

ICT & Innovations in Education

International Electronic Journal

ISSN 2321 – 7189 | Volume 2, Issue 2 | April 2014

Research results of Japanese elementary school students' affect toward EFL

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www.ictejournal.com

ABSTRACT

This paper reports the preliminary survey results of two groups of elementary school students in Japan, one of which will be engaged in a computer mediated communication (CMC) exchange with native speaker of English (NSE) elementary school students in Australia. The schools have collaborated to provide the students an opportunity to introduce themselves via the multimodal online software Skype in the future. The findings of the first iteration of the survey instrument given before the intervention are reported. The instrument consists of questions regarding foreign language activities (FLAs), international posture (IP), motivation, and their self-perceived communicative competence, willingness to communicate (WTC), and desire to visit foreign countries. The results show strong correlations between motivation and WTC, motivation and IP, and between motivation and FLAs. The results and implications are discussed in relation to later stages planned for the project.

Keywords: EFL, WTC, CMC, IP, confidence, motivation

Introduction

This paper examines the affective variables of elementary school students regarding English in a Japanese English as a foreign language (JEFL) setting. The results of a small group of Japanese school students ($N=58$) who will use technology-based methods (Skype and email with video attachments) to communicate with a group of elementary school students in Australia are presented. It is anticipated that using CMC to bring the real world into the classroom will broaden the students' horizons by exposing them to native speakers of English (NSEs) from another country - promoting an international posture (IP; Yashima, 2002) in the students. Furthermore, this method authentically involves the students themselves in the learning process, increasing autonomy and intrinsic motivation (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Reeve & Halusic, 2009). The research results presented herein show high correlations between motivation, international posture (IP; Yashima, 2002), and willingness to communicate (WTC; McCroskey & Baer, 1985) of elementary Japanese students studying English as a foreign language (EFL). Educators benefit by realizing that this group of students really enjoyed the language exchange experience using live video, resulting in a greater than anticipated relationship between several of the affective variables surveyed. As a result of the higher than expected inter-affect correlations found in this study, it may be speculated that live language exchanges may create a valid replication of a real-world, face-to-face language exchange, resulting in a heightened L2 self-image (Dörnyei, 2009).

In this paper, we begin first with a review of the shift in EFL education from an integrative motivational orientation for English learning to an international posture regarding English as a part of learners' global outlook; Self-determination theory-based EFL motives, specifically, students' intrinsic motivation; Then, the students' ideal L2 Self; We then examine students' willingness to communicate and its antecedent, self-perceived communicative competence. Next we explore the relationship between motivation and task-based learning We conclude by appealing to curriculum designers and teachers in general to consider the results with the understanding that this research project has a variety of purposes, the most important of which is the broadening of our students' horizons via English language learning and thereby help them become global citizens (Lamb, 2004; Ushioda, 2006; Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2012; Yashima, 2002).

EFL Motivation

From an integrative orientation to an international posture

The debate surrounding the concept of the integrative motive (Gardner, 1985, 2001) has grown in recent years in EFL. As a result, the concept has been re-thought, mainly prompted by the growing discussions of its applicability in applied linguistics due to the spread of English as a global language (aka. 'World Englishes'). Recently, the inclusion of English as a basic skill to be taught from the primary school level has been introduced in Japan (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; MEXT, 2003). Educators now ask if the concept of integrative orientation can be applied in situations where there is no specific target reference group of speakers. Does the idea of an integrative motivational orientation for learning English have real meaning anymore?

Ushioda (2006) has noted, since English is spoken by members of a global community, the question arises whether it is appropriate to conceptualize its members as an external reference group, or as part of one's internal

representation of oneself as a *de facto* member of that global community. It is this theoretical shift of focus to the “internal domain of self and identity that marks the most radical rethinking of the integrative concept” (p. 150). The concept of an L2 Self will be explored further, below.

For many learners, English symbolizes the world around Japan, something that connects them to foreign countries and foreigners with whom they can communicate by using English, according to Gudykunst and Kim (1984). In the JEFL context, in which daily contact with native speakers of English remains infrequent if at all, learners are not likely to have a clear affective reaction to the specific L2 language group (Ushioda, 2006). However, student attitudes toward American and other English-speaking cultures are surely created through education and exposure to foreign culture via various media. Yashima (2000) found that English seems to represent something broader than people from the US or Britain in the minds of young Japanese learners. Therefore, Yashima (2002), for example, has expanded on the definition of 'integrativeness' to refer to a generalized international outlook or 'international posture' (IP), which she has defined as an “interest in foreign or international affairs, willingness to go overseas to stay or work, readiness to interact with intercultural partners, and...openness or a non-ethnocentric attitude toward different cultures” (p. 57). The concept of IP thus considerably broadens the external reference group from a specific geographic and ethno-linguistic community to a non-specific global community of English language users. Therefore, IP refers to a desire to be looked upon as a member of an international community English language speakers, which is influenced by the communicative behavior of other such 'globally minded' students that use English. Therefore, IP tries to catch the learner's attitude toward the world and interest(s) toward the world outside Japan. In short, this identity with 'foreignness' possesses an international outlook and the attendant attitudes to different cultures and foreigners that are non-Japanese (Yashima et al., 2004). This has “attempted to operationally define international posture based on preliminary studies and examined, in the Japanese EFL context, relations among international posture, L2 learning motivation, L2 proficiency, and L2 communication variables including confidence in L2 communication and WTC” (Yashima et al, 2004, p. 125). These relationships have been more recently explored with Japanese elementary school students in, too (see Tagami, 2011, May; 2011, July).

Self-determination theory-based EFL motives

SDT intrinsic motivation

Self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985) has been used in a variety of fields over the past twenty five years with consistent results. Within the field of education, much of the research has consistently pointed to the importance of motivation from within (Deci & Flaste, 1996), whether defined in terms of intrinsic or integrative motivation (as opposed to an extrinsic or instrumental motivation). This 'motivation from within' is believed to sustain the learning process more effectively than motivation that is externally regulated or controlled by the teacher and the research evidence thus far supports this view (e.g. Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2002), and the message for educators clearly shows that in order to help our students, we need to find ways of finding, supporting and maintaining students' own motivation to learn (Ushioda, 2006). Research to 'recast' the integrative and instrumental orientations (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) into the self-determination motivation framework has helped to “organize systematically many of the reasons for learning a L2” (Noels, Clément & Pelletier, 1999, p. 24).

EFL learners' Ideal L2 Selves: SDT integrated regulation

In their comments on the integrative motivation factor in their data, Csizér and Dörnyei (2005a; 2005b) speculate that the process of personal identification theorized to make up the construct of 'integrativeness' might be more readily explained as an internal process of identification within the person's 'self' concept, rather than identification with an external reference group. Dörnyei (2005) developed this line of thought further by drawing on the psychological theory of 'possible selves' (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Accordingly, this theory provides that as a basis of self-identity, possible selves represent an individual's idea of "what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming", and therefore "provide a conceptual link between the self-concept and motivation" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 157). Dörnyei (2005) builds on this theory of possible selves to develop a new conceptualization of L2 motivation, what he refers to as the "L2 Motivational Self System" (p. 9). The central concept is the ideal self, which refers to the representation of the attributes that someone would ideally like to possess (i.e. a representation of personal hopes, aspirations or wishes). Along with the 'ideal' self is the 'ought-to' self, an identification with the attributes that the individual believes he or she ought to possess, such as one's duty, obligations or responsibilities. A basic hypothesis is that if proficiency in the target language is an integral part of one's 'ideal' or 'ought-to' self, this identification alone provides the motivation to learn the language. To sum up, it is due to the individual's psychological desire to become more and more like their desired possible 'future' self (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009).

Other affective variables in EFL

Willingness to communicate

An issue that influences students' classroom participation is their willingness to communicate in English. In L1 studies, McCroskey and his associates (McCroskey, 1992; McCroskey & Richmond, 1987; McCroskey & Richmond, 1991) initially researched and reported on the construct that they have identified as 'willingness to communicate'. WTC captures the major implications that affective variables such as anomie, communication apprehension, introversion, reticence, self-esteem and shyness have in regards to their influence on communicative behavior (McCroskey & Richmond, 1991).

However, since L2 communication contexts contain several "inter-group issues, social and political implications" (MacIntyre & MacDonald, 1998, p. 546), WTC in the L2 is not regarded as a simple manifestation of L1 WTC, which is believed to be more of a personality trait. As a result, MacIntyre (1994) developed a path model speculating that to L2 communication WTC is based on a combination of perceived communicative competence and a low level of communication anxiety. Based on studies conducted in Canada, MacIntyre's (1994) model proposes that perceived competence and anxiety affect WTC separately. MacIntyre and Clément (1996) showed that motivation influenced WTC in the L2, which, in turn, resulted in increased frequency of L2 communication. In studies conducted in other contexts, WTC was a predictor of frequency of communication in the L2, while motivation was a predictor of WTC and / or frequency of communication (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; MacIntyre & Clément, 1996).

EFL WTC studies have shown a connection to other affective variables such as personality, self-confidence, attitudes, and motivation, and learners' sense of their communicative competence. Studies have shown that "(l)earners who have higher perceptions of their communication competence and experience a lower level of communication anxiety tend to be more willing to initiate communication" (Peng & Woodrow, 2010, p.836). However, other situational factors are also involved, such as topic, task, group size, and cultural background (Cao, 2011). In Asian cultures, for example, students may be more willing to communicate in front of their peers in the classroom than in other cultures. Wen and Clément (2003) suggest that in China, group cohesiveness and attachment to group members influence Chinese students' WTC in the classroom. A student may believe that if they volunteer to answer in class this may be judged as "showing off" (Richards, 2012, p. 50). This reticence is all too familiar to EFL teachers in the JEFL situation as well.

Yashima and her associates (Yashima, 2000; 2002; Yashima et al, 2004; Yashima et al., 2009) have conducted research on affective variables in the JEFL context. For example, language learning orientations and motivations of Japanese college students (Yashima, 2000), student willingness to communicate (Yashima, 2002), the influence of attitudes and affect on willingness to communicate and second language communication (Yashima et al., 2004) and the interplay of classroom anxiety, intrinsic motivation, and gender (Yashima et al., 2009).

According to the experts in the field, intercultural communication is the sharing and construction of meaning through interaction with dissimilar others. WTC in an L2 involves readiness to start this process, which will hopefully lead to mutual understanding and trust. As a result, Yashima et al. (2004) have called for "Studies...to be carried out with programs that offer students increased opportunities in L2 communication" (p. 126). The research project results presented in this paper are of just such a program. Matsuoka's (2005) research confirms several of the above results. The results showed that introversion, motivational intensity, communication apprehension and IP were "significant predictors of L2 WTC" (p. 157). In addition, it was shown "that perceived competence and L2 WTC were significant predictors of L2 proficiency" (p. 157).

Self-confidence and self-perceived communicative competence

MacIntyre and his associates (Donovan & MacIntyre, 2005; MacIntyre, 1994; MacIntyre & MacDonald, 1998; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998) have identified a concept which they have labeled 'perceived communicative competence'. All of these competencies influence the communicative process of how people influence each other verbally / aurally and / or with symbols (such as writing systems) and therefore, visually through the interpretation of those symbols or words. How a learner perceives their ability to communicate will be influenced by how well they have mastered each of the above skills.

On the other hand, McCroskey and his associates (Chesebro et al., 1992; McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988; Rosenfeld, Grant & McCroskey, 1995) emphasize that it is the learner's perception of their own communicative competence that influences their WTC - not the teacher or an 'other' who perceives the learner to be objectively able to communicate competently. So, a student who quite easily 'gets the point across' using gestures and occasionally scribbling a word or diagram on a piece of paper may in fact believe that they are not a competent speaker if they are lacking in discourse confidence, for example.

In her JEFL study, Yashima (2002) found a positive, causal relationship between motivation (which was comprised of two indicator variables, desire and intensity) and communication confidence (comprised of two indicator variables - communication anxiety, aka nervousness, and perceived communication competence) in the L2, which led to WTC. In addition, Yashima (2004) found that "self-confidence in communication in an L2 is crucial for a person to be willing to communicate in that L2" (p. 141). The role of confidence as a predictor variable for WTC has also been found by Hashimoto (2002) and Yashima et al., (2004). In addition, Matsuoka's (2005) results indicate that while WTC and proficiency are not correlated, confidence may predict English proficiency amongst Japanese college students.

Foreign Language Activities

The author believes that the research demonstrates that young people – and especially children - are inherently motivated to be active in almost any situation and enjoy hands on activities. In addition, "research results demonstrate that students are more interested in living the language than merely using it in a classroom setting" (Ockert, 2006, p. 336) such as occurs in traditional, teacher-fronted lessons in which the language is merely translated, listened to or repeated. These results are in line with Willis, who describes task-based activities as "activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose in order to achieve an outcome" (Willis, 1996, p. 23). Furthermore, L2 motivation can hardly be examined in a more situated manner than within a task-based framework. Recognizing the significance of tasks in shaping learners' interest and enthusiasm coincides with teachers' perceptions: the quality of the activities used and the way they are presented makes a difference in students' attitudes toward learning. As Noels et al. (1999) have noted, "With its potential to be developed and maintained by the social environment, motivation is one element that educators can develop to improve their students' L2 outcomes" (p. 31). The social environment of the foreign language classroom can be developed to enhance motivation and, therefore, improve self-confidence (Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1994).

Research involving JEFL elementary students by Nose (2006) asked the student three questions regarding English language learning and use before and after an intervention which included native speakers of English (NSE). These three questions are: *Do you like English?*, *Do you want to be able to speak English?* and *What is the most interesting (activity) during English time?* His research revealed that the majority of the students (65%) responded most favorably to the third question. In particular, those who reported that 'games' was the most interesting activity for the third question, reasons given were an increase of interest as a result of talking with an NSE; listening to a foreign language; and the increase of awareness towards (the necessity of English) communication.

The study

Based on the above research, the authors propose the following research question: How will English language activities correlate with interest in foreign countries (different cultures); motivation to study English; confidence to communicate in English; desire to communicate with foreigners in English; desire to go overseas motivation, and their IP?

Hypotheses

The students in this study will show a desire to learn English with activities and be motivated to do so. In addition, both groups of students will have similar responses to the six survey questions.

Methods

Participants

Fifty-six Japanese 5th grade elementary school students who were 10-11 years old participated in the study. The students were in two separate, intact classes. They were all native Japanese in the same school in Nagano prefecture, Japan.

Materials

Based on the research by Nose (2006) and Takiguchi (2002; see below), with elementary school age participants, it was decided to keep the questionnaire items few and simple. Therefore, the self-report measure (see McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988) used a six-point Likert-type scale from 1 (Completely Disagree) to 6 (Completely Agree) for one statement for each of the following variables: foreign language (English) activities; foreign countries (different cultures); motivation to study English more; confidence to communicate in English; desire to communicate with foreigners in English; desire to go overseas. The instrument's Cronbach's *alpha* reliability estimate of 0.88 is acceptable for an instrument of six items.

Procedures

The survey was administered in class to the 56 Japanese fifth grade elementary school students in April, 2010. The survey was in paper form and in Japanese. The data was put to a correlation analysis using statistical software SPSS 18. The significance level was set to .05 for all of the questions.

Results

The descriptive statistics for the experimental and control groups are presented in Table 1. As can be seen, there are a number of high mean scores. For example, the experimental group has a mean score of 4.45 for desire to travel overseas, and the control group has a similar score of 4.74. Furthermore, the control groups mean score for foreign language activities is 4.00, indicating a stronger desire to engage in such activities than the experimental group members ($M = 3.14$). Interestingly, and in contrast to the hypothesis of this study, the control group shows a stronger desire to engage in FLAs than the experimental group. In addition, the control group also shows a higher mean score for IP, motivation, and desire to travel overseas. It will be very interesting to see the changes for these two groups of students after the introduction of the technology-based FLAs, which will include both video 'letters' and Skype exchanges.

Table 1. The descriptive statistics of the two student groups

Experimental Group	N	M	SD	Control Group	N	M	SD
FL Activities	29	3.14	1.70	FL Activities	27	4.00	1.62
Int'l Posture	29	3.31	1.84	Int'l Posture	27	3.74	1.61
EFL Motivation	29	3.17	1.70	EFL Motivation	27	3.52	1.72
Comm. Confidence	29	3.45	1.40	Comm. Confidence	27	2.67	1.62
WTC	29	3.34	1.86	WTC	27	3.22	1.60
Desire to travel overseas	29	4.45	1.77	Desire to travel overseas	27	4.74	1.83

The correlation results are presented in Table 2. The correlation between motivation and WTC the correlation is .806; between motivation and IP, it is .806; between motivation and FLAs we find a correlation of .780; between WTC and FLAs it is .675; between WTC and IP we have .669; between FLAs and communicative competence, the correlation is .502; and finally, between motivation and desire to travel overseas, it is .514. These results indicate that these student response results differ from those previously reported by Yashima et al., (2004). As both studies took place in the Japanese EFL environment, possible reasons for the different results will be discussed below.

Table 2. Correlations and statistical significance of the six affective variables (N=56)

	FL Activities	Int'l Posture	EFL Motivation	Comm. Confidence	WTC	Desire to travel overseas
FL activities	—	.000	.000	.000	.000	.020
Int'l Posture	.552**	—	.000	.005	.000	.001
EFL Motivation	.780**	.806**	—	.000	.000	.000
Comm. Confidence	.502**	.373**	.493**	—	.000	.024
WTC	.675**	.660**	.828**	.500**	—	.000
Desire to travel overseas	.309*	.426**	.514**	.301*	.482**	—

* p < 0.01 (2-tailed); ** p < 0.05 (2-tailed)

Discussion and future directions

The results above are very different than those found by both MacIntyre and Charos (1996) in their study of adult learners of French in Canada and the results reported by Yashima et al. (2004) and Matsuoka (2005) involving Japanese students. For the purposes of this paper, it is worth noting that the Yashima et al. (2004) research, the Matsuoka research and this research took place in Japan. However, there are two notable differences between the two research groups. First, the students in Matsuoka's studies were university level students; the Yashima et al. research subjects were 15 and 16 year old JHSs while the subjects for this study were 10 and 11 year old elementary school students. Therefore, the two confounding variables of age and the impact of technology offer further areas of investigation. Of particular interest at this stage of the project are the high correlations between FLAs and motivation (0.78), and FLAs and WTC (0.675). Since the next stage of the project will be introducing innovative ways to use technology to communicate with students living abroad, it is anticipated that an increase in interest in FLAs may also result in an increase in student motivation to learn English and WTC in English.

The survey for this paper consists of six simple statements because the students are so young, it was believed that a more complicated survey would have been inappropriate. It may also be argued that these students are simply so young that they perceive the activity as 'play' rather than learning; therefore, they do not as yet have a fully developed sense of 'self' about which they can feel self-conscious.

This research project will continue with the addition of several technology-based, multi-modal FLAs. Research on multimodal computer-mediated communication (MCMC) activities, such as those involving synchronous second and foreign language uses (L2 and FL, respectively) have received the attention of theorists and researchers. For example, cross-cultural exchanges via the Internet using virtual worlds (Felix, 2005) and video games (Reinders & Wattana, 2011) have proven to be beneficial to student participants. Research by on the use of Skype (Godwin-Jones, 2005) and Hampel and Hauck (2006) on multimodal virtual learning spaces have contributed greatly to our understanding of how to incorporate CALL / CMC-based communication media into the classroom (see also Hoven, 2006; Lamy, 2012). Additional research has demonstrated the positive effects of CMC on affective variables such as anxiety (see de los Arcos, Coleman & Hampel, 2009) and WTC (Reinders & Wattana, 2011)

In the Japanese university EFL learning situation, Kikuchi and Otsuka (2008), have reported on the use of social networking services in the classroom; Takase (2009) has shown how scaffolding and network learning in CMC English classes using blogs improved performance. Finally, computer-mediated communication in foreign language learning benefited the students of Japanese and English (Saito & Ishizuka, 2003; Ramzan & Saito, 1998).

There has been little reported in the literature on the changes in affective variables of students who engage in real-time synchronous communication with members of the target language community outside of Japan. One research project testing for changes in affective variables of Japanese students was carried out by Takiguchi

(2002). The results have shown that real-time, in-class communication with students in foreign countries using a voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) conferencing system (e.g. Skype or Gizmo) improved student interest, concern, and desire. Especially, the students responded favorably to items such as *I want to make friends* 「友達になりたい」、*I like English* 「英語が好き」、and *I enjoy my hobby using English* 「趣味に生かす」.

What are some of the benefits of introducing live, video multimodal exchange experiences for young EFL Japanese learners? It is possible to use video communications as a means to teach English by using such exchanges as a foreign language activity as a motivating mean of study. English is used as a means for real communication with real and tangible results. Furthermore, the activities presented herein have been shown to make it possible to easily interact with students at schools in various regions around the world, thereby introducing students to many different cultures and uses of English (Tagami, 2011). The next stage of this project will explore in greater detail any changes in the affective variables reported herein.

Conclusions

Technology continues to have a positive impact both within and on the field of education. By actively engaging learners in the learning process, technology provides a means to capture interest and foster learning. There are several reasons why learners may lose interest in learning another language: time pressure; the fact that their friends do not use the language; boredom; they see no future use for it; and other interests, to name a few. However, the use of recent technological advances such as the Internet provides an interesting alternative to traditional educational approaches.

This technology enables educators to create 'live' communication opportunities in the classroom. The advantages of such events include: authentic speech, including, but not limited to: auto-corrections; natural pauses; facial expressions; pragmatic speech acts; interruptions, and the required handling of them; background noise, and the various ways to overcome this interference. The classroom uses are both innovative and original ways that educators can use to take advantage of the most up-to-date technologies to help their students learn language. In addition, students and teachers could make a video of the event, thereby creating a unique recording of a special time in their lives forever.

The author believes that future, longitudinal studies which track student progress based on gender, future goals, and the intensity to learn English would of great benefit for teachers, students, and educational systems around the world. It is hoped that the results of this experiment will be beneficial to the global language learning community.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the students and teachers who helped with this research project and the editor and reviewers for their assistance in bringing this paper to press. Any errors are the authors'.

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Appendix. *The student survey*

English translation of the questionnaire items using a six-point Likert-type scale from 1 (Completely Disagree) to 6 (Completely Agree).

1. I like foreign language (English) activities.
2. I want to know more about foreign countries (different cultures).
3. To communicate in English, I want to study more.
4. I have confidence to communicate using simple English.
5. For myself, I want to communicate with foreigners in English.
6. I want to go overseas at some time.