view nowadays.

It also needs to be noted that, in one way, the NZ-based students would have had little choice but to put in an ongoing investment of effort into their studies compared to the Japan-based students. Unlike universities in Japan where courses which have final examinations are rare, almost all courses (especially at the undergraduate level) in NZ have final examinations that need to be passed by the students. It is comparably more difficult to stay in a university in NZ because most universities have an exclusion policy which means that, if a student fails more than half of his/her courses in any 2-year period, the student is “excluded” (i.e., asked to leave the university).

The reasons given above may work in combination to explain why, even though examination hell is a common experience amongst significant portions of student populations in Asia, the problem of low academic motivation amongst university students appears particularly pronounced only in Japan. Greenfeld (2006) noted that “there is a steady nobility … in the student going through exam hell in one of Asia’s supercities so that he may fulfil his parents’ wishes and graduate to a better life” — but as noted earlier,
in Japan, any obvious links between studying hard and a better life (for students who are mostly already affluent in life) may have become largely blurred over the past few decades. Unlike their counterparts in South Korea, who the International Student Exchange Program (2005) described as having a higher prestige and respect in society compared to university students in the US, many students in Japan may not value their university education and its accompanying status as much. Furthermore, without final examinations — which are usually an integral part of university studies in most other Asian countries — the threat of failure in Japanese universities may be comparatively mild, which could account for complacency and poor effort on the part of many students who previously (prior to entering university) had their study activities largely regulated by examinations and the threat of failure.

Another possible source of difference between the present study’s two cohorts of students as far as the factors related to amotivation are concerned is the Japan-based students’ apparent need for more than the educational aspects of the university experience. This need is reflected in the group’s significantly higher scores on the ‘enrolling for various other extraneous reasons’ factor and on intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation. This finding supports Shimoyama’s (1992) explanation of the social condition of many university students in Japan: that they are basically experiencing freedom for the first time after seemingly endless years of examination hell, and would like to enjoy life and experience what they missed during childhood. Unfortunately, however, this social condition appears to promote amotivation, as the data from the present study suggest.

As noted, the Japan-based students possessed less positive views about themselves and the future — a factor found to significantly link with amotivation. Universities in Japan may therefore wish to consider enhancing services they provide that could generally promote more positive views amongst students. They could, for example, provide more comprehensive career planning and counselling services, and encourage students to use these. Savickas (1998) stressed the importance of career planning to tertiary students, describing it as being inseparable from students’ identity development. Numerous authors (e.g., Halasz & Kempton, 2000; Smith & Gast, 1998; Smith, Myers, & Hensley, 2002) have pointed out the multifaceted benefits to students that stem from the provision of instruction and advice on matters addressing careers options and decision making.

Despite Japanese universities being consistently ranked the best and/or amongst the best in Asia and the world (see, for example, Ince, 2004), data from the present study indicate that Japan-based students were less positive in their views about university education and society at large, compared to the NZ-based cohort. Again, it may be useful for universities in Japan to consider strategies that could better re-align the universities’ merits and capabilities with their students’ appreciation of the personal and wider benefits of university education — and this needs to go beyond the notion that “If I graduate from a good university with a high reputation, I can get a good job in a good company.” Strategies that could be considered include the provision of better co-ordinated and effective student induction and orientation programmes — both at the institutional and faculty/departmental levels. Such programmes could not only clarify academic
expectations and motivations for students, but also convey a greater sense of how much
the institution cares and values them. There are many authors who stress the value of
student orientation programmes to the students themselves as well as the institutions they
are in. For example, Glass and Garrett (1995) found evidence in their study that
completing an orientation course during the first term of enrolment promoted and
improved student performance, and Robinson (1996) explained why orientation
programmes facilitate the transition and integration of students into the tertiary learning
environment. To promote a more positive outlook and enhance their sense of belonging to
the university, Cooke, Sims, and Peyrefitte (1995) suggested providing students greater
opportunities for engagement in research projects and community service.

The present study found important differences between Japanese university students
enrolled in Japan compared to those enrolled in NZ. There were differences in academic
motivation profiles with the Japan-based students manifesting higher levels of
amotivation. The findings of this study indicate that (1) having other extraneous reasons
for enrolling at university, (2) enrolling because of encouragement from others, (3) having
a low desire for self-improvement, (4) more negative views about oneself and the future,
as well as (5) less than favourable views of university education and society at large, are
factors that are linked to amotivation. In all except the desire for self-improvement, the
Japan-based and NZ-based students significantly differed on these factors.

The fact that the Japan-based and NZ-based students significantly differed in their
levels of amotivation suggest that the problem of low academic motivation amongst
university students in Japan may be possible to address at the institutional level. This is
partly supported by observations that these same unmotivated students can work hard and
with enthusiasm once they get jobs after graduation¹, suggesting that the poor motivation
manifested is associated with environmental perceptions and attributions (i.e., in this case,
the students’ awareness that doing little work at university may not have dire
consequences, but doing little work in their subsequent places of employment could cost
them their jobs). Some suggestions for strategies that universities can take to address
students’ motivational problems have been put forward here for consideration, including
the provision of more comprehensive careers planning and advice, and induction and
orientation programmes for students. There is, however, only so much that universities
can do to address the problem. At a more fundamental level, some changes need to also
be made at the societal level so that students do not end up suffering the many years of
examination hell prior to entering universities. At the same time, it is crucially important
to develop in school children a better and more balanced perspective about examinations,
as well as to foster a greater sense of self-efficacy, purposefulness, and control over their
environment.

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ACADEMIC MOTIVATION OF JAPANESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS


(Manuscript received October 25, 2005; Revision accepted April 2, 2006)
Appendix

English Translation of the Items in the Questionnaire Administered to Students

DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS ABOUT YOURSELF
1. Age (in years) =
2. Gender (circle one) = FEMALE/MALE
3. Main subject or major at university =
4. Level at university (circle one) = UNDERGRADUATE / POSTGRADUATE
5. Year at university (count all years spent at university including this year) =

For the following sections, please circle the number you feel is appropriate for you.

I HAVE ENROLLED AT UNIVERSITY BECAUSE ...
My parents encouraged me to.
Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true
My teachers encouraged me to.
Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true
My friends encouraged me to.
Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true
I want to obtain national qualifications, degrees, or licences.
Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true
Most of my friends have also enrolled at university.
Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true
I believe I have the ability to succeed at university.
Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true
I want to further develop my skills and abilities at university.
Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true
I do not really want to work yet.
Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true
I would like to be involved in university sport or music life.
Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true
I cannot think of what else to do at this time of my life.
Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true
I want to have an interesting and exciting social life.
Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true

YOUR PERSONAL VIEWS ABOUT YOURSELF
I am comfortable with who I am.
Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true
I am happy with the number and kind of friends I have at the present time.
Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true
I am comfortable about the direction my life is taking at the moment.
Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true
I feel that I have good control about what happens in my life.
Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true
I consider myself to be a serious student.
Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true

YOUR VIEWS ABOUT THE FUTURE
I would be happy if my life turned out exactly the same as my parents.
Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true
I am looking forward to the future.

Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true

I think my working life in the future will be exciting and challenging.

Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true

YOUR VIEWS ABOUT UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND SOCIETY

I think what I am taught at university will be useful to me in the future.

Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true

I think I can make an important contribution to society.

Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true

I think it is very easy to pass examinations in the university I am in now.

Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true

I think the grades I receive at university will have an impact on my future career prospects.

Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true

I think most of my university instructors care about the progress that students make in their studies.

Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true

I think the society I live in will allow me to make an important contribution to it.

Not true at all 1 2 3 4 5 Totally true

Please tell us what you would like to do after graduating from your University. Fill a ◯ mark in □ if you hope it eagerly and fill a ○ mark if you would like just to do so. You can use each mark as often as you like.

☐ To go to another university
☐ To continue in a graduate course
☐ To get a job in a Japanese company
☐ To get a job in a foreign-affiliated company
☐ To work in a foreign country, outside of Japan
☐ To become a government officer
☐ To become a local government officer
☐ To become a school teacher
☐ To become a lawyer or a certified public accountant
☐ To become a medical doctor or a dentist
☐ To become a nurse or one of other paramedical staff
☐ To become a social worker or a welfare worker
☐ To become an independent business person
☐ To work free lance
☐ Not decided
☐ Other – Please specify ( )