Investigating Learners’ Sense of Achievement: A Retrospective Study of 1st Year Japanese EFL University Students

To date, despite the importance of a sense of achievement, empirical investigations focusing on this sense in language learning have been scarce in L2 research.

This study aims to examine the nature of learners’ inner psyche and the learning environment by investigating their experience of feeling a sense of achievement. To this end, a questionnaire survey and interviews were carried out. In the present study, however, focus was placed more on the interview data.

Chapter 1 lays a theoretical framework for this research. At the outset of this chapter, working definition of a sense of achievement is given using the framework of achievement motivation theory. Following this is a classification of motivation, which consists of intrinsic and extrinsic types (including several stages of extrinsic motivation) within the framework of self-determination theory. On this basis, the chapter expands on the reciprocal relationships that exist among three components: motivation, internal factors, and external factors using Williams and Burden’s framework (1997). Finally, other learner variables such as anxiety, goal-theory, attribution theory, and self-efficacy theory are discussed.

Chapter 2 describes the overall design of the research. First, the strengths and weaknesses of the qualitative data are discussed. In order to understand learners’ English learning history and their perception of English language learning, real learner was elicited to obtain qualitative data. Then, the research schedule and processes of this study (a
questionnaire survey and interview) are described. The data analysis of the present study also has two areas: Study 1 and Study 2. Study 1 focuses on the common features of the participants, while Study 2 describes the characteristics of each individual. In the next section, the nature of retrospective data is discussed. Then, the details of investigation are outlined: the process of the pilot study, the participants, the open-ended questionnaire, and the interview. The pilot study, whose participants were first-year university students, consisted of two processes: an open-ended questionnaire survey and an interview.

Chapter 3 gives an analysis of the overall data and discusses the results. Firstly, the data elicitation is explained. In the subsequent section, the method of analysis, which was similar to but slightly different from the KJ method (Kawakita, 1967, 1970) is described in much more detail. The KJ method is an approach to examine eclectic information using illustrated diagrams. In this study, two points were different from the original KJ method in the process of data analysis. Two types of diagrams were created through the process of analysis: positive patterns and negative patterns.

Chapter 4 discusses five learners’ language learning experiences individually. These five learners were selected based on specific criteria, and significant comments were picked out from the interview scripts. The discussion of this chapter focuses on learners’ development at the level of their inner psyche with reference to a sense of achievement and the learning environment.

Chapter 5 summarizes the answers to the research questions. Following this, in the next section, some limitations of this study are pointed out. Then, to conclude this paper, an outline of the points learned from this study is given.