Purpose of education is not only to transmit knowledge for students, but also to enhance their competence, interest and motivation. It is important for teachers to monitor how students think and act on their own will, and guide them through the process with timing and accuracy.

Motivation is important in second language acquisition (SLA) because it provides the primary impetus to initiate second language (L2) study, and later the driving force to sustain the long, often tedious learning process (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015).

In this study, I assess the motivation of students at Japanese language schools, with a special focus on the differences in gender and length of study. Students who study at Japanese language schools account for 34 percent of all the international students in Japan, and 70 percent of them attend vocational school or university after graduation. However, in spite of the large proportion they occupy in the number of international students in Japan, they have not been given enough attention in the study of Japanese second language education. Therefore, it is important to investigate how to keep their motivation through the process of the temporal transition.

Who are the students that study at Japanese language school? They are privately financed international students mostly in their late teens or early twenties. They need to pass an exam held by higher education institutions in one or two years to keep their student visa. Therefore, previous studies mainly focus on the difficulty of their study circumstances and analyze the problems in order to provide better solutions for them. However, they didn’t explain the most other students, who keep motivations and continue to study in the difficulties.

To assess the temporal transition of students’ motivation, I aim at the following two
goals. First, I intend to identify factors beside their intrinsic motivation and self efficacy that support students’ motivation. Due to the sever circumstances, it is assumed to be easy to lose interest and confidence during the one to two years, and intrinsic motivation and self efficacy are not be enough to explain their continuous positive attitude for their study. My second goal is to find out what their motivations are in relation to self formation (Mizogami 2008). As students at Japanese language school often confront identity crisis by living in a different culture, they have to reconstruct their own identity by themselves.

In this study, I discuss (1) the factors that construct the motivation of students at Japanese language schools, (2) the relationship between motivation and self formation in a different culture, (3) the temporal transition of motivation and self formation of students through the interaction with others.

In Chapter 2, I will discuss the concept of motivation in the context of Japanese language education, focusing on how the term “motivation” has been translated into Japanese in the past. Then, the concept of motivation will be redefined from the viewpoints of educational psychology, SLA and also the paradigm change from objectivism to the social constructivism, as the term ‘motivation’ has been used with various definitions in previous studies.

In Chapter 3, I will summarize the three approaches to motivation studies that have been utilized in the previous studies of L2 motivation theory developed in Japanese language education: social psychological approach, i.e. Gardner’s integrative orientation, educational psychological approach, i.e. intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and sociological approach using qualitative research methods. In any of the three approaches, many studies focused on intrinsic motivation and self efficacy, which means they mainly evaluate more positive and confident student, and failed to examine the student with other motivational factors.

In Chapter 4, to assess the motivation of students at Japanese language schools, I will adapt the expectancy-value theory (Eccles & Wigfield 1995). This theory suggests that choices to engage in activities are shaped by competence and value belief. Competence belief addresses questions of ability, i.e. “Can I acquire Japanese?”, while value belief considers the personal importance of task, i.e. “Do I want to study Japanese?”. Expectancis and values are assumed to be influenced by self-schema, cultural milieu, etc.
Chapter 5 will provide the details of the data collection and analysis. Students of Japanese language schools (N=406) completed a questionnaire about motivation. The results of factor analysis, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis revealed that 1) students’ motivation consists of five factors: attainment and utility value, intrinsic value, affirmative effort, ability expectancy and task difficulty, 2) affirmative effort has a correlation not only with task difficulty, but also with attainment and utility value, 3) perception of task difficulties has both positive and negative effects on the learning behaviors.

The same 406 participants also completed a questionnaire about relationship between motivation and self formation. Multiple regression analysis and two-way factorial analysis showed that 1) the effect of three motivation factors, i.e. intrinsic value, affirmative effort, ability expectancy, in students who have been studying Japanese for more than one year is significantly low, 2) the effect of self formation (Psychosocial Identity) in students who have been studying Japanese for less than four months is significantly high, 3) the effect of ability expectancy of male students who have been studying Japanese for six to ten months is significantly higher than equivalent female students. These results indicate that the students at Japanese language schools have difficulties in maintaining a high motivation and self formation after a certain period of time. (Chapter 6)

Four students attended semi-structured interviews and draw their motivational graphs and network figures with the researcher. Interview data showed that 1) task difficulty increases in advanced Japanese, 2) ability expectancy increases and decreases depending on the circumstances. Classroom atmosphere influences the students’ psychosocial identity and also students’ motivation; that is every student has felt being a “minority” in the class. However, some students acted by themselves to improve the relationship with classmates, so sense of being a minority is not the negative factor for motivation of the international students. (Chapter 7)