In an EFL context, mastering English language is extremely difficult unless supported by disciplinal learning tasks. Over time, a great many claims have been made as to that what enables learners to endure myriads of difficulties in learning English is intrinsic motivation such as interest and joy in learning English. However, if a student now feels some helplessness like “It is impossible for me to master English” or “I don’t feel like learning English at all”, it is hardly possible for him or her to have such intrinsic motivation to learn English.

To fill this quantum gap, it would be effective to satisfy the learner’s essential need for competence. A concept of “competence” was introduced by White (1959), defining it as an individual’s capacity to interact effectively with the environment. In other words, an individual has a feeling of competence when he can make a choice and decision by himself in his environment. These concepts of competence and self-determination were taken over by Deci and Ryan’s self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), suggesting that people become more autonomous and intrinsically motivated as they internalize external values and increase self-determination. However, it appears that such emphasis on self-determination does not always work successfully in the Japanese school context because there are few opportunities for the students to make decisions on their own accord. Moreover, on the face of it at least, the word “competence” for the Japanese, seems to include different meaning to the above definition by White (1959): he seems to regard the environment as something to be governed under human’s self-determination.

Concerning this, the Japanese regard the environment as rather something to be harmonized with. Therefore, a feeling of “competence” might be acquired by the Japanese when an individual can be harmonized with the environment, performing well in something which is required by the surroundings. Therefore, it is vital to take such a cultural difference into consideration when discussing the motivation of EFL learners in Japan.

Since a learner’s motivation transforms into
various states throughout their long period of English learning, his or her current low motivation for learning English may be a result of the ebb and flow of one's motivation up to the present. Inevitably, how to motivate them differs in accordance with its transitional process. In order to understand why and how learners' motivations have been transformed, it needs to be revealed how they have perceived their learning experiences and outcomes, and how they have constructed their "self". To this end, the purpose of this study is to reveal a common learning experience which influences English learners' motivational transition in the Japanese EFL school context.

Chapter 1 reviews theories in the field of motivation and their limitations in the Japanese school context. The following four chapters report the study, starting with the method and procedure, and then finishing with a discussion of the results.

Chapter 3 describes the two phases of the quantitative study. In phase 1, using cluster analysis, the participants are divided into four groups according to their transition patterns in motivational intensity of English learning. According to their transition patterns, the four groups were named "high-high", "low-low", "low-high", and "high-low" groups. In phase 2, the four groups' characteristics are investigated concerning their motivational qualities, attribution, and feelings of competence / helplessness. The findings can be summarized as the following: 1) the learners' perception of whether they are being forced to learn English has a strong influence on their increase, decrease, and maintenance of motivational intensity, 2) whether one has an experience of being rewarded in making an effort or not affects his or her change of attribution, and 3) feelings of competence are perceived higher by the learners who have increased or sustained high intensity of motivation.

In Chapter 4, the participants' descriptive data are analyzed in order to follow up the results of Chapter 3, seeking to reveal what kinds of learning experience influences on such characteristics. As a result, it was found that tests, school records, and the school entrance examination exert a serious impact on learners' perception of the effect of their effort and their feelings of competence.

The last chapter summarizes the findings of this study and discusses them paying particular attention to the Japanese EFL School context.