Feature Article

Assessing the Relationship between English Proficiency, Learning Motivation, and the Four Dimensions of International Posture

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International Posture (IP) has been found to predict language learners' Willingness to Communicate, which in turn may influence English proficiency and learning motivation. This study assessed the IP of Japanese students enrolled in English courses at one national university. The IP survey consists of 20 Likert-scale items comprised of four motivational dimensions: intergroup approach-avoidance tendencies; interest in international vocation or activities; interest in international news; and having something to communicate. This study examined the relationship between IP and students' English proficiency (TOEIC scores), learning motivation (course grades), and which of the four dimensions of IP were strongest and weakest among students. Pre-/post-course IP surveys were conducted in four general English courses attended by 69 students; courses were divided by major: Nursing/ Psychology (n=21); Medicine (n=11); Economics/Law (n=22); and Economics/Design (n=15). Data were analyzed using Kruskal-Wallis tests, correlational analysis, and simple regression analysis. A weak positive relationship between IP scores and proficiency was identified; no relationship was found between IP and learning motivation. Intergroup approach-avoidance tendencies had the highest median of the four dimensions, and having something to communicate had the lowest. Helping students express opinions about various issues with an international audience in mind may increase language learners' IP. 国際志向性(IP)は学生が英語使用に対するする態度に不可欠であり、英語力に

相関していると考えられている。IP調査は「異文化リアクション」「国際的職業・活動

への関心」「海外ニュースへの関心」「伝えたいことがある」という4つの下位尺度からなる20のリッカート尺度項目から構成されている。本研究では、日本人大学生69 名(専攻によって分類された4群)を対象とし、IPと英語力、成績との関係、およびIP の4つの下位尺度との関係も検討した。解析はKruskal-Wallis検定や相関分析、単 回帰分析を用いた。IPスコアと英語力の間には弱い正の関係が認められたが、IP スコアと成績には有意な相関を認めなかった。「異文化リアクション」は4つの下位 尺度の中で最もスコアが高く、「伝えたいことがある」は最も低かった。様々なトピッ クについて外国人に意見を述べられるようにすることが、学生のIPを高める可能性 がある。

In recent years, Japan has seen a decline in students studying abroad, with the COVID-19 pandemic worsening the situation (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2022). As the pandemic settles, borders have reopened and once again people are moving abroad freely. Study-abroad experiences have again become an option for Japanese university students, but will they be interested? If not, Japanese businesses, which increasingly demand employees with international communication skills, will face a crisis with considerable consequences for the Japanese economy (Su, 2021).

This paper reports on a pilot study that measured the International Posture (IP) of Japanese university students in different majors. The findings suggest that instructors may be able to increase students' IP by implementing activities designed to help students develop opinions about international topics.

Integrativeness and Willingness to Communicate

Gardner (1985), in advancing a sociocultural model of second language (L2) acquisition, described the integrative motive as being important to second language learning. This motive is comprised of *integrativeness*, or a desire to communicate with members of a community that speak a target language, and attitudes toward a learning situation; this combination is associated with a learner's motivation to continue studying a language as well as with language proficiency. The integrative motive later became encapsulated in early models of second language Willingness to Communicate (L2 WTC) developed by MacIntyre and associates (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; MacIntyre et al., 1998), drawing from work on first language (L1) WTC (e.g., McCroskey & Baer, 1985). WTC was conceptualized by

McCroskey and Baer (1985) as a trait-like personality variable that determined a person's tendency to speak with others when free to do so. MacIntyre et al. (1998) considered L2 WTC to include speaking as well as writing and comprehension of written and spoken language, and they suggested that L2 WTC is influenced by situational factors, such as a speaker's intentions, and enduring factors such as personality. The authors argue that the development of L2 WTC in learners should be the central goal of the language learning endeavor.

The Development of the International Posture Scale

Gardner's work was based in a bilingual (French/English) context in Canada. Yashima (2002) pointed out that integrativeness was a weak motivational factor in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts such as Japan. According to Yashima (2002), Japanese learners tend to see English as representing the world around Japan, and they may not have any clear affective reactions to specific English-speaking groups. To adapt Gardner's (1985) sociocultural model and the L2 WTC model of MacIntyre et al. (1998) to the Japanese context, Yashima (2002) proposed a variable called International Posture (IP), which she defined as language learners' interest in and favorable attitudes toward an imagined international community. IP was conceptualized as including friendship and vocational orientations, which were roughly equivalent to integrative and instrumental motivations. In designing an IP scale, Yashima (2002) was influenced by the intercultural competency research of Gudykunst (1991) and Kim (1991), which concerned ethnocentrism and learners' tendencies to approach or avoid foreigners. The ethnocentrism and friendship items were later removed from her IP scale (see Botes et al., 2020). The most recent version (Yashima, 2009) is comprised of four motivational dimensions: intergroup approach-avoidance tendencies, interest in international vocation or activities, interest in international news, and having something to communicate.

Since this concept was introduce, dozens of studies have investigated the IP of language learners at both the primary, secondary, and tertiary education levels. Most have been conducted in Asian contexts such as Japan (Birdsell, 2014; Elwood & Monoi, 2015), Korea (Kim & Kim, 2016; Kong et al., 2018),

and China (Jiang, 2013; Ulu et al., 2015). They have also been conducted in such countries as Poland (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pietrzykowska, 2011), Iran (Aliakbari et al., 2016), and Pakistan (Ali et al., 2015).

These studies vary in their faithfulness to Yashima's IP scale. Kong et al. (2018), for instance, uses only six questions from the scale in Yashima (2009), three of which are from the *intergroup approach-avoidance tendency* dimension. Nishida and Yashima (2017) use five IP items from Yashima (2002), though it is unclear which items these are. It should be noted that IP is not the sole focus of most of these studies; other variables, such as WTC, are often the main targets. The situation is made more complex as Yashima has adjusted her IP scale over the years, as noted above. Several studies follow Yashima (2002) which include friendship orientation items and not having something to communicate items (Elwood & Monoi, 2015; Razak et al., 2022). Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pietrzykowska (2011), working from a Polish university, present one of the few studies to use the complete IP scale from Yashima (2009), though the authors express concerns about the having something to communicate items, which respondents found unclear. Two items clearly concern opinions about "international issues," while the other two are vaguer in their scope: "thoughts I want to share" and "issues to address." These items may concern either local or international issues, though the audience is specified as an international one.

Two issues related to IP are most relevant to this paper: the relationship between IP, learning motivation, and language proficiency; and the "malleability" (Botes et al., 2020) of IP. How these issues have been addressed in the research literature will be described in the next section.

International Posture, Motivation, and Language Proficiency

Since IP is a form of integrativeness adjusted for EFL contexts, it is natural that motivation to learn should relate to IP (Botes et al., 2020). Yashima (2002) identified a predictive relationship between the motivation to learn English and IP; as motivation increases, IP tends to increase. Several studies have identified a similar relationship between IP and language learning motivation (Kong et al., 2018; Meyer, 2008; Nishida & Yashima, 2017). However, negative evidence

exists. Kim and Kim (2016) found that instrumental motivations were dominant among their Korean high school student participants, and IP had little to do with learning motivation. The authors conclude that Korean students, like many Japanese students, do not have a strong desire to be globally active in their academic or professional lives.

Like language learning motivation, language proficiency and IP appear to be positively related; as proficiency increases, IP tends to increase (Nishida & Yashima, 2017), though learning conditions may be important. For example, Yashima and Zenuk-Nishide (2008) found that IP and English proficiency increased the most in a cohort of high school students who studied English under a theme-based curriculum as opposed to those in a traditional grammarbased curriculum. However, the direction of the relationship between IP and proficiency remains unclear. Botes et al. (2020) suggested that IP may indirectly increase proficiency through motivated learning behaviors.

The Malleability of International Posture

Several studies suggest that IP may be a malleable disposition, i.e., that it can be increased (Meyer, 2008; Ockert, 2017; Yashima & Zenuck-Nishide, 2008). Again, teaching conditions may be important. Significant gains in IP using precourse/post-course surveys were found in students who experienced a studyabroad program (Meyer, 2008; Yashima & Zenuck-Nishide, 2008) as well as a virtual study-abroad program using Skype (Ockert, 2017). Content- or themebased English instruction were also found to yield significant gains in IP (Yashima & Zenuck-Nishide, 2008). For this reason, Yashima advocates English education grounded in content and language integrated learning (CLIL) methodology to boost students' IP and WTC (see Willey, 2023). On the other hand, Jiang (2013) reported a significant decrease in IP after 12 months of traditional grammarbased EFL instruction at a Chinese university. Yashima & Zenuck-Nishide (2008) reported no IP gains among high school students who studied English in a grammar-based curriculum.

If IP among language learners can be increased through intercultural experiences and teaching methods, perhaps language instructors can boost

learners' IP through activities that target specific motivational dimensions of IP, as described in Yashima (2009). Identifying which of those four dimensions were strongest or weakest among specific groups of learners would help instructors plan activities that boost learners' IP effectively. However, few studies have undertaken such an examination. In Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pietrzykowska's (2011) survey of Polish university students, mean scores were shown for the four motivational dimensions; *interest in international news* had the lowest mean (2.84) while *having something to communicate* had the highest (3.08), and the other two dimensions each had mean scores of 3.04. A statistical comparison of these scores was not undertaken, however.

The current study emerged from a desire to better understand the relationship between IP and Japanese university students' English proficiency and motivation for learning. We also wanted to identify which motivational dimensions of IP are strongest and weakest in Japanese university students. This information might help teachers increase English learners' IP, thereby elevating students' interest in study-abroad programs or intercultural activities within Japan and consequent gains in English proficiency. This study, conducted in the second (autumn) semester of 2021, was considered a pilot study to test the instrument and procedures, with a larger survey planned for the following year.

This study sought to answer three research questions (RQs):

RQ1. What is the relationship between students' IP scores and English proficiency, as measured by TOEIC scores?

RQ2: What is the relationship between students' IP scores and students' learning motivation, as measured by course grades?

RQ3: Which of the four dimensions of IP are strongest and weakest among students?

Course grades were included as a variable for analysis to explore the relationship between the effort students are willing to expend on each course and IP; this expenditure may be linked to students' learning motivation or a sense of studiousness.

Method

Survey Participants and Their Respective Courses

A total of 69 first- and second-year students participated in this study. All students were Japanese, with Japanese as their first language, and were enrolled in four general English courses at one national university in Western Japan (with an enrollment of approximately 6,000 students). Students were not asked to reveal their age; it is estimated that students were between 18 and 21 years old. Students who were repeating a course after failing it in a previous semester were excluded. Students who were absent four or more times were also excluded, as they were unable to pass their courses.

The four courses consisted of students in uniform major groups: Nursing/ Psychology (second year), Economics/Design (second year), Medicine (first year), and Economics/Law (first year). Nursing and Psychology, as well as Economics and Design and Economics and Law, are distinct majors; however, both groups of students attend many of the same courses at the same campus and are thus grouped together in our curriculum. Each course had 15 ninety-minute classes (one class per week) in the semester. Classes were taught by two different non-Japanese teachers.

Research Instrument

The instrument used was the IP scale in Yashima (2009). It includes 20 Japanese statements, seven of which require reverse coding. Participants indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with these statements on 6-point Likert scales. Items are grouped under the four motivational dimensions of IP: 1) *intergroup approach-avoidance tendencies* (6 items); 2) *interest in international vocation or activities* (6 items); 3) *interest in international news* (4 items); and 4) *having something to communicate* (4 items). The items were randomized to remove ordering biases (Wilson & Lankton, 2012). A sample of questions is provided in the Appendix.

Procedure

Participants filled in the same questionnaire in the first and last classes of the semester. Students who did not fill in both questionnaires were excluded.

Questionnaire results were input into Microsoft Excel, and analyses were performed using JMP Pro 15.1 for Windows (SAS Institute, Cary, NC, USA). The statistical significance of the calculated coefficients was determined at p < 0.05. The research instrument and procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board of our university.

Results and Discussion

First, an Anderson-Darling test was run to determine whether the data required parametric or non-parametric analyses; results showed a need for non-parametric analyses. Table 1 provides general information about student participants, including major, class year, the number of students by gender, TOEIC scores, and course grades. This section will describe general characteristics of each group before moving into analyses that address the three research questions.

Next, a Kruskal-Wallis test was run to examine the relationship between student majors and these variables. Significant differences in both TOEIC scores and course grades were found among students by major ($\chi 2 = 50.3$, df = 3, p < 0.0001). A Steel-Dwass test was performed to pinpoint the significant difference between groups. Medical students were found to have significantly higher TOEIC scores and course grades than all other groups: Economics/Design (Z = 4.3, p = 0.0001; Z = 3.5, p = 0.0027, respectively); Economics/Law (Z

Table 1

Major	Year	Female	Male	Total (%)	TOEIC score M (Min, Max)	Course grade M (Min, Max)
Nursing/ Psychology	2	19	2	21 (30)	510 (475, 640)	4 (2, 5)
Economics/Design	2	8	7	15 (22)	365 (250, 415)	3 (2, 4)
Medicine	1	5	6	11 (16)	685 (445, 790)	5 (3, 5)
Economics/Law	1	15	7	22 (32)	398 (260, 550)	3 (1, 4)
Total		47	22	69 (100)		

Survey Participants in Four General English courses

= 4.6, p < 0.0001; Z = 4.3, p = 0.0001, respectively) and Nursing/Psychology (Z = 3.6, p = 0.002; Z = 3.0, p = 0.016, respectively). Nursing/Psychology majors had significantly higher TOEIC scores than Economics/Design and Economics/Law majors (Z = 5.0, p < 0.0001 for both). On the other hand, Nursing/Psychology majors had significantly higher course grades than only the Economics/Law group (Z = 3.1, p = 0.0092). For instructors of these courses, these findings would not be a surprise, as the Medical and Nursing/Psychology students tend to score higher on the TOEIC than students in other majors, due perhaps to their more stringent university entrance requirements.

The next analyses sought to answer the first two research questions, which concerned the relationship between IP, English proficiency, and course grades. Regarding IP and English proficiency, a bivariate correlational analysis showed a significant but weak correlation (r = 0.29, p = 0.01). A simple regression analysis was also run (Figure 1). For the first research question, a weak relationship was found between IP and English proficiency, as measured by TOEIC scores (y =

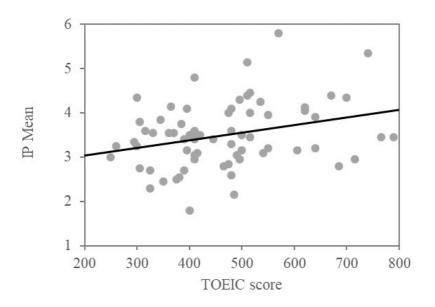


Figure 1. TOEIC and IP: Scatterplot with a regression line. y = 0.002x + 2.7; R2 = 0.09; p = 0.0146.

0.002x + 2.7, R2 = 0.09, p = 0.01). As the learners' proficiency increases so does their IP, though the increase is slight. However, the direction of the relationship remains unclear; IP may influence TOEIC scores or vice versa, or both may predict each other. This weak positive relationship confirms findings from previous research (e.g., Kim & Kim, 2016).

Next, a Kruskal-Wallis test was performed to examine differences between IP and course effort as measured by final grades (Table 2). No significant differences were found in total IP ($\chi 2 = 4.3$, df = 4, p = 0.37); *intergroup approach-avoidance tendencies* ($\chi 2 = 5.5$, df = 4, p = 0.24); *interest in international vocation or activity* ($\chi 2 = 5.0$, df = 4, p = 0.28); *interest in international news* ($\chi 2 = 8.0$, df = 4, p = 0.09); and *having something to communicate* ($\chi 2 = 4.3$, df = 4, p = 0.37). To answer the fourth research question, it seems that the effort students were willing to expend in class did not significantly relate to students' IP.

Lastly, a Kruskal-Wallis test was done to examine the relationship between students' majors and IP scores and the four dimensions of IP (Table 3). The Cronbach's alpha value was 0.92 for the IP scale (0.84 for *intergroup approach-avoidance tendencies*; 0.83 for *interest in international vocation or activity*; 0.80

Table 2

Course grade	Total IP M (Min, Max)	IAAT M (Min, Max)	IIVA M (Min, Max)	IFA M (Min, Max)	HSC M (Min, Max)
0	3.6 (3.4, 3.8)	3.8 (3.7, 4)	3.2 (3, 3.3)	3.5 (2.8, 4.3)	3.8 (3, 4.5)
1	3 (2.2, 4.4)	3.5 (2.3, 5.5)	3.3 (1.7, 5.3)	2.6 (1.8, 3.8)	2.4 (1.5, 4)
2	3.4 (1.8, 5.2)	4 (2.3, 5.8)	3.5 (1.5, 5.8)	3.3 (2, 5.5)	2.8 (1.3, 4.3)
3	3.4 (2.6, 5.8)	4.3 (2.8, 6)	3.3 (2.3, 5.7)	3.6 (1.5, 5.5)	2.6 (1, 6)
4	3.7 (2.8, 5.4)	4.3 (3, 6)	3.8 (3.2, 6)	3.9 (2.3, 4.8)	3 (1.5, 4)
<i>p</i> value	0.37	0.24	0.28	0.09	0.37

Course Grade and IP: Kruskal-Wallis Test

Notes. M = Median; Min = Minimum number; Max = maximum number. IAAT: intergroup approach-avoidance tendencies; IIVA: interest in international vocation or activity; IFA: interest in international news; HSC: having something to communicate.

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Table 3

Major and IP: Kruskal-Wallis Test

N = 69	Total IP M (Min, Max)	IAAT M (Min, Max)	IIVA M (Min, Max)	IFA M (Min, Max)	HSC M (Min, Max)
Nursing/ Psychology	3.6 (2.2, 5.8)	4.3 (2.8, 6)	3.7 (1.7, 5.8)	3.5 (1.8, 5.5)	3 (1.5, 6)
Economics/ Design	3.4 (1.8, 4.8)	4 (2.3, 5)	3.5 (1.5, 4.5)	3.3 (1.5, 5.5)	2.5 (1, 5)
Medicine	3.5 (2.8, 5.4)	4 (3, 6)	3.7 (3, 6)	3.8 (2.3, 4.8)	2.8 (1.5, 4.3)
Economics/ Law	3.3 (2.3, 4.4)	3.7 (2.8, 4.8)	3.3 (1.8, 5.3)	3 (2, 4.8)	2.9 (1.8, 4.5)
Total	3.5 (1.8, 5.8)	4 (2.3, 6)	3.5 (1.5, 6)	3.3 (1.5, 5.5)	2.8 (1, 6)
p value	0.15	0.07	0.22	0.16	0.41

Notes. M = Median; Min = Minimum number; Max = maximum number. IAAT: intergroup approach-avoidance tendencies; IIVA: interest in international vocation or activity; IFA: interest in international news; HSC: having something to communicate.

for *interest in international news*; 0.82 for *having something to communicate*). These values show that Yashima's (2009) survey, which surveyed high school students, maintained reliability for this group of university students. No significant differences were found among the four different groups in terms of total IP ($\chi 2 = 5.4$, df = 3, p < 0.15); *intergroup approach-avoidance tendencies* ($\chi 2 = 7.0$, df = 3, p = 0.07); *interest in international vocation or activity* ($\chi 2 = 4.5$, df = 3, p = 0.22); *interest in international news* ($\chi 2 = 5.2$, df = 3, p = 0.16); and *having something to communicate* ($\chi 2 = 2.9$, df = 3, p = 0.41).

As described above, Medical and Nursing/Psychology students were significantly higher than the other students in terms of TOEIC scores and course grades. However, a regression analysis found only a weak relationship between proficiency and IP, and no clear relationship between IP and grades. Also, the Kruskal-Wallis test also found no differences among groups in terms of IP and its four dimensions. Taken together, these findings suggest that proficiency and learning motivation alone are insufficient to significantly increase learners' IP, and that different variables, such as extraversion and openness to new experiences, may be involved (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2020).

Compared to the other three dimensions, *intergroup approach-avoidance tendencies* had the highest median (M = 4), suggesting that these students were able to imagine themselves communicating with foreign people in various situations. *Having something to communicate* had the lowest median (M = 2.8). These findings answer our third research question, which concerned which dimensions of IP were highest and lowest among students. This result also contrasts to a similar study by Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pietrzykowska (2011) with Polish university students, in which *having something to communicate* was the highest of the four motivational dimensions.

Conclusion

This study found, first, a weak positive relationship between IP and English proficiency. As proficiency increases, IP tends to increase as well, though the direction of the relationship is unclear. Second, no clear relationship was identified between IP and course grades, representing students' learning motivation. Last, we found that intergroup approach-avoidance tendencies was the strongest IP dimension among students, while having something to communicate was the weakest. These students did not feel they had opinions to share with an international audience. Thus, to boost Japanese students' IP scores, teachers may need to help students formulate and express opinions about various topics with an international audience in mind. As mentioned above, English education grounded in content and language integrated learning (CLIL) methodology may boost students' IP and WTC. Such methods enable students to read about various issues, form opinions, and then communicate their opinions to others. The New Course of Study for secondary education learners, with its focus on content rather than grammatical forms, may offer hope, but whether this curriculum will affect teaching practices is yet unclear. If these methods prove successful, CLIL-based English education may gain further traction in English courses at the tertiary level in Japan.

However, there remains confusion among instructors and textbook authors

about what CLIL entails. The authors of this paper have found that some CLIL textbooks present only one side of various issues and thus do not give students the opportunity to reflect upon the issues and develop their own opinions. An "issue-of-the-week" approach, in which topics such as global warming are presented in short, one-sided readings, may be unsuitable in helping learners find what they think about these issues, and may not lead to increases in IP. Students need to engage issues in greater depth and from various viewpoints.

Limitations and Future Directions

The low number of participants, as well as our only surveying students at one institution, may have resulted in the lack of significance in statistical analysis. In addition, the use of students' TOEIC scores as a proficiency measure may have been problematic, as the TOEIC does not measure the skill of writing and speaking. Also, course grades may reflect students' previous English education and not necessarily the effort they are willing to expend in classes. Qualitative data collection measures, such as interviews and free-response items, as well as items to gather information about personality variables such as extraversion and relevant background information such as students' previous experiences using English, would have allowed for a richer conceptualization of IP as it relates to Japanese learners. As mentioned earlier, this study was considered a pilot to test the research instrument and procedures, and an expanded study, involving a greater number of participants and an expanded number of items, is in progress.

Finally, we hope that future studies take a more critical view of the IP scale. The world has changed a great deal since Yashima's formulation of International Posture, and the current scale does not acknowledge modern modes of intercultural exchange such as social media, online gaming, and virtual study abroad programs. One no longer needs to leave one's country to step out into the world. A better understanding of International Posture would enable English instructors to help students become internationally minded in a multi-modal world.

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Appendix

A sample of questions from the survey is shown below.

Intergroup approach-avoidance tendencies

I want to make friends with international students studying in Japan. 日本に来ている留学生など外国人と(もっと)友達になりたい。

* I would feel somewhat uncomfortable if a foreigner moved in next door.

*もし、日本で隣に外国の人が越してきたら困ったなと思う。

Interest in international vocation or activities

I'm interested in an international career.

国際的な仕事に興味がある。

- * I'd rather avoid the kind of work that sends me overseas frequently.
- *海外出張の多い仕事は避けたい。

Interest in international news

I often talk about situations and events in foreign countries with my family and/ or friends.

外国の情勢や出来事について家族や友人とよく話あうほうだ。

* I'm not much interested in overseas news.

*海外のニュースにあまり興味がない。

Having something to communicate

I have thoughts that I want to share with people from other parts of the world. 世界の人々と話したいトピックがある。

- * I have no clear opinions about international issues.
- *国際的な諸問題について特に意見はもっていない。
- * = Reverse-coded item

In filling in the questionnaire, students read the instructions below and then wrote a number in the parentheses next to each item. The original Japanese instructions, an English translation, and one sample item are shown below.

6	5	4	3	2	1
強くそう 思う	そう思う	ややそう思う	あまりそう思 わない	めったにそう 思わない	

判断の際は、以下の表に示した基準を参考にしてください。それぞれの項目を読んで「強 くそう思う場合は6」と、「決してそう思わない場合は1」と括弧内に書いてください。

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Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements below.

6	5	4	3	2	1
I strongly agree	I agree	I somewhat agree	I somewhat disagree	I disagree	I strongly disagree

1) I want to make friends with international students studying in Japan. ()