

# English Learner Motivation at Ritsumeikan University : Gender differences

——立命館大学における英語学習の動機：男女差はあるのか。——

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## Abstract

Students responded to a questionnaire that sought to identify specific extrinsic and integrative goals that Ritsumeikan University students find motivational in their study of English. This pilot study's goal was to determine factors which motivate students and guide further investigation into their general and specific motivation for learning English. Women showed almost exclusive preference for integrative goals whereas men included extrinsic goals such as TOEIC scores and job prospects. This difference in preferences by gender held true for short and long term goals. Additionally, students identified short and long term goals for their study of English. These goals were primarily integrative and communicative. Further research is necessary to confirm the findings of this pilot study. If confirmed, the follow up will attempt to determine if tying course materials to student goals of this sort helps learners to feel increased motivation for learning.

Keywords : English, gender, Japan, motivation, SLA,

## I. Introduction

The issue of student motivation is central to any course and instrumental in the development of curricula and materials. In the Business Administration department at Ritsumeikan University, the main motivations of students appeared unclear. Informal student feedback, anecdotal evidence and classroom questionnaires suggested that student concerns lay generally in testing, grading, and desires to communicate effectively. The low quality of data available, however, did little to more than suggest vague leanings toward ill defined goals.

It was in this information gap that the current study germinated. The questionnaire developed from literature on motivation and Japanese learners in higher education to target extrinsic and integrative motivating factors. The instrument collected information on factors that students find motivating as well as data useful for understanding and categorizing students that might help identify student profiles that would react to some specific goals or materials.

## II. Literature Review

While students may look to their teachers for approval and respect as “... key figures ... who affect the motivational quality of the learning process” (Dornyei, 2001 pg. 35), they also are capable of motivation from expectations of distant future rewards or achievement (extrinsic motivation) and the desire to improve their existing abilities (integrative motivation). This study seeks to determine what extrinsic and integrative factors students consider to be motivating.

Research literature on the subject of student motivation in Japan’s higher education EFL population is sparse. Negative opinions prevail among the sources addressing student motivation and the motivating of this student population. Comments include the complaints that learners are unmotivated, unwilling to use English in class, bound by consensus, uncommunicative, academically dishonest, disengaged, cripplingly shy, and even perhaps resistant to learning, (Shimizu, 1995; Poza 1998; Nimmanit, 1998; Mayer, 1999; Doyen, 2000; Saito, 2000; McVeigh, 2002). Some sources, particularly McVeigh (2002), suggest that learners are motivated only by their need to pass the next test, for example, a college entrance exam or a level of proficiency described by Eiken or TOEIC scores.

Short term extrinsic goals such as grades may motivate students to some extent, for example to pass a course, they may not motivate students to excel. Teachers, especially non-Japanese staff, may expect grades to motivate students, however, Hill (1996) and McVeigh (2002) opine that Japanese learners generally do not feel much pressure from this source. In particular, Hill (1996) finds that grades given in the classroom are not so much an indication of academic success or superiority as they are an indication that the student is progressing in a “normal” fashion.

Among the more positive views, Atsuta (2003) concludes that teaching student learning strategies are a key to motivating learners. Kamada (1987) comes to a similar conclusion among her suggestions for emphasizing the motivations she views as most positive. These particular studies, however, focus on high school or younger students who are fundamentally motivated by the extrinsic pressure of college boards. The conclusions may not hold true among students already in the university setting who are free of the pressure of entrance boards.

Extrinsic motivation refers to learners reacting to the expectation of rewards at a later time. As Kamada (pg. 6) succinctly states it, extrinsic motivation refers to a “... a context in which the motive for the activity is stimulated by an outside reward or goal such as money, prizes, high grades, or entrance examination scores.”

As presented in this study, the expected rewards are higher TOEIC scores and improved job outlook upon graduation based on English ability. Extrinsic motivation matches to questions 3-7 and certain of the points for ranking within questions 10 and 11 in the instrument used for this study.

Intrinsic motivation, motivation based on satisfaction at mastering and integrating the skills and material being learned (Kamada) or the innate need for gaining competence (Deci, 1985) is part of this investigation alongside the notion of integrative motivation. Integrative motivation as explained by Gardner (1985, pg. 10), refers to a desire to become part of the target language group, specifically, "... strives to learn a language because of a desire to do so and satisfaction experienced ...". Gardner further specifies this motivation as, "... as integrative because they appeared to stress interaction with members of the French [target language] speaking community for social-emotional purposes." Integrative motivation matches questions 1, 2, and 8-10 as well as certain of the points for ranking within questions 10 and 11 in the instrument used for this study.

### III. Methodology

This research is an example of applied research conducted using a survey format. Survey research, as described by Wiersma (2000), seeks to discover the presence and relationships of variables as they exist in the "natural" setting of the study population. The variables investigated in this study are the student's perceptions of classroom content that motivates or could motivate them to expend effort on learning English.

The study sought only to collect information on student motivation and identify specific elements of motivation that might become subjects of further research or that might be useful for directing development of classroom content. As a survey for discovering relationships and variables, this study does not attempt to prove or disprove a hypothesis. Direct application of the data and conclusions to the classroom, and evaluation of their success, remain a topic for future investigation.

This study enjoys internal validity as defined by Wiersma because it involves two groups of students in two programs in only two classes under the same teacher. Importantly, these students are homogenous; all were native Japanese speakers, they were mostly in their first and second years, all started English in Japanese junior high schools at the same age, and were all in the Business Administration Department. The greatest variation among the students was in gender (about one quarter were female) and in overseas travel experience. Variations in responses to survey questions by gender and travel experience are displayed in figures six and seven below.

The study claims limited external validity, generalizable, as defined by Wiersma, to a wider population. That population is the students in the Business Administration and Economics departments at Ritsumeikan University, Biwako Campus, Shiga Japan. The study population is broadly similar in background, experience, and environment to the remainder of the student body in these departments. Caution should be exercised in applying these data to learners at other institutions in Japan.

The study is subject to some limitations particularly regarding the relatively small amount of data, from 25 valid responses, which made more sophisticated statistical processing in-

appropriate. Future efforts will collect data allowing a deeper analysis of motivation among students in the target population. Additionally, the current study does not follow a theoretical construct of motivation which would make it possible to join the broader academic discussion of student motivation.

A bilingual questionnaire with a five point Likert scale was used to gather data. The instrument was bilingual in order to improve comprehension of the task. Translation of the English was completed by a native Japanese speaker with research experience. The instrument was proofed and corrected before use. The Likert scale included emoticons in order to facilitate comprehension. The instrument is attached in Appendix I.

The instrument collected data categorizing respondents by age, travel experience and gender. Respondents identified their feelings regarding motivation towards the class, its materials and the curriculum of the Business Department. Additionally, it allowed the respondents to identify and rank their short and long term English language goals with the intent to conduct a factorial analysis. Too few responses with completed rankings, however, were collected with this instrument to allow factorial analysis.

The instrument was administered in the final class in two courses of the 2006 fall/winter semester, in January 2007. It was piloted in a class with advanced students who returned nine responses. The initial use served to identify two errors in the instrument :

- 1) Question 11 had a numbering error, but it was possible to transpose tabulated data one column with no loss of accuracy or information. This was corrected on the second version of instrument.
- 2) Students did not do a correct ranking of questions 10 and 11. More detailed directions were provided on second version of the instrument with more informative results.

The improved instrument was presented later that week to about 20 students of an intermediate class and 16 responses were collected. This population of 25 respondents serves as a pilot to guide the improvement of the instrument used, as well as to guide the evolution of a hypothesis regarding student motivation.

#### IV. Findings

Statistical analysis of the data generated by this study was conducted using Microsoft Excel software. The relatively small amount of data, 25 valid responses, made more sophisticated statistical processing inappropriate.

Almost half of the students responding to this questionnaire were in their first year at Ritsumeikan University, see Figure 1.

Most of the students, fully 68%, use English outside of their English class, mainly for reading, see Figure 2. There was a clear gender distinction with 6 of 7 women (85%) using English outside of class while only 8 of 17 men (45%) used English outside of class.

Figure 1 Student Year at University

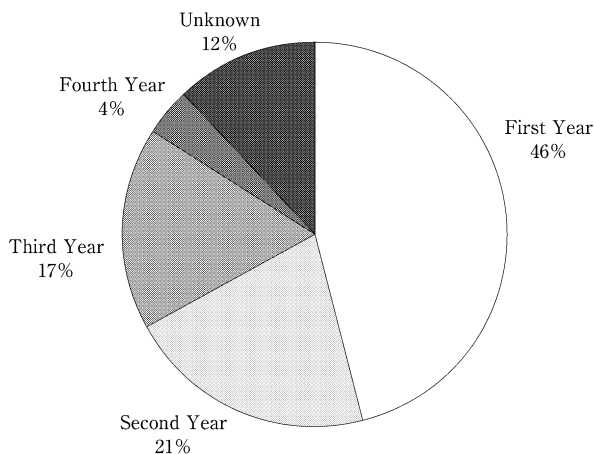
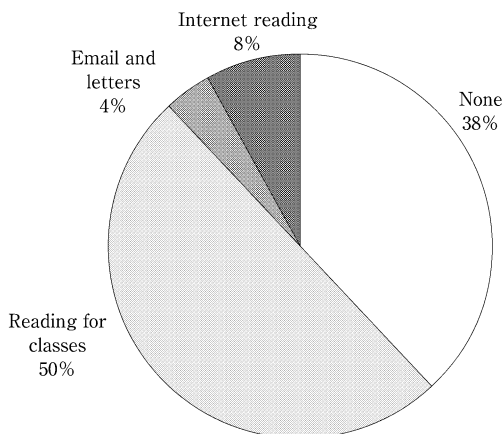


Figure 2 Use of English Outside of Class



**Motivation Questions**

Questions 3 through 9 on the instrument relate to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. A high score on the Likert scale indicated corresponding student agreement with the statement. The following descriptive analysis is based on the questions garnering the highest scores being the most motivating to students.

Questions 5, 6, and 7 earned the highest total points among all respondents, see Figure 3. These questions consider the motivation of improving one’s TOEIC scores, getting a job, and earning potential respectively. The attention these items garnered suggests that students are most motivated to learn English by TOEIC scores and work opportunities after graduation.

Students placed the next highest level of importance on the ability to communicate. This attitude is reflected in the high scores earned by these questions (Q8 and Q9), see Figure 4.

Comparison of responses by male and female students showed that women placed slightly more value on communication ability (Q8, Q9) and less on income (Q7) than men did, see Figure 4.

Figure 3 Relative Importance of Issues By Student Point Awards

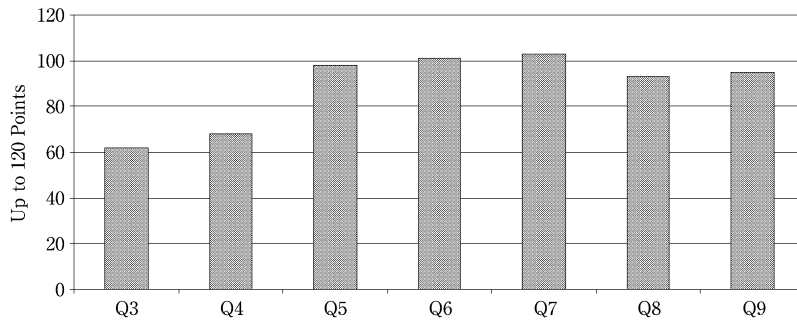


Figure 4 Male Female Response Variation

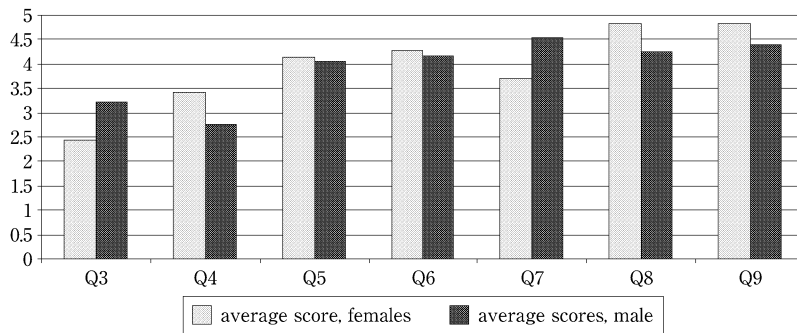


Figure 5 Variation by Year at University

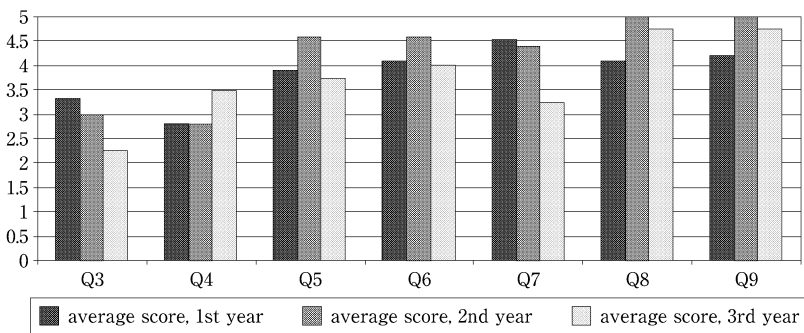
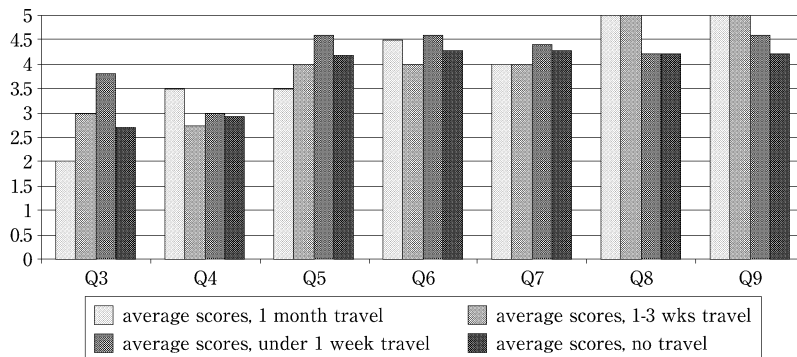


Figure 6 Variation by Travel Experience



Older students gave higher average priority to conversation and day-to-day skills, see Figure 5.

Students with more travel experience felt more motivated by conversation and day-to-day skills as well as class materials than students with less travel experience.

Students with less travel experience felt more motivated by all items related to higher TOEIC scores and improved job opportunities, see Figure 6.

Findings include the short and long term goals of students

#### Short term goals

- Women showed uniform preference for learning conversation as a short term goal.
- Male respondents showed equally divided interest in passing the course, TOEIC scores, and conversation.
- Freshmen identified passing the course and conversation as a top priority in almost equal numbers.
- Almost all freshmen identified writing ability as their second priority.
- Upperclassmen mostly identified conversation as their short term priority. No other choice approached this level of interest.
- Second priority for upper classmen was equally distributed between getting a high TOEIC (700 or better) score and passing the course.

#### Long term goals

- All female respondents placed priority on conversation as a long term learning goal. There were no choices made for other goals.
- Males showed a broader range of goals with half indicating that conversation was top priority while business and translating were identified as top priority by about 35% of those responding.
- One third of freshmen respondents selected translation and conversation as top priority choices.
- For freshmen, business was the next most popular long term goal.
- Freshmen chose translating and business with equal popularity as their number two priority.
- Among first year students, 90% selected conversation, business, and translating as their first and second priority goals.
- Among upperclassmen, 70% identified conversation as their most important long-term goal.

#### Discussion

The most striking differences among students were with regard to gender and travel experience. Female students overwhelmingly sought success in intrinsic goals such as conversational ability and communication with foreigners. Men, on the other hand, were interested in business related skills, test scores, and communication ability.

Student responses regarding their motivation and learning goals include reading, writing, and translating. However, in general, the responses show a high level of interest in communicative English skills, i. e. conversation and business. This was particularly true of upperclassmen and female students. To a lesser extent, students - especially males - are interested in, and claim they would be motivated by, materials that would lead to better job prospects and TOEIC scores.

## V. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research suggests that instructors can motivate learners by tying curriculum content and in-class materials and activities to conversation and communication skills first, and secondarily to TOEIC success, and job opportunities.

Therefore the student priorities identified in this research should guide content creation as well as presentation of that content to students. Content and its presentation will best motivate students if the students are informed how the content supports these priority points. With that goal in mind, the practical recommendation based on this research is to include a clear and simply written description goal statement for each assignment and exercise. For example, the goal statement of a discussion exercise might be :

Goal : This discussion exercise will help students feel comfortable participating in informal conversations they may have in business or travel in the future.

Alternatively,

Goal : This discussion exercise includes vocabulary from the TOEIC wordlist and will help students improve their TOEIC score.

It is the further recommendation of this paper that the goal statement be written in Japanese and English so that it is most likely to be understood by the student. Additionally, teachers may choose to query the students about the purpose of the exercise and expect them to paraphrase the goal statement.

### Next Steps

More research using a similar questionnaire will be necessary to increase the data volume sufficiently to provide more meaningful statistical analysis that will create deeper insight into student motivation. Coming research should include qualitative analysis in order to better interpret the statistical data.

The next step should focus on Ritsumeikan University students in order to best serve this student group. Later research might include other universities in the Kyoto/Kansai region in order to provide incoming teachers at Ritsumeikan University a picture of the differences between students at Ritsumeikan University and other universities where they may have taught.

Additional research should investigate the effectiveness of the goal statement in motivating students. Such research would use questionnaires and interviews to generate data about stu-



dent motivation and reactions to goal statements.

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### Appendix I Data collection instrument

Class 授業 \_\_\_\_\_ No. 10 \_\_\_\_\_

This survey is voluntary and anonymous. Please do not use your name or student number.

…この調査は、自由意思の方々に、無記名に行います。お名前や生徒番号は記載しないで下さい。

Please check if you agree to participate. ご協力に同意いただける場合は、下記にチェックをお願いします。

I agree to participate in this survey. I understand that I will not have any advantage or disadvantage by participating or not participating. I understand that the information will be used for research to better understand student needs and to create better materials for students.

私は、この調査に参加することに同意します。参加もしくは不参加により、利益や不利益をこうむらないことは理解しています。この調査情報は、生徒が必要とすることをより深く認識し、生徒に役立つ勉強

材料を提供することのために使われることを認識しています。

Please circle answers. 答に丸をつけて下さい。

About the student 生徒について

Male 男

Female 女

Year at RU 立命館大学 \_\_\_ 回生

Department 学部

Business Administration	経営	
Economics	経済学	
International Management	国際管理	

Plans after graduating RU 立命館大学卒業後の予定

graduate school	大学院進学	
work	就職	
marriage	結婚	
travel	旅行	
Other その他	_____	

Started English in 英語の勉強を始めたのは

elementary school	小学校	
junior high school	中学校	
senior high school	高校	

Use of English outside of English classes (please circle all applicable): 英語の授業以外で英語を使う機会 (回答はいくらでも可。丸をつけてください。)

email and letters	e メールや手紙	
reading internet	インターネットの英語情報を読む	
reading for classes	授業のために英語を読む	
none	全くない	
Other その他	_____	

Have you visited an English speaking country? 英語圏に行ったことはありますか

Yes はい

No いいえ

If so, for how long? ある場合はどのぐらいの期間ですか

Less than one week	1週間未満	
1-3 weeks	1-3週間	
About one month	1ヶ月程度	
1-3 months	1-3ヶ月	
Up to one year	1年未満	
More than one year	一年以上	

Q1 Do you feel motivated by the course material in this class? この授業で使う題材により、学習意欲が高まりますか。

Firmly negative ☹☹ 全然高まらない	Slightly negative ☹ あまり高まらない	Neutral ☺ どちらとも言えない	Slightly positive ☺ どちらかといえば高まる	Firmly positive ☺☺ とても高まる
1	2	3	4	5

Comment, if any コメントがあれば記入してください：

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Q2 Do you feel motivated by the course material in your other English classes

他の英語の授業で使う題材により、学習意欲が高まりますか。

Firmly negative ☹☹ 全然高まらない	Slightly negative ☹ あまり高まらない	Neutral ☺ どちらとも言えない	Slightly positive ☺ どちらかといえば高まる	Firmly positive ☺☺ とても高まる
1	2	3	4	5

Comment, if any コメントがあれば記入してください：

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Q3 Doing well on the TOEIC is more important than this class

TOEIC でよい成績をとることのほうが、この授業よりもっと重要である。

Firmly negative ☹☹ 全く同意しない	Slightly negative ☹ あまり同意しない	Neutral ☺ どちらとも言えない	Slightly positive ☺ どちらかといえば同意する	Firmly positive ☺☺ とても同意する
1	2	3	4	5

Comment, if any コメントがあれば記入してください：

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Q4 Doing well in this English class is more important than doing well on the TOEIC

この授業を頑張ることのほうが、TOEIC でよい成績をとることより重要だ。

Firmly negative ☹☹ 全く同意しない	Slightly negative ☹ あまり同意しない	Neutral ☺ どちらとも言えない	Slightly positive ☺ どちらかといえば同意する	Firmly positive ☺☺ とても同意する
1	2	3	4	5

Comment, if any :

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## Q5 I would study more if the class would directly improve my TOEIC

もし、この授業で頑張ったことが、TOEICの高得点につながるのならば、この授業でもっと勉強する。

Firmly negative ☹☹ 全く同意しない	Slightly negative ☹ あまり同意しない	Neutral ☺ どちらとも言えない	Slightly positive ☺ どちらかといえば同意する	Firmly positive ☺☺ とても同意する
1	2	3	4	5

Comment, if any コメントがあれば記入してください：

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## Q6 I would study more if the class would directly improve my chances of getting a job

もし、この授業で頑張ったことが就職に有益になるならば、この授業でもっと勉強する。

Firmly negative ☹☹ 全く同意しない	Slightly negative ☹ あまり同意しない	Neutral ☺ どちらとも言えない	Slightly positive ☺ どちらかといえば同意する	Firmly positive ☺☺ とても同意する
1	2	3	4	5

Comment, if any コメントがあれば記入してください：

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## Q7 I would study more if the class would directly improve my income in my first job

この授業で頑張ったことにより、自分の初めての職場での給料を良くなるのなら、もっと勉強する。

Firmly negative ☹☹ 全く同意しない	Slightly negative ☹ あまり同意しない	Neutral ☺ どちらとも言えない	Slightly positive ☺ どちらかといえば同意する	Firmly positive ☺☺ とても同意する
1	2	3	4	5

Comment, if any コメントがあれば記入してください：

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## Q8 I would study more if this class directly improved my ability to talk to foreigners

この授業を頑張ったことにより、外国人と話す能力がアップするのならば、この授業をもっと頑張る。

Firmly negative ☹☹ 全く同意しない	Slightly negative ☹ あまり同意しない	Neutral ☺ どちらとも言えない	Slightly positive ☺ どちらかといえば同意する	Firmly positive ☺☺ とても同意する
1	2	3	4	5

Comment, if any コメントがあれば記入してください：

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Q9 I would study more if the class material was directly linked to day-to-day practical English  
この授業をもっと頑張れば、日常英会話が上手くなるならば、もっと勉強する。

Firmly negative ☹☹ 全く同意しない	Slightly negative ☹ あまり同意しない	Neutral ☺ どちらとも言えな い	Slightly positive ☺ どちらかといえば 同意する	Firmly positive ☺☺ とても同意する
1	2	3	4	5

Comment, if any コメントがあれば記入してください：

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Q10 My immediate goal for learning English is (rank these by importance starting with 1)

英語を習うに当たってのさし当たっての自分のゴールは（もっとも大事なところを1として、順に番号をつけていってください。）

- a) Getting 600 on TOEIC TOEICで600点とる
- b) Getting 700 on TOEIC TOEICで600点とる
- c) Getting 800 on TOEIC TOEICで600点とる
- d) Passing this course この授業で合格点をとる
- e) Conversation 会話能力のアップ
- f) Reading 読み取り能力のアップ
- g) Writing ability 書く能力のアップ
- h) Improve my job prospects 就職の可能性をよりよいものにする
- i) Improve my \_\_\_\_\_ 能力のアップ
- j) None なし
- k) Other その他 \_\_\_\_\_

Q11 My long term goal for learning English is (rank these by importance starting with 1) 英語を習うに当たっての自分の目標は以下の能力の向上である（もっとも大事なところを1として、順に番号をつけていってください。）

- a) Writing 書く能力
- b) Translating 翻訳
- c) Understanding movies and music 映画や音楽を理解する
- d) Business ビジネス
- e) Conversation 会話能力のアップ
- f) None なし
- g) Other その他 \_\_\_\_\_