

## 1. Introduction

In an increasingly globalized society, proficiency in a second language has become essential for academic and professional success. As the role of English continues to expand in Japanese higher education, understanding learners' beliefs and strategies regarding language learning is crucial. This study investigates Japanese university students' beliefs and strategies related to English language acquisition, aiming to uncover the factors influencing their attitudes, motivation, and behaviors. The findings offer insights to support more culturally responsive and effective pedagogical practices.

### 1.1 Language Learning Beliefs

Language learning beliefs refer to learners' assumptions and perceptions about the nature of language acquisition and how second languages are learned. These beliefs affect motivation, strategy use, and learning outcomes (Horwitz, 1987; Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005). Early research grounded in cognitive and affective models has highlighted the influence of beliefs on learners' persistence and engagement. Later studies have explored socio-cultural and contextual influences, revealing the dynamic and adaptive nature of these beliefs (Barcelos, 2003).

Positive and realistic beliefs can foster learner autonomy, engagement, and resilience (Bernat & Lloyd, 2007). In Japan, research has found common beliefs among students, including the importance of formal instruction and the perceived difficulty of language learning (Nakano, 2021). These beliefs often mirror broader societal expectations, particularly the value placed on English proficiency for academic and career advancement.

### 1.2 Analytical and Experiential Beliefs

This study categorizes language learning beliefs into two types:

**Analytical beliefs:** Emphasize grammar, accuracy, and rule-based instruction. Learners with these beliefs favor structured environments and explicit explanations (Ellis, 2008; Richardson, 1996).

**Experiential beliefs:** Prioritize learning through practical use, interaction, and contextualized experiences. Grounded in constructivist theories, these beliefs value immersion, communication, and learning from mistakes (Kolb, 1984; Dewey, 1938; Lantolf, 2000).

### 1.3 Research Purpose and Questions

This study aims to understand Japanese university students' beliefs and strategies regarding English learning, and how these are influenced by motivation. The research addresses the following questions:

- ① What types of language learning beliefs are most commonly held by Japanese university students?
- ② What learning strategies are most frequently used?
- ③ How does motivation affect the relationship between beliefs and strategies?

## 2. Quantitative Research Findings

### 2.1 Participants and Method

Data were collected from 102 Japanese university students using a structured questionnaire. The survey examined students' English learning beliefs and strategies, distinguishing between analytical and experiential orientations.

### 2.2 Results and Analysis

#### 2.2.1 Language Learning Beliefs

The results showed that 56% of participants held analytical beliefs, while 44% held experiential beliefs. The preference for analytical beliefs may be attributed to Japan's education system, which emphasizes structured learning, grammatical accuracy, and exam preparation. Limited opportunities for real-life communication in English further discourage experiential learning.

#### 2.2.2 Language Learning Strategies

Similarly, 58% of students reported using analytical strategies, compared to 42% who employed experiential ones. This finding aligns with the influence of Japan's education culture, which prioritizes discipline, teacher-centered instruction, and measurable outcomes (Yamamoto, 2021; Ishikawa, 2020). Moreover, Japanese learners' cognitive style often field-dependent and accuracy-focused, supports the use of analytical strategies

(Nisbett, 2003). In contrast, experiential strategies require risk-taking and spontaneity, which may conflict with cultural norms around error avoidance and social harmony (Kobayashi, 2018).

### **2.2.3 Belief–Strategy Combinations**

When analyzing combinations of beliefs and strategies:

- ① 34% held analytical beliefs and used analytical strategies (AA)

A typical AA learner prefers structured lessons, focuses on grammar and accuracy, and studies primarily through textbooks and test preparation materials.

- ② 32% held experiential beliefs and used experiential strategies (EE)

An EE learner enjoys real-world communication, actively engages in conversations, and learns through media, interaction, and immersive experiences.

- ③ 24% held experiential beliefs but used analytical strategies (EA)

Although the EA learner values communication and practical use, they often resort to grammar drills and structured exercises to meet academic requirements.

- ④ 10% held analytical beliefs but used experiential strategies (AE)

The AE learner believes in rule-based learning but chooses to practice language through real-life conversations and informal exposure to enhance fluency.

These mismatches indicate a degree of cognitive and strategic flexibility among learners. For instance, learners with experiential beliefs may adopt analytical strategies due to academic demands, while those with analytical beliefs may experiment with experiential strategies to enhance communication skills. Factors such as learning goals, test preparation, and teaching contexts likely influence these shifts (Oxford, 1990; Hofstede, 2001; Dörnyei, 2005).

## **3. Qualitative Research**

### **3.1 Method and Participant**

To further explore the divergence between beliefs and strategies, a qualitative case study was conducted with one second year economics student who demonstrated a mismatch in the survey. The student, an intermediate English learner with no overseas experience, participated in a face-to-face interview.

### **3.2 Results and Analysis**

Initially guided by experiential beliefs, the student engaged with English through films, dramas, and social media. However, as his academic goals shifted toward achieving a high TOEIC® score, he adopted analytical strategies such as grammar drills and test-specific preparation. Despite this shift, he acknowledged the importance of experiential learning for real-world communication and expressed an intention to return to such strategies for future professional use.

This case illustrates the dynamic nature of language learning beliefs and strategies. Learners adapt their approaches based on evolving motivations and goals. In this case, the participant balanced short-term academic objectives with long-term communicative competence, highlighting the interplay between instrumental and intrinsic motivation.

## **4. Conclusion**

This study reveals that Japanese university students tend to favor analytical language learning beliefs and strategies, influenced by cultural norms, educational practices, and cognitive styles. Structured, rule-based learning aligns with the Japanese education system and societal values, while experiential strategies are less common due to limited opportunities for practical application and a cultural emphasis on error avoidance.

Nonetheless, the data also show significant diversity in belief-strategy alignment, with many students adopting mixed approaches. These mismatches reflect adaptability in learning, shaped by individual goals, external expectations, and exposure to different teaching methods. The qualitative case study supports this view, illustrating a learner's shift from experiential to analytical strategies due to test-oriented motivation, while still valuing immersive learning for future use.

The findings underscore the need for a more balanced pedagogical approach that integrates both analytical and experiential methods. Educators should provide opportunities for structured learning alongside authentic

language use to support students in developing both accuracy and fluency. Although no direct correlation between English proficiency levels and belief-strategy patterns was identified, future research could further explore this relationship.

## 5. References

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