

# Students' Emotions, Teachers' First Language (L1)/Target Language (TL) Use and English Proficiency Improvement

Takako Inada<sup>1)</sup>, Toshiya Inada<sup>2)</sup>

## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The aim of this study was to investigate whether a teacher's language choice in task-based English communicative classes could affect students' enjoyment, anxiety, and English proficiency improvement.

**Design:** Two groups: English-only (EE group) and with some legitimate Japanese support (EJ group) were created and their enjoyment, anxiety and English proficiency improvement were compared.

**Methods:** The questionnaire ninety-two students took twice (at the entry and at the end) was used to measure the levels of students enjoyment and anxiety. The change between the term tests' scores was used to measure the levels of students' English proficiency improvement.

**Results:** The levels of enjoyment significantly increased in the EE group, and each student's score from the midterm to the final exam significantly increased in the EJ group.

**Conclusion:** Japanese support instruction might contribute to English proficiency improvement of basic to low intermediate-level students.

## KEY WORDS

foreign language enjoyment, foreign language classroom anxiety, exclusive TL use, L1 use, students' English proficiency improvement

## INTRODUCTION

Regarding the necessity of using Japanese in improving English proficiency in task-based university lessons, it is suggested that factors such as the student's English proficiency level, foreign language enjoyment, and foreign language classroom anxiety are involved. However, consistent results have not yet been obtained and remain to be unclarified. Therefore, it could be an important topic to be discussed.

Along with the globalisation of society, Japanese English education has gradually shifted from the grammar translation method to the inclusion of communicative methods. Task-based methods are currently the mainstream in communicative English classes at universities, and many Japanese universities have adopted an English-only rule, which is one reason for students' anxiety (Rivers, 2011). Students' performance could improve if anxiety decreased (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994b); therefore, researchers (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986) have focused on reducing foreign language classroom anxiety.

When teachers and students share their native language (L1) in English as foreign language (EFL) situations, L1 is often used to decrease students anxiety (Rivers, 2011). L1 use can be a quick solution to providing a clear understanding and decreasing anxiety because of failure of comprehension or expression in a target language (TL). L1 is also a useful resource for promoting second language (L2) learning if judiciously applied in a single-nationality class (Cook, 2001). Mere exposure to a TL is insufficient for students to internalise and process

messages (Moore, 2010); therefore, what might be effective are lessons where students can fully understand the contents. Likewise, Macaro (2001b) states that L1 use can be successfully integrated into language learning activities and is a valuable tool for teachers. Explaining new and difficult words or phrases, teaching grammar, clarifying comprehension and providing translations are all situations when L1 is commonly used. Overall, L1 use may quickly provide students a comfortable escape from troubling situations through comprehension support, which reduces anxiety; increases enthusiasm, self-confidence and risk-taking; and leads to successful second language acquisition (SLA) (Cook, 2010).

SLA research has investigated negative emotions such as anxiety and the holistic perspective of emotions. Positive psychology in foreign language (FL) classrooms has focused on L2 learners' positive emotions such as enjoyment. MacIntyre and Mercer (2014) are pioneers of this movement and report that if students have an enjoyable experience when learning a TL, their self-confidence and enthusiasm increase and their anxiety decreases. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) adopt both sides of human emotions holistically in an FL context and assess enjoyment and anxiety among 1746 FL learners (aged 11-75 years) worldwide and demonstrate that enjoyment increases and anxiety decreases gradually and enjoyment and anxiety are independent dimensions and students can experience both emotions simultaneously. Dewaele, Witney, Saito and Dewaele (2017) report that enjoyment and anxiety are not dependent and learner-internal factors are more linked to anxiety and teacher-centred variables are more related to enjoyment. Likewise, Dewaele

Received on March 16, 2020 and accepted on June 25, 2020

1) Department of Health Sciences, Japan University of Health Sciences  
1961-2 Satte, Satte-shi, Saitama 340-0113, Japan

2) Department of Psychiatry and Psychobiology, Nagoya University Graduate School of Medicine  
65 Tsurumai-cho, Showa-ku, Nagoya-shi, Aichi 466-8550, Japan

Correspondence to: Takako Inada  
(e-mail: takako.inada@gmail.com)

**Table 1: Teacher's Language.**

	EE group	EJ group
New words, phrases & idioms	explain with easier English slowly	explain in Japanese
Difficult questions	explain satisfactorily by using different English expressions	clarify listening comprehension of idiomatic sentences in Japanese explain the sentences that include complicated grammar in Japanese
Important information (HW & tests)	explain repeatedly with easy English write on the blackboard in English	use English-Japanese translation
Rapport building	ask students to help each other in English some humor in English	ask students to help each other in English some humor in English

**Table 2: Demographics.**

		EE group (n = 31)	EJ group (n = 61)	
Total No. (n = 92)		Class 1 (n = 31)	Class 2 (n = 26)	Class 3 (n = 35)
Gender	Male (n = 64)	21	17	26
	Female (n = 28)	10	9	9
Age	18 years old (n = 47)	19	10	18
	19 years old (n = 39)	12	13	14
	20-23 years old (n = 5)	0	3	2
	No answer (1)	0	0	1
Nationality	Japanese (n = 88)	31	25	32
	Chinese (n = 3)	0	1	2
	Korean (n = 1)	0	0	1

and MacIntyre (2018) state that personality traits can cause anxious experiences and teacher-related variables can cause enjoyable experiences. Jin and Dewaele (2018) also state that a teacher's emotional support was less crucial than a student's emotional support to decrease anxiety, and students' positive attitudes were significantly related to lower anxiety. Thus, teachers can contribute to enhancing student enjoyment, but the power of students has been found to have a stronger influence on reducing anxiety.

Regarding the progress of students' English proficiency level, enjoyment and anxiety are positively and negatively correlated with a learner's FL proficiency. Dewaele and Alfawzan (2018) report that advanced-level students have high enjoyment and low anxiety. Saito, Dewaele, Abe and In'nami (2018) report that enjoyment can be predicted by the amount of practice and L2 development within 3 months. They conclude that regular and frequent use of a TL while experiencing enjoyable feelings could promote SLA, reduce anxiety and improve TL proficiency overall.

Both L1 use and enjoyable lessons have benefits for reducing students' anxiety and improving their English proficiency. Although the positive psychology movement and the dynamic nature of enjoyment and anxiety have been investigated in the literature, the relationship between a teacher's language choice, students enjoyment and anxiety, and their English proficiency improvement have never been examined among EFL college students in Japan.

## A RESEARCH QUESTION

This study poses the following research question: Does a teacher's language choice, namely, English-only versus occasional use of Japanese, affect students' levels of enjoyment/anxiety and their English proficiency improvement?

## METHODS

This study adopted a prospective, longitudinal (one semester) and quantitative approach.

## Setting

The course investigated was a semi required task-based English class for freshmen that focused on development of students' communicative skills in English. The Japanese researcher, a Japanese and English bilingual instructor, taught three classes and used data from those classes for this study. The textbook, homework assignment, tests and lesson plan were the same in all classes. During the lessons, students engaged in pair and group work for speaking practice, studied how to listen by using listening comprehension materials and learned new vocabulary, phrases, idioms and grammar. The duration of each class was 100 minutes, and a teacher taught one unit per week.

The students studied units one through six before the midterm exam and units seven through twelve before the final exam. The students completed the midterm exam during the seventh lesson and the final exam during the fourteenth lesson. The textbook had two progress tests, namely, a relevant review unit. The first progress test covered the material in the initial units, and the second progress test covered the material in the latter units. The two progress tests were used as the midterm and final exams. The domains assessed were listening comprehension, communicative short reading and communicative grammar and vocabulary.

This study investigated two types of classes: English-only classes (the EE group; one class) and classes conducted in English but Japanese was used occasionally by the teacher (the EJ group; two classes). Examples are shown in Table 1.

For the EE group, the questions asked by the students were answered with easier English spoken slowly to students, and satisfactory explanations were provided by adjusting the question until the student could understand. Information regarding homework and exams was repeatedly explained using easy-to-understand English and was sometimes written on a blackboard.

For the EJ group, based on the duration of the class, the teacher spoke Japanese less than 10% of the time to help students. Regarding the qualitative data, Japanese was typically used to promote students' understanding:

1. Teach Japanese meanings of new words or phrases such as 'feature' (tokuchou) or 'It's a drag!' (sore wa ashi wo hitsuparu mono desu.)
2. Clarify listening comprehension of an idiomatic sentence such as 'That's about it'. (ma, sonna tokoro kana.)
3. Explain sentences that include complicated grammar. For example, when students were confused about the sentence 'I am afraid to go near the snake as I am afraid of being bitten', they were instructed that the meaning of 'be afraid to' was 'wo sakeru' and that of 'be afraid of' was 'wo osoreru'. Additionally, to report notable information such as explanations of homework and exams, English-Japanese translation was provided to the students to minimise the disadvantages of students with low listening comprehension ability. However, to establish a good rapport among the classmates, in both groups, the students were asked to help each other during lessons and humour was sometimes used, both of which were done in English.

## Questionnaire

The levels of enjoyment and anxiety were assessed using the questionnaire by Dewaele, Witney, Saito and Dewaele (2017) (appendix). The questionnaire comprised six items regarding background information, ten items regarding FL enjoyment and eight items regarding FL classroom anxiety. The ten items regarding FL enjoyment were from an enjoyment questionnaire (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014) and included

**Table 3: Levels of English Proficiency, Enjoyment and Anxiety.**

	EE Group (n = 31)		EJ Group (n = 61)		Statistic value (EE vs EJ)
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
TOEIC placement	438.55	105.27	427.67	98.06	$p = 0.626, t = 0.489, df = 89$
Midterm exam (Time 1)	14.74	2.65	14.23	2.52	$p = 0.369, t = 0.902, df = 90$
Final exam (Time 2)	14.93	3.09	14.98	2.10	$p = 0.932, t = -0.085, df = 90$
Enjoyment Time 1	37.26	6.37	36.57	6.63	$p = 0.637, t = 0.474, df = 90$
Enjoyment Time 2	40.52	6.92	37.39	7.30	$p = 0.052, t = 1.973, df = 90$
Anxiety Time 1	25.58	6.72	27.11	5.73	$p = 0.256, t = -1.144, df = 90$
Anxiety Time 2	22.61	7.57	22.89	5.87	$p = 0.849, t = -0.190, df = 90$

Note. Independent t-tests were performed in the comparisons of the above variables between the EE group and the EJ group.

three dimensions of enjoyment: social, private and peer-controlled versus a teacher-controlled positive atmosphere in FL classrooms. The other eight items were from an anxiety scale (Horwitz *et al.*, 1986) and included three dimensions of anxiety: anxiety, insufficient confidence and nervousness. The Cronbach's alpha of their ten enjoyment items was 0.88, and that of their eight anxiety items was 0.85 in the research by Dewaele *et al.* (2017). The six background information items were name, gender, age, nationality, languages participants understand (L1-L3) and the FL (s) participants were studying. A five-point Likert scale was used: *strongly agree* = 5, *agree* = 4, *neither agree nor disagree* = 3, *disagree* = 2, *strongly disagree* = 1, with higher total scores indicating higher levels of each category. The wording for two items that assessed anxiety that required Likert scale answers was reversed to ensure that the aim of the research was not detected by the participants. When recorded in an Excel file, two reversely worded items were adjusted.

## Data Collection

The questionnaire was used to measure the levels of students' enjoyment and anxiety in task-based English classes. Written, informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participants were informed that anonymity was guaranteed and that all participants were allowed to ask questions about the survey and to withdraw from it at any time. This study was a longitudinal; therefore, the same questionnaire was distributed at the study's entry (Time 1) and at the endpoint (Time 2) of a semester. The sample was 92 college students who studied English while attending a Japanese university. The students completed the questionnaire in class within approximately 10 minutes to maximise the response rate. The researcher recorded one lesson from each class by using an Integrated Circuit (IC) recorder in the middle of the semester to provide evidence of the language choice.

## Statistical Analyses

After checking the histograms, a parametric distribution was confirmed for all variables. The comparison of the gender ratio between the EE and EJ groups was performed using a chi-square test. Comparisons of proficiency test (TOEIC) scores, midterm and final test scores, levels of enjoyment (Time 1 and Time 2) and anxiety (Time 1 and Time 2) between the EE and EJ groups were conducted using the independent *t*-tests. Comparisons of the tests and enjoyment/anxiety from Time 1 to Time 2 within the EE and EJ groups were implemented using the paired *t*-tests. Bonferroni's correction was applied for multiple comparisons. The difference at  $p < 0.05$  was considered significant. These statistical analyses were performed using the SPSS statistical package version 23.

## RESULTS

### Validity of the Likert Scale

The Cronbach's alpha of ten items of enjoyment and that of eight items of anxiety were 0.88 and 0.83 at Time 1, and 0.93 and 0.86 at Time 2, respectively.

### Participants

Table 2 shows the demographic and racial distribution between the

EE group and EJ group. All the participants were freshmen aged 18-23 years (mean  $18.59 \pm 0.82$  S.D.). No significant difference was observed in the gender ratio between the two groups. The participants were largely racially homogeneous. The researcher taught three classes at an equivalent English level based on the students' scores on a TOEIC test administered before the class started. The range of the students English proficiency levels was from 220 to 745 (mean  $431.37 \pm 100.12$  S.D.) on the TOEIC.

Table 3 shows the levels of English proficiency, enjoyment and anxiety in/between both groups. Significant differences were observed between the groups for enjoyment at Time 2. Furthermore, significant differences were observed between Time 1 and Time 2 for enjoyment and English proficiency improvement in both groups. In the EE group, levels of enjoyment at Time 2 increased significantly when compared to those at Time 1 ( $df = 30, t = -2.609, p = 0.014$ ), while did not in the EJ group ( $df = 60, t = -0.792, p = 0.432$ ). The scores of the EJ group significantly increased from the midterm to the final exam ( $df = 60, t = -2.610, p = 0.011$ ) but not for the EE group ( $df = 30, t = -0.469, p = 0.642$ ). The levels of anxiety at Time 2 decreased significantly in both the EE group ( $df = 30, t = 2.590, p = 0.015$ ) and the EJ group ( $df = 60, t = 5.945, p < 0.001$ ), when compared to those at Time 1.

## DISCUSSION

The results demonstrate that the levels of enjoyment increased and the levels of anxiety decreased during one semester, but differences were observed based on instruction type.

Regarding the levels of anxiety, the students' anxiety in both groups decreased from Time 1 to Time 2, and no significant difference was observed between the two groups. This finding supports the literature, that is, teachers should prioritise students' enjoyment over their anxiety (Dewaele *et al.*, 2017; Jin & Dewaele, 2018). Jin and Dewaele (2018) report that teachers' emotional help did not reduce students anxiety: classmate support and peer solidarity were more effective for decreasing anxiety. Furthermore, students' positive attitude towards English language acquisition, such as whether they have a positive self-image and a good relationship with their classmates, would be a reasonable measure of their anxiety. Similarly, Dewaele, Saito, Witney and Dewaele (2017) conclude that anxiety is from students' inner feelings, such as insufficient FL fluency or dislike of FL classes. Therefore, teachers' effort regarding anxiety reduced by using Japanese may not be effective.

Regarding enjoyment, a statistically significant difference was observed between the two groups at Time 2: English-only instruction significantly increased students' enjoyment overtime compared with English with some Japanese support instruction. No significant difference between the two groups was observed in the levels of anxiety; thus, this result is supported by Dewaele and Alfawazan (2018), who state that the positive effect of enjoyment is stronger than the negative effect of anxiety on FL performance. English-only instruction can be suitable for increasing levels of enjoyment and students may have to be exposed to English as much as possible. Another result suggests that the growth of English proficiency tended to differ between EE group and EJ group: the students' scores from the midterm to the final exam significantly increased in EJ group. Considering these results, legitimate Japanese support may contribute to increased English proficiency, but students increase in levels of enjoyment may not always lead to it.

This study has limitations. First, the small sample used means that the result is vulnerable to statistical choice. Second, this study did not

include a speaking test for the proficiency assessment. Third, this study was a short longitudinal study (i.e. one semester); therefore, a longer longitudinal study is recommended. Fourth, the participants were mostly Japanese college students and their English proficiency levels ranged from beginner to intermediate; thus, the findings may not be generalisable to other EFL contexts. These limitations may explain the differences between the results of this study and those in the literature. Thus, further research could increase the number of participants, include a speaking test, conduct a longer longitudinal study, or perform replication studies in other EFL classrooms in Japan or other countries.

## CONCLUSION

This study investigated whether the teacher's language choice affected the levels of enjoyment/anxiety and students' English proficiency improvement. The results suggest that exposure to English-only instruction significantly increases students' level of enjoyment and that exposure to English-Japanese instruction significantly promotes students' English proficiency. The Japanese support instruction may have contributed to the increase in levels of English proficiency of students who participated in this study (the mean score of TOEIC: about 431), which may be a factor independent from increasing the levels of enjoyment.

## APPENDIX

### A Paper-based Questionnaire

1. I didn't get bored in today's class. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. I enjoyed today's class. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. I felt like a worthy member of the English class today. \_\_\_\_\_
  4. In class, I felt proud of my accomplishments today. \_\_\_\_\_
  5. It was a positive environment today. \_\_\_\_\_
  6. It's cool to know English. \_\_\_\_\_
  7. It was fun today. \_\_\_\_\_
  8. The peers were nice today. \_\_\_\_\_
  9. There was a good atmosphere today. \_\_\_\_\_
  10. We laughed a lot today. \_\_\_\_\_
- 
1. Even if I am well prepared for the English class, I felt anxious about it today. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. I always feel that the other students speak English language better than I do. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. I felt my heart pounding when I was called on in the English class. \_\_\_\_\_
  4. I didn't worry about making mistakes in the English class today. \_\_\_\_\_
  5. I felt confident when I spoke in the English class. \_\_\_\_\_
  6. I got nervous and confused when I had to speak in the English class today. \_\_\_\_\_
- 
7. I started to panic when I had to speak without preparation in the English class. \_\_\_\_\_
  8. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class. \_\_\_\_\_

## REFERENCES

1. Cook, G. *Translation in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2010
2. Cook, V. Using the First Language in the Classroom. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 2001; 57(3), pp. 402-423. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.57.3.402>
3. Dewaele, J.-M. and Alfawzan, M. Does the Effect of Enjoyment Outweigh That of Anxiety in Foreign Language Performance? *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 2018; 8(1), pp. 21-45. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssl.2018.8.1.2>
4. Dewaele, J.-M. and MacIntyre, P. D. The Two Faces of Janus? Anxiety and Enjoyment in the Foreign Language Classroom. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 2014; 4(2), pp. 237-274. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssl.2014.4.2.5>
5. Dewaele, J.-M. and MacIntyre, P. D. The Predictive Power of Multicultural Personality Traits, Learner and Teacher Variables on Foreign Language Enjoyment and Anxiety. In M. Sato and S. Loewen (Eds.), *Evidence-based Second Language Pedagogy: A Collection of Instructed Second Language Acquisition Studies*. London: Routledge. 2018
6. Dewaele, J.-M., Witney, J., Saito, K. and Dewaele, L. Foreign Language Enjoyment and Anxiety: The Effect of Teacher and Learner Variables. *Language Teaching Research*, 2017; 22(6), pp. 676-697. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1362168817692161>
7. Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., and Cope, J. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 1986; 70(2), pp. 125-132. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1986.tb05256.x>
8. Jin, Y. X. and Dewaele, J.-M. The Effect of Positive Orientation and Perceived Social Support on Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. *System*, 2018; 74, pp. 149-157. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.01.002>
9. Macaro, E. *Learning Strategies in Foreign and Second Language Classrooms*. New York: Continuum. 2001b.
10. MacIntyre, P. D., and Gardner, R. C. The Subtle Effects of Language Anxiety on Cognitive Processing in the Second Language. *Language Learning*, 1994b; 44(2), pp.283-305. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1994.tb01103.x>
11. MacIntyre, P. D., and Mercer, S. Introducing Positive Psychology to SLA. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 2014; 4(2), pp. 153-172. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssl.2014.4.2.2>
12. Moore, D. Code-switching and Learning in the Classroom. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 2010; 5(5), pp. 279-293. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050208667762>
13. Rivers, D. J. Politics Without Pedagogy: Questioning Linguistic Exclusion. *ELT Journal*, 2011; 65(2), pp. 103-113. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccq044>
14. Saito, K., Dewaele, J.-M., Abe, M. and In'nami, Y. Motivation, Emotion, Learning Experience, and Second Language Comprehensibility Development in Classroom Settings: A Cross-sectional and Longitudinal Study. *Language Learning*, 2018; 68(3), pp. 709-743. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12297>