

Title: A Study on the Possibility of Enhancing and Sustaining Students' Motivation through Synergistic Effects

Research overview: Passivity is frequently observed among Japanese junior and senior high school students. This practice-based inquiry examines whether empathy and synergistic effects produced through direct, two-way classroom interaction can increase and sustain motivation, especially in English learning. Guided by Hattori's hospitality theory, the study reports qualitative observations from a three-month intervention.

Purpose of study: This study addresses a practical and increasingly urgent question: why do many Japanese secondary students attend lessons in a passive manner, and what classroom conditions can shift them toward autonomous, self-initiated engagement that lasts beyond a temporary boost? The study considers two interrelated explanations for passivity. First, students may have accumulated classroom experiences in which success is defined by correct answers, speed, or conformity, and in which speaking up entails social and academic risk. Second, passivity may be structurally reinforced by Japan's long-standing exam-centered education system, where learning is often framed as preparation for external evaluation rather than as inquiry, communication, or personal meaning-making. It further addresses the urgency of reexamining what motivates learners as AI rapidly penetrates education despite lagging ethical and legal frameworks, particularly in language learning where students may rely on AI translation and feel they have "completed" learning tasks. The study aims to clarify what uniquely human, relational processes remain central to motivating learners: empathy, reciprocity, and the possibility of mutual growth through interaction.

Research Methods: The author conducted a practice-based inquiry in an authentic school setting through English lessons taught by the author. The intervention period was

approximately three months, which limits the ability to make strong claims about long-term outcomes; therefore, the study prioritizes describing the process by which changes may emerge. Lesson design proceeded in two phases. In Phase 1, the teacher deliberately reduced students' anxiety around participation by clarifying expectations, lowering the perceived cost of mistakes, and creating predictable, psychologically safer routines for speaking and responding. In Phase 2, the teacher increased opportunities for interactive relationship—teacher–student and student–student—designed not as one-way transmission but as reciprocal exchange. The conceptual lens is Katsuhito Hattori's hospitality theory. In this framework, once anxiety is sufficiently reduced, reciprocity (the “principle of mutuality”) can generate synergistic effects that extend motivation beyond momentary excitement. A critical precondition is mutual independence: relationships that support each participant's agency and growth, rather than relationships of dependence in which one side relies on the other to carry thinking or decision-making. Evidence for analysis consists primarily of classroom-based qualitative observations. Because motivational states are shaped by learners' values, backgrounds, and changing circumstances, the study treats observed changes as situated and interpretive rather than as universally generalizable metrics.

Results and Discussion: Within the limits of the short implementation period, the classroom process suggested several meaningful tendencies. First, anxiety reduction appeared to increase students' willingness to take small risks in English, which in turn created more opportunities for interaction to occur in the first place. Second, when interaction was designed as reciprocal exchange rather than evaluation, students showed signs of increased attention and greater readiness to act on their own initiative. These behaviors are interpreted as early indicators that learners are shifting from “being

present” to “participating as agents.” The study argues that such changes are plausibly explained by an interactional mechanism: direct human-to-human exchange can generate empathy (being understood and understanding others), and empathy can create synergistic effects in which students and teachers mutually influence each other’s attitudes and energy. When reciprocity is established under conditions of mutual independence, students are less likely to depend on the teacher for every step and more likely to experience learning as something they do with others rather than something done to them. This reframing may support sustained motivation because it changes the perceived meaning of participation—from performance under judgment to contribution within a relationship. The discussion also highlights why these relational processes may become more, no less, important as AI spreads. AI tools can produce correct outputs quickly, which may inadvertently deepen passivity if students equate output with learning. Especially in English learning, reliance on translation or generated responses can allow students to avoid the discomfort that often accompanies genuine language use. While AI may substitute for some instructional functions (drill, explanation, immediate feedback), it cannot fully replace the motivational impact of being recognized by others, negotiating meaning together, and experiencing mutual growth. The study therefore proposes that hospitality-informed, reciprocity-centered interaction—grounded in mutual independence—offers a promising pathway for enhancing and sustaining motivation in Japanese secondary classrooms.

Keywords: synergistic effects; reciprocal relationship; empathy; mutual independence; hospitality theory