Research Article

The Influence of Course Type on Motivation in a Japanese University Context

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Abstract

In this research article, the author investigates the influence of course type—elective versus mandatory—on motivation, from both the learner and teacher perspectives in a Japanese University educational setting. The author utilizes a mixed methods study to draw on recent qualitative interview data from teachers, and both qualitative and quantitative data from student reflections. Survey data were collected from 279 students, and four adjunct lecturers were interviewed. The analysis explores how motivation fluctuates depending on the nature of the course. Referring to motivation theories such as self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), content-based instruction (Brinton et al., 1989) and Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (1978) the paper aims to illuminate how different course types contribute to or detract from intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, from the perspectives of both students and teachers. The basic findings were that teaching elective classes did have a motivating effect on them, however maintaining a sustainable balance in teacher workload is crucial to upholding motivation.

Keywords: *Motivation, Classes, Elective, Mandatory, CLIL*

Introduction

This research study was carried out at a university, in Tokyo, Japan. The university had recently implemented CLIL-style classes for students in the 2nd year and above, aiming to transfer from language skills courses to English-Medium Instruction (EMI) courses. These classes enable teachers to be creative in their lesson content and delivery. Conversely, first-year students still must complete mandatory classes, which all follow a unified curriculum. Therefore, teachers must still follow these guidelines more strictly. This change has prompted much discussion amongst the author's peers. In this study, the author sought to investigate how these different course types affect motivation, from both the teachers' and students' perspectives, and analyse experiences in university-level courses.

Language education success depends heavily on motivation because it affects students' work ethics, attitudes and future achievements (Lapădat & Lapădat, 2023; Seven, 2020;

Yue et al., 2022). Students and teachers experience changes in motivation, perception and satisfaction levels based on whether courses are elective or mandatory (Condron et al., 2025; Wang, 2023).

Several motivational frameworks give credence to the adoption of elective language classes as a way of instilling motivation in learners. Self-determination theory (SDT) argues that competence, relatedness and autonomy are underlying psychological needs for achieving intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). The ability for students to select their courses in elective programs leads to higher autonomy satisfaction and better engagement compared to mandatory classes (Ryan & Deci, 2017). While intrinsic motivation may be a powerful motivating factor for students in elective classes, most of a person's learning is fuelled by extrinsic motivation. Ryan & Deci (2000) offer that most individuals lose the freedom to be internally motivated in early childhood, when they are then subjected to social demands that require the embracement of non-intrinsically appealing tasks. School and education are a prime example of this gradual weakening in intrinsic motivation. Take the case of a first-year university student who is studying to get a credit and passing to the next year, therefore getting closer to graduation and potentially getting a favourable job in the future. They may not be stimulated by the content of a mandatory class–just merely complying with societal pressure. Goal-setting theory presents the idea that learners achieve higher motivation through clear and specific challenging goals (Locke & Latham, 1990). Students in elective courses tend to establish personal learning objectives which become more effective when combined with rich teacher feedback to boost their persistence and achievement (Latham & Locke, 2007). Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) (1978) argues that tasks positioned slightly above students' second language skills become more effective when teachers offer support (scaffolding). If teachers can link these tasks directly to students' personal interests, it creates a motivating atmosphere for students who want to complete the tasks.

By the same token, content-based instruction (CBI) combines language learning in the classroom with authentic subject matter, such as newspaper articles - simultaneously boosting linguistic and cognitive growth (Brinton et al., 1989). CBI is closely linked to content and language integrated learning (CLIL), which Coyle et al. (2010, p. 1) define as

> A dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language. That is, in the teaching and learning process, there is a focus not only on the content and not only on the language. Each is interwoven, even if the emphasis is greater in one or the other at a given time.

It is a teaching concept that researchers and language educators have become accustomed to hearing about in recent times (Georgiou, 2012). Lorenzo (2007, p. 25) asserts that "CLIL is bilingual education at a time when teaching through one single language is seen as a second-rate education." A typical example of a CLIL class and setting could be a classroom

in Spain taking a history lesson taught in French. The focus is simultaneously on content and language.

Even though CLIL may seem to be a new and innovative teaching method to many, Coyle (2007, p. 543) points out that "being educated in a language other than one's mother tongue has been around for over 5000 years." The Romans employed such a learning style when the aristocracy studied certain subjects in ancient Greek millennia ago (Van den Bergh, 2000). Latin was also the language of instruction in Europe for centuries in fields such as medicine, philosophy and science (Martínez Adrián, 2011). This arguably provides the underpinnings of CLIL philosophy, and obvious parallels can be drawn to today's use of English as a medium for modern day education.

CLIL and CBI have been on the rise in Japanese higher education in recent times in a response to government policies promoting English-medium instruction, and to fall in line with global educational norms (Brown, 2014; Thompson & McKinley, 2018). In this setting, it has been reported that students harbored positive notions towards CLIL and that this teaching style also increased global awareness amongst students (Ohmori, 2014; Yoshihara et al., 2015). MacGregor (2016), in another university–based study indicated that teachers reported positive impressions of the CLIL approach but also suggested that if it is to succeed in Japan, there needs to be dialogue between teachers and administrators, with a clear direction decided upon. The CLIL approach presents some institutional challenges, such as undeveloped faculty training, inadequate content-language aims and curriculum development (Coyle et al., 2010) but has nevertheless established a foothold in the Japanese educational arena.

Methodology

Data were collected from all the author's first year students (spring semester n = 177, fall semester n = 99), with the main intention of gathering their feelings about the six English mandatory classes they were required to take in the first year (five discussion classes, two reading and writing classes, two presentation, three debate classes and four e-Learning classes, which consisted primarily of online English study for students, together with three face-to-face communicative classes with large class sizes). A Google Form was issued at the end of each semester in the final class to gather this data. Data were also collected from the author's one elective class, which was the subject "Health & Wellness" (n = 3) to retrieve the students' feelings about this class. There were also two open-ended questions at the end of the surveys, providing qualitative data, which asked students to give examples of activities in which they found pleasure in their classes, and activities that they did not care for, to detect what students found motivating.

The author also carried out face-to-face interviews with four current adjunct lecturers. All these lecturers had been teaching at this university for at least four years, so they had plenty of experience teaching classes. Each of the lecturers taught different elective classes,

and each interview focussed on gathering the lecturers' perspectives on teaching their elective and mandatory classes. Each interview lasted about ten to fifteen minutes and had a total of eight questions (see Appendix 3) and was recorded and transcribed later. The data were then categorized into themes, with the aim of providing valuable insights into the teachers' perspectives. Dörnyei (2007) asserts that interviews work well as a flexible research instrument on the grounds that they are well-known as a communication routine. Given that the author planned to collect data from four individuals, this was a smaller-scale part of the study, which as Mackey and Gass (2012, p. 183) mention about qualitative research "tends to operate on a small scale, to provide a detailed and nuanced picture of individual settings, participants, or instances of interaction." The author wanted to use interviews to explore teachers' feelings and perceptions of teaching mandatory classes and elective (CLIL) classes, and to query what had been rewarding and challenging for them, and how these had impacted their teaching motivation. Since the author has been teaching at the university for 6 years, he felt that he had sufficient knowledge of the topic to develop pertinent questions during the interview, which has been deemed essential by Dörnyei (2007). The author employed semi-structured interviews since this style gave him the flexibility to delve deeper into any answers given from the original set of questions prepared and gave him the possibility to ask different follow-up questions to each interviewee (Mackey & Gass, 2012). The author knew the personalities of the teachers that he was planning to interview were quite different, so the semi-structured method allowed him to steer each interview in the appropriate way to gather pertinent detail. When constructing his main questions, the author was influenced by Evers and De Boer (2012), who proposed that researchers ought to concentrate on scope, steering and level of abstraction. Since the author strived to focus on teacher and student motivation in mandatory and elective classes, the questions were closely aligned to these topics. The author framed the interview according to work by Kvale (1996), by briefing the interviewee about the context prior to the interview, as well as debriefing post – interview, in which the main points learned from the interview were mentioned.

Richards (2003) refers to some important interview techniques that the author took on board and implemented in his interviews. Foremost points included listening carefully, offering supportive feedback and letting the interview take its own shape. Furthermore, question types such as opening, check/reflect, follow-up and probe as suggested by Richards (2003), were utilized in my interview. The author also bore in mind interview tips proposed by Robson (2002) including listening more than speaking, enjoying the interview, and phrasing questions in a clear way.

The interviews took place in a classroom within the university. The author made a schedule with all the teachers in advance to ensure that he could carry out the interviews at the most convenient times for each interviewee. The interviews all took place at the end of term in January, when all the teachers had fresh memories of their teaching experience from that academic year. All the dialogue was recorded and afterwards transcribed, while notes were

also made during the interviews to aid the data analysis procedure (Brown & Rodgers, 2002). Thematic analysis was the method chosen for analyzing the data, which Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 6) state is "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data." One of the reasons this method was chosen is its flexibility—the sample size was small, and this allowed the author to delve deeply into the data gathered.

Before the launch of the study, the author received ethical approval from the university to carry out the study. An application form was submitted to the journal committee that explained his research goals, the author's Google Form surveys, and interview questions. All the students signed consent forms distributed by the author in lesson one of each class, which also contained a Japanese version on the reverse side. All the teachers also signed consent forms given to them in person by the author.

In summary, the author designed the instruments and procedures above with the following research questions in mind: (1) What factors contributed to student motivation and demotivation among first-year students enrolled in mandatory classes in the spring and fall semesters? (2) What factors influenced teacher motivation and the challenges faced when teaching both mandatory and elective classes? (3) What factors shaped the motivation and challenges encountered by students in elective classes?

Results

Mandatory Class Preferences

The first question of the survey asked students to indicate which mandatory classes were the most interesting for them in the spring and fall semesters. As can be seen in Figure 1 below, the discussion class was deemed to be the most interesting for the first-year students in spring. 71.9% (n = 127) chose this class as the most interesting. This result was anticipated, since discussion is a small class in which students get to know each other deeply, with a focus on oral communication. Each lesson follows an almost identical structure, with all students being taught the same language items (For more information on the course, see Hurling, 2012). Teachers are expected to teach the classes in a very similar way, although that is not an essential requirement. Discussion was followed by reading and writing with 24.9% (n = 44). This class is usually the most time-consuming for teachers and students alike, since students must write essays in various genres and teachers must grade them. Teachers have the latitude to teach this class in a manner that they feel most appropriate, allowing for more flexibility, with a textbook being optional. The e-Learning class scored lowest, with only 3.4% (n = 6) indicating that they enjoyed this class the most. This class requires students to complete online lessons to improve their English reading and grammar skills, with a primary goal of boosting TOEIC scores. The classes only have three face-to-face classes with their teacher, with large class sizes, so it is difficult for teachers and students alike to form meaningful bonds in class. This issue has been touched upon by Dörnyei (2009), who argues that the most significant factor in fostering class

member relationships is giving learners the opportunities to learn about each other as much as possible, which includes sharing meaningful personal information.

The results displayed less separation in the fall semester (see Figure 2). Debate was voted as the most interesting, with 40.4% (n = 40) indicating that they enjoyed this class the most. Reading and writing was again voted second, with 30.3 (n = 30) selecting this, with presentation class narrowly behind 29.3% (n = 29). The debate class has only been taught since 2020, but since it allows students to debate topics that they are interested in (Mahoney, 2022), this may account for these results. The author himself allows students to choose many topics and engage in plenty of group work to allow them to delve deeply into the topics, such as the environment, AI, and gender. The students seemingly appreciate the time given to work together on the topics, validating the 100-minute lesson time length of classes which enables them to immerse themselves in topics in detail and promotes greater interaction (Braine & Yorozu, 1998; Byrne, 2024). Since there are many types of individual differences between the students, the teachers need to take heed and attempt to group the students together in a harmonious way (Mahoney, 2020). It has been previously reported by Mahoney (2022) that facilitating asynchronous platforms to practice and broach their opinions led to students rapidly taking on board the nature of debate, refining their ideas and the enhancement of in-class discussions and debate.

Figure 1

Spring Semester (Which Mandatory Class was the most interesting?)

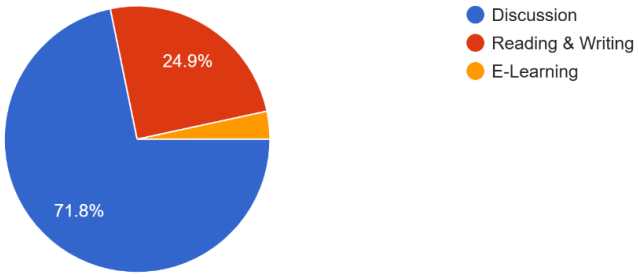
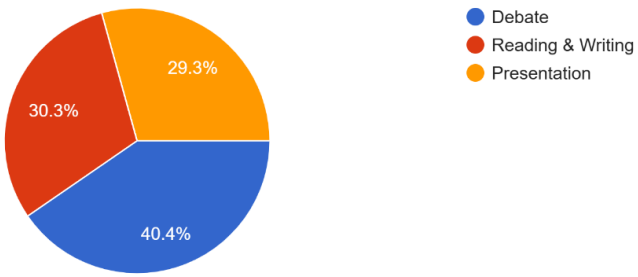


Figure 2

Fall Semester (Which Mandatory Class was the most interesting?)



The results of the two surveys (Figures 1 & 2) indicate that overall students were satisfied with the mandatory classes provided in the spring and fall. However, there was a marked difference between the semesters, with students perceiving the spring classes to be superior. Students indicated a preference for all spring classes in all four questions (see Table 1 below) with only the level of agreement of one question not decreasing more than ±0.20. Question one decreased in agreement by −0.03, suggesting that students could learn about interesting topics in both spring and fall. The first to decrease significantly was item 2, which dropped from a mean of 4.18 to 3.95. Although students had indicated that the topics of the classes were interesting, the lessons themselves were deemed less interesting in the fall. Item 3 had a drop of −0.31 (4.06 to 3.75). This suggests that students were less motivated in the fall classes. Item 4 had the highest drop-off −0.40, from 3.77 to 3.37. This indicated that students felt that the learning materials in the spring semester were superior, and therefore more engaging.

These results allow for tacit interpretations regarding the motivation of students in spring and fall. It is perhaps understandable that there is a drop-off in motivation in the fall. The students have completed their first semester, so the novelty of being at university has worn off somewhat. They have already made friends and joined their clubs, so excitement levels naturally fall. One hypothesis for this result is that the discussion module in spring is a long-established class, and the textbook has been refined over a couple of decades. The layout is easy to understand and follow. The focus is for students to communicate, with minimal writing activities. On the other hand, the debate class in the fall was only established in 2020. Class sizes vary from about 20–23 students, so members cannot get to know each other so well. The small size of the discussion class, with only ten members, could be the main reason for these findings. Additionally, debate requires students to research deeply, point out weaknesses, and make refutations against the other team's arguments. The core pedagogical principles are closely aligned, with CLIL and its four theoretical pillars: Culture (Community), Content, Communication, and Cognition, (Debate Committee, 2025), thereby laying a foundation for this learning style for the students in their future elective classes.

Furthermore, the debate textbook does not have versions for each students' levels; therefore, teachers are encouraged to pick and choose appropriate activities from it and provide suitable supplementary materials which may vary from teacher to teacher. The layout in each chapter in the textbook is different, which may sometimes be confusing for the students to comprehend. On the other hand, the discussion textbook has two different levels (Level 1, designed for students with a TOEIC score between 480–680 and over, and Level 2, designed for students with TOEIC scores 479 and below) and has a consistent layout in each chapter, with a unit chapter reading, two practice activities and two discussions. Having consistent unit layout has been linked with many benefits for learners, including coherent learning progression, improved comprehension and increased satisfaction and confidence (Keller, 1987; Mayer, 2009; Skela & Burazer, 2021) and may be why students signalled a preference for learning materials

in the spring semester.

The descriptive trends shown below suggest several possible relationships within the dataset, although no direct causal effects can be confirmed. As a result, the results should be treated tentatively. More detailed analysis will be required to confirm them.

Table 1

Results of the Spring and Fall Semester Questionnaires

	Item	*Average Level of Agreement**	
		Spring Semester (n=177)	*Fall Semester (n=99)*
1.	I could learn about topics I was interested in the mandatory English classes	4.08	4.05
2.	The mandatory English classes this semester were interesting	4.18	3.95
3.	I was highly motivated in the mandatory English classes this semester	4.06	3.75
4.	The materials and textbooks in the mandatory classes this semester were engaging	3.77	3.37

*Agreement was measured on a Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree)

Student Enjoyment and Motivation in Fall Mandatory Classes

The final two questions of the survey were open-ended questions meant to elicit qualitative data, asking students what they found rewarding and, conversely, disapproved of in the spring semester (see Appendix 1). Student reflections from the spring semester revealed high levels of enjoyment connected to communicative and interpersonal elements. The three mandatory English classes students took were, discussion, reading and writing, and e-Learning. The most popular activity reported by students was discussion/ group discussion/ talking with classmates with 110 students indicating this was the most enjoyable activity they took part in. Second was speaking English/Using English actively (n = 28), and third was Making Friends/Building Relationships (n = 22). Since the discussion class is small and usually only contains 10–12 students, it gives them the perfect opportunity to participate in these activities, whilst also getting to know their classmates deeply. These findings show that students were heavily dependent on peer collaboration and social elements, lending credence to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), which claims that interactions with more knowledgeable peers and adults leads to improved cognitive development amongst learners.

On the other hand, the most popular answer for what students did not enjoy in the spring semester was nothing (n = 47), suggesting that most students were fulfilled by the semester's activities. The next most common answer was homework/assignments/ tasks (n = 23), followed by tests (n = 13) and reading (n = 10). All these answers align with Self-Determination theory

(Deci & Ryan, 1985), where a lack of autonomy in tasks like homework and test preparation can reduce intrinsic motivation. A total of nine students also reported "early morning classes" as a challenge. This may be connected to students living far away from campus and having to commute early morning to make first-period classes.

Student Enjoyment and Motivation in Fall Mandatory Classes

Students' reflections of the fall semester also indicated that enjoyment was connected to communicative and interpersonal elements. However, there was more variety and specific answers given than in the spring semester. The most popular activity was group work/discussion (n = 33), suggesting that allowing students to communicate in groups is valuable for them. This was followed by debate (n = 16), giving presentations (n = 11) and writing (n = 9). Since this was the second semester, some students may have become more accustomed to writing and therefore started to enjoy it more.

The students also reported more specific unenjoyable activities in the fall semester. The most common was homework/assignments (n = 19), followed by nothing (n = 15) and then giving presentations (n = 14). This number would suggest that some students really enjoy giving presentations but slightly more do not. Other findings included reading (n = 10) and class difficulty/ structure (n = 9). Since the debate class is more complex than the discussion class, it was understandable that students indicated this.

Student Fulfilment in Elective Classes

The three students in the author's elective class all answered "strongly agree" to the five closed questions, suggesting that they enjoyed the class. In the two open qualitative questions, they mostly mentioned that they enjoyed having discussions with their classmates:

> I enjoyed free discussion about topics.
> The teacher was friendly, and because there were only a few students, we were able to talk a lot, and it was fun. He was also a fun and easy-going person who was open to light jokes.
> Discussion with classmates.

Since there were only three students in this class, the sample size is too small for the data to be given serious consideration, but it is important to remember that qualitative analysis does not have the sample size dilemma that quantitative research seeking to make population inferences does (Vitta et al., 2025). This small size meant that the author had a lot of time to get to know the students and listen deeply to what they said. The author often took part in class activities, such as pair work. It has been reported that direct teacher involvement in class tasks and activities such as pair work fosters a collaborative environment, reducing barriers in which students are more likely to take risks in communicating in a second language

(Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003). Since the topic was health and wellness, the author can say that because he listened carefully to students, and remembered things that they had said, even weeks later, the students grew to have confidence in him and respect him more, leading to them gradually sharing their worries and anxieties in confidence, with a collaborative and respectful environment being established in the classroom. The author contends, with a degree of confidence that the students had a meaningful and beneficial time in his class. Careful listening by ESL teachers plays an important role in creating supportive learning environments, as it certifies students' voices and fosters greater confidence in language use (Rost, 2011).

Teacher Findings

The four teachers were all interviewed in January, at the end of the academic year. The teachers had taught a variety of CLIL classes in the past academic year, including Health & Wellness, Film studies, International Business, Multimodal Communication, and IELTS. The teachers were all asked eight questions, to gauge their feelings on teaching elective and mandatory classes (see Appendix 2). Teachers were referred to L1–L4 (Lecturer 1–Lecturer 4), which was decided by the order in which they were interviewed. The most common themes will now be considered, discussed, and reflected upon.

Elective Classes

From a teacher's standpoint, the elective classes offered challenges and rewards. The most common challenge mentioned was the time-consuming preparation needed, especially when few pre-existing CLIL lesson materials were available. CLIL courses posed additional challenges due to the unfamiliarity of the content, and the need to make this content subject-specific (Coyle et al., 2010):

> (L4) I didn't have any content knowledge when it comes to business. I researched what textbooks are highly recommended. Creating all the materials was so challenging because the textbook didn't have like slides or anything.

> (L1) The hardest thing was making it all from scratch. Time consuming to make all the materials. And then after that, managing everything going on. Basically, you must do everything yourself. So, trying to figure out how to do CLIL was challenging.

On the other hand, teachers found the teaching electives personally fulfilling. They enjoyed aligning course content with their own academic interests. This opportunity for pedagogical creativity was reported as having a strong impact on motivation. These results give credence to findings by Pearson and Moomaw (2005), who argue that teacher effectiveness is elevated when they are granted autonomy and flexibility:

(L3) I spent a lot of time planning this course. I enjoyed the process of it because multimodal communication is something that I studied in university. So, I was happy to be able to use the stuff I learned. The topic area was something more personal than presentation or debate or whatever.

(L2) The film studies class, I studied it in my undergrad study. They do some practical work taking different camera angles and filming their own final film project. So that's fun to see them using English to work together in groups and get engaged with it.

Challenges in Mandatory Classes

All the teachers reported that mandatory classes were more difficult to manage. The main reasons given were behavioural problems such as lateness and inattentiveness. Since it was widely reported by first-year students that early morning classes were the most unenjoyable aspect of classes for them, this complaint is understandable. Uneven student motivation was also stated along with issues related to absenteeism. While some students displayed high motivation, many seemed to be doing the bare minimum, and attending only to get a credit for the class. This class was seen as suitable for higher-level students. Having lower-level students debate each other and scaffolding the content was seen as problematic:

(L4) Regarding debate class. I feel like sometimes I give them too much scaffolding. Then, sometimes too little scaffolding. Every semester, I've taught debate differently. And I don't know if I'm getting better at it. I would really like to like to watch other people's debate classes because mandatory debate is a hard subject to teach for me.

(L2) Debate, I feel is excellent for the higher-level students. But I feel that it's not the best content of lesson to teach to lower-level learners of English.

(L4) So what I find challenging about presentation is when students don't come to class and they don't learn the material that we learned during class. So, they obviously are not applying the same principles, and they get upset. That's what I get most upset about. That's challenging when students don't come to presentation because every class is important.

(L1) So, in this term, especially around November, they started being late all the time. And didn't seem to be paying attention anymore. There was like a big drop-off. I think they were prioritising other classes.

Scaffolding is seen by Pinner (2013, p. 51) as: "The interaction and negotiation of meaning between expert and less expert speakers." Scaffolding is relevant for CLIL and the

debate class, as it's the process of supporting students throughout their learning process and then gradually removing this support as students become more independent, when they can start to explore topics themselves. Since teachers are faced with various student English proficiency levels and motivation, teachers will need to utilize different types of scaffolding for each class. The point that some teachers reported debate as suitable for higher levels is telling, and the pace of learning in each class can vary greatly. Suitable scaffolding and careful management of groups, such as placing higher-level students with lower-level students, especially in a level 4 class, may enable teachers to navigate this class smoothly.

Class Size

Another common theme was the mention of class sizes. Discussion was singled out by one teacher, since the class size is 10−12 students, making it the smallest mandatory class in terms of size. Since the size of elective classes varies, this was understandable:

> (L2) Discussion is fantastic. Hearing all the different opinions about the topics and seeing them use the different discussion skills to say their own ideas. The 10-student size of the classes is the right for teachers to be able to give them feedback and the attention that they need. They need attention, that's the thing.

> (L4) I loved my students so much because there was only like six or seven and they're all upperclassmen and they were all very interested in the topic, so, like, it was better to make relationships with the students. Like, easier to go and talk to them about the content. And they're better at English.

> (L2) In the past, when I taught e-Learning, the issue would be the large number of students in one class. I think it's too large.

> (L2) I think there was over 30 students in the film studies class, and I initially designed the syllabus for 20 or less. And so, I've had to change and adapt the syllabus. So, take out writing assignments and change the presentations, at the beginning of class instead. And I can't focus on the students individually as much.

Small class sizes are particularly important in EFL contexts because they allow teachers to be able to provide more individualized attention and feedback, which supports learner autonomy and increases opportunities for meaningful interaction (Nunan, 2015). What's more, frequent targeted feedback has been shown to enhance learners' motivation and language development, especially when delivered in supportive, low-anxiety environments (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). The small class sizes are likely one of the main reasons why the discussion class was seen in such a favourable light by students. One of the teachers (L2) also mentioned:

"And I think even other universities I've heard say that they kind of respect Rikkyo's discussion curriculum."

Workload and Efficiency

Workload was a significant factor influencing motivation for teachers. Several teachers mentioned that repeated teaching of the same elective class would be more manageable and enjoyable due to familiarity and the refined content of their classes:

> (L3) I spent all that time doing that preparation for the elective course last year and now it's basically done. Although I will refine it. If I had like three elective courses this term, that wouldn't be enjoyable because the preparation would be insane. Especially if it was in a topic area which I had no particular interest.

> (L2) I especially enjoyed teaching the film studies class. I'd like to continue teaching that and keep trying to work on it and make it better and improve on it as much as possible.

> (L4) I would like to be given the same course, because it's just so much work preparing. I've already got a lot of work to do for my reading & writing classes too.

It was clear that all the teachers had spent a lot of time preparing their syllabi for the elective courses. This justifiably led to feelings of wanting to continue teaching the course and improving the content. It might be advisable for teachers of the same classes to meet and compare their syllabi and classes to achieve this.

Student Motivation and Course Structure

One of the most revelatory comparisons was in homework completion. Students in mandatory classes, though often less enthusiastic in class, were more likely to complete homework assignments. This trend could be put down to stronger grading policies and accountability structures. In contrast, electives often suffered from incomplete homework assignments, particularly in flipped learning models:

> (L1) Next year, that's something I'm going to change. I'm going to give them a quiz at the start of class.

This quote underscores the link between accountability and motivation and supports changes in assessment design to increase out-of-class engagement.

The teacher in this final excerpt highlights one of the realities of teaching—that not all classes are the same. It is only natural that some classes will be more difficult than others:

(L3) The biggest challenge is dealing with unmotivated students. You're inevitably going to get students who don't really want to be there, basically. When the students are motivated, just the flip side to that. It doesn't matter if it's mandatory or elective. They're there, they want to do well, they want to get a good grade.

Discussion

The CLIL program at the author's university is still a relatively new one. From the findings of this study, it can be argued that it is going smoothly and has the potential to be improved. This study affirms that elective and mandatory courses offer distinct motivational elements for students and teachers. It could be argued that the university's current policy of allocating teachers approximately 80% mandatory classes and the rest as electives is a fair and balanced one. Furthermore, matching teachers to suitable elective classes that they have prior knowledge of or an interest in would seem to be a very advantageous policy to continue.

Since some teachers mentioned that they were teaching topics that they had studied at the undergraduate level and that this was rewarding for them, this suggests that teachers enjoy preparing materials in subjects that they have prior knowledge of. It is feasible that this will have the ripple effect of teachers being more likely to create more meaningful and engaging materials for students in this environment. A flexible implementation, as asserted by Davies (2017), which grants the teachers a flexible environment in classes depending on the types of students they may have in a particular class, seems rational.

The observation that all teachers mentioned that creating materials for elective classes was time-consuming is understandable. Faculty training is a valuable way of supporting teachers to give them fresh ideas and perspectives on their lessons. Meeting with teachers who teach the same elective classes is also a possible way of providing peer-support. However, teachers may vary greatly in teaching styles and methods, and collaboration may be lacking in higher education settings (Pérez-Cañado, 2012), while the balance of faculty training and teacher autonomy is unclear. Granting teachers freedom over what and how they teach has been reported to produce more positive and supportive teachers, as well as creating more collaborative learning environments (Louis & Marks, 1998), which may have a positive impact on student engagement and success in the classroom (Keiser & Shen, 2000). Allocating teachers' autonomy may also benefit student learning, as this condition may increase teachers' commitment (Marks & Louis, 1999). Giving teachers the opportunities to observe their peers' lessons may be an advantageous tactic in improving and enlightening fellow teacher techniques and scaffolding.

The significance of class sizes was often mentioned as important. Both students and teachers reported that they enjoyed group work activities. Group work is especially important for Japanese learners of a second language, because it creates opportunities for authentic communication, peer-support, and collaborative problem-solving, which can reduce anxiety and increase confidence in speaking. Research has shown that cooperative learning fosters

both language acquisition and learner autonomy in EFL contexts (Dörnyei, 2007; Jacobs & McCafferty, 2006). By allowing group work in elective classes, such as project-based work, and giving individualized feedback and attention, a positive learning environment can be achieved, whereby students can engage in meaningful communication with each other (Mehisto et al., 2008). If students are given this opportunity, they may process the content in a deeper fashion, by 'engaging in their own experience and previous knowledge in an interactive process' (Light et al., 2009, p. 52). In addition, attentive teacher listening enhances classroom interaction, enabling learners to feel understood and resulting in heightened motivation and engagement (Brown, 2014). Smaller class sizes provide teachers with opportunities to offer individualized attention, thereby increasing the likelihood that students will display higher levels of motivation.

Conclusion

Teachers need to be mindful of different student levels and alter their classes and learning goals for mandatory classes. Ultimately, teachers need to be prepared and flexible because each class is unique, with different personalities and chemistry contained within them. Class sizes may be large or small, so altering materials and activities is commonly essential. As one teacher offered some philosophical reflection that classes are: "*hit and miss*," which is only natural in this profession. Regardless of how much planning and preparation a teacher fashions, students will inevitably shift in and out of a Vygotskian state of readiness to study (Chaiklin, 2003). It is necessary for teachers to have a variety of activities in their 100-minute lessons to maintain student motivation at an optimal level. Listening carefully to what students say and giving rich feedback, together with the adoption of group work activities and careful group management, may have a positive impact on student motivation. The data from this study suggest that appropriately aligning teachers with elective subjects can exert a positive influence on learner motivation and learner outcomes; however, a larger sample size of elective students in any possible future research would be able to garner more salient conclusions in this realm.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Student Mandatory Classes Survey (Spring & Fall)

1. Which mandatory class was most interesting for you?
2. I could learn about topics I was interested in mandatory classes.
3. The mandatory classes this semester were interesting.
4. I was highly motivated in the mandatory classes this semester.
5. The materials and textbooks in the mandatory English classes this semester were engaging.
6. What was something you enjoyed in the mandatory classes?
7. What was something that you did not enjoy in the mandatory classes?

Appendix 2: Student Elective Classes Survey (Fall)

1. What elective classes did you take this year?
2. I could learn about topics I was interested in.
3. I was highly motivated in the elective English classes this year.
4. The materials in the elective English classes were engaging.
5. I was more motivated in my elective classes then in my first-year English mandatory classes.
6. What was something that you enjoyed in your elective classes?
7. What was something that you did not enjoy in your elective classes?

Appendix 3: Teacher Interview

1. What electives did you teach this academic year?
2. What was challenging for you?
3. What was enjoyable or rewarding?
4. What was challenging teaching mandatory classes?
5. What was enjoyable or rewarding teaching mandatory classes?
6. Do you prefer teaching elective or mandatory classes? Why?
7. What were some differences between teaching elective and mandatory classes?
8. Would you like to teach the same elective class next year? Why?