

Investigation of how to reduce affective filter

岩間靖子
Seiko Iwama

ABSTRACT

This study investigates how students could reduce their affective filters when learning English as a second language in Japan. According to the Krashen Hypotheses (1982), there are six hypotheses that can apply when learning English as a second language. These are as follows: (i) The Acquisition-Learning hypothesis, (ii) The Monitor hypothesis, (iii) The Natural Order hypothesis, (iv) The Input hypothesis, (v) The Affective Filter hypothesis, (vi) The Reading hypothesis.

This study will discuss the Affective Filter hypothesis and examines how students could improve their self-confidence when learning English as a second language in the classroom.

1. Introduction

The purpose of the present study is to research how to improve students' self-confidence in learning English as a second language.

This research examined six factors with the students to ascertain whether improvements can be made in self-confidence when learning English as a second language. These factors are as follows: (i) teachers' smile, (ii) positive words, (iii) small cards with positive comments written on them, (iv) compliment activity, where students will compliment their peers (v) stamps with positive affirmations, (vi) group talks with their peers. This study then posed the following two questions; (i) Can students increase self-confidence when learning English as a second language? (ii) To what extent are the six factors successful in boosting the students' self-confidence when learning English as a second language?

This study is as a result of the writer experiencing studying alongside students from other countries. When attending the classroom as a postgraduate student, Japanese students were very quiet. On the other hand, students who were from The Netherlands, Russia and Spain seemed to be very confident in the classroom. They asked many questions of the teacher during and after the class, giving answers immediately after the teacher posed questions and then discussing the topic. Japanese students were very used to being quiet in the classroom and always concentrated on listening to the teachers' lesson. It appeared that students from other

countries had a totally different culture in the classroom. This research will review literature pertaining to achieving self-confidence in students when learning English as a second language.

After that, this study will discuss the questions above and describe the methodology. In the findings chapter we will mention what the research revealed, considering the questions posed, and a discussion of their implications. Finally, we will examine this research and review how this could contribute to teaching English as a second language.

2. Literature review

2.1 The Affective Filter hypothesis

The Affective Filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1982) is described as follows:

‘The Affective Filter hypothesis states how affective factors relate to the second language acquisition process, (Krashen: 1982: 30).

Krashen classifies The Affective Filter hypothesis into three parts: (i) Motivation; Performers with high motivation generally do better in second language acquisition. (ii) Self-confidence; Performers with self-confidence and a good self-image tend to do better in second language acquisition. (iii) Anxiety; Low anxiety appears to be conducive to second language acquisition, whether measured as personal or classroom anxiety (Krashen: 1982).

According to Krashen, he hypothesised that these attitudinal factors relate directly to acquisition and not learning (Krashen: 1982). This study is interested in the aspect of self-confidence and will therefore be concentrating on this aspect.

2.2 Self-Confidence

In the previous section, we considered how motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety seemed to be related to language acquisition. In this section, we will consider how important students’ self-confidence is in learning English as a second language.

According to Heyde (1979),

‘anxiety is one of the most negatively influential affective variables, which prevents learners from successfully learning a foreign language’. Also, he says, ‘It makes language learners nervous and afraid, which may contribute to a poor aural/oral performance. One of the personal factors, which are highly correlated with anxiety, is self-confidence. Self-confidence involves judgements and evaluations about one’s own value and worth. Self-confidence can be negatively influenced when the language learner think of oneself as deficient and limited in the target language. On the other hand, high self-confidence can be positively correlated with oral performance’ (Heyde, 1979, cited by Hyesook and Adam, 2005, 198).

Also, MacIntyre, Dornyei, Clement and Noels (1998) suggested, ‘self-confidence dramatically contributes to the learner's willingness to communicate in foreign language learning.’ (MacIntyre, Dornyei, Clement and Noels: 1998, cited by Hyesook and Adam: 2005: 199)

3. Research questions and Research Method

3.1 The Six Factors

This research examined six factors with the students to ascertain whether improvements can be made in self-confidence when learning English as a second language. These factors are as follows: (i) teachers smile, The teacher would smile at the student (ii) positive words, the teacher would always provide positive words to the students (iii) small cards with positive comments written on them, (iv) compliment activity, where students will compliment their peers (v) stamps with positive affirmations, (vi) group talks with their peers. The students would discuss their work before publicly speaking in the class. This is further explained in section 3.3.2 and

3.2 Research questions

The Affective Filter hypothesis and especially the importance of self-confidence were reviewed and examined in the previous chapter. This chapter will set out the research questions asked and how the research was conducted.

The research questions are as follows: (i) Can students increase self-confidence when learning English as a second language? (ii) To what extent are the six factors successful in boosting the students' self-confidence when learning English as a second language?

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Subject

Thirty-one native speakers of Japanese (JS) in Japan participated in the full study. The Japanese (JS) subjects were between 18 and 20 years of age; twenty six were females, and five were males. All of them were learning English as a second language in Japan. The subjects represent a convenient sample and cannot, of course, be considered fully representative of all age groups of native Japanese speakers. However, they can potentially give us indicative evidence regarding young Japanese speakers.

3.3.2 Instruments

All subjects were asked to complete the questionnaire written in Japanese as well as English. This consisted of seven questions (See appendix 2 for the full questionnaire). Firstly, they were asked whether they could improve their self-confidence through English language lessons. Secondly, whether the remarks from a teacher such as "You did so well!", "Well done!", "You can do it!" can influence self-confidence. Thirdly, whether the small cards given to the students at the end of the class could have some effect on their self-confidence. There were always positive words on the small cards such as "You are wonderful as you are.", "You have infinite possibilities." "I'm so proud

of you.”, “You are doing so well.”, “You can do it.”, “Everything will go well”. Some were handwritten by a teacher. Lastly, it is about which word on the small cards could encourage them the most. Furthermore, stamps were pressed during and after students were working out the problems in the textbook, or doing their reading and vocabulary activities. The positive words such as “good job”, “Wonderful” and “You are doing so well” were written on the stamps pressed by the teacher.

Importantly, the “Compliment Activity” was one of the most essential activities to boost the student’s confidence. This can be described as follows: Students stood in two lines and whilst paired they had to tell their partner at least three points about their partners’ positive personality traits. They were prohibited from saying disadvantageous points to their partners even as a joke. Also, when they were told compliments, they were encouraged to respond positively. For example, they could say, “Thank you very much” or “I think so too.” (See appendix 1). They could reinforce their vocabularies about personality traits at the same time. Finally, if they had any ideas about improving their self-confidence in the class, they were encouraged to write it down on the questionnaire.

3.3.3 Compliment Activity

Here is a more precise description of the “Compliment Activity”. This is where the students praise their class peers by finding their good points. The students stand in two lines with their partners in front of them. Then, they make pairs with the students standing on the other line. Once they find their partner, they then say, “I want to tell you about yourself. You have many good points. Especially, you are [], [] and [].” They have to say three good points about their partners. Once they are given the compliment from their partners, they have to say “Thank you very much.” They should never say “No”. Instead, they try to say, “Thank you very much. I think so too.” The students in one line then move to the left once they have finished the “Compliment Activity”. Then, they do this activity with a new friend. In addition, when they do this activity, they use the sheet; (See appendix 1).

3.3.4 Procedures

Japanese subjects were given the questionnaire in Japanese as well as English and were asked to answer in Japanese. This questionnaire was inspired by the work of Arango (2015), as it is partly similar to my research, although additional details were added. The main aim of this questionnaire is to ascertain what kinds of encouragement the teacher can use to boost their self-confidence. Also, to find out how students can be encouraged by their class-peers.

4. Findings

The previous chapter presented the research questions and methodology. In this chapter, we would like to discuss the findings gained from the questionnaire in response to the six factors, (See appendix 2). Also, there will be some comments from students at the end.

In each part, the research question will be repeated to remind the readers of what we wanted to examine. Let us begin by considering the research question one.

4.1 Research question one: Can students increase self-confidence when learning English as a second language?

4.1.1 The result of research question one

According to the questionnaire, thirty out of thirty-one students said that they had boosted their self-confidence through learning English as a second language. One student did not write an answer, it is therefore assumed from the answer to the six factors' questions, that the student did not increase their self-confidence.

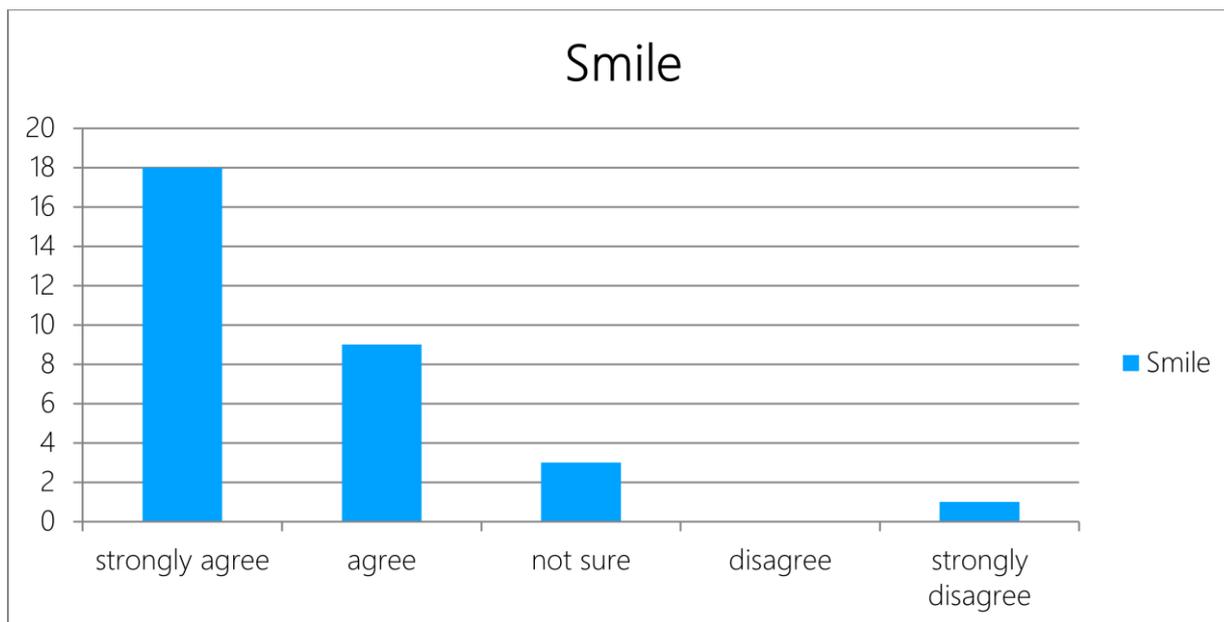
4.2 Research question two: To what extent are the six factors successful in boosting the students' self-confidence when learning English as a second language?

Here, we used six factors to boost the students' confidence: (i) teachers smile, the teacher would smile at the student (ii) positive words, the teacher would always provide positive words to the students (iii) small cards with positive comments written on them, (iv) compliment activity, where students will compliment their peers (v) stamps with positive affirmations, (vi) group talks with their peers. The students

would discuss their work before publicly speaking in the class. In this section, we will look at the result of which aspects worked to increase their self-confidence.

4.2.1 Teacher's smile

The result of the smile factor has shown that it may have increased Japanese students' self-confidence, according to the graph below.

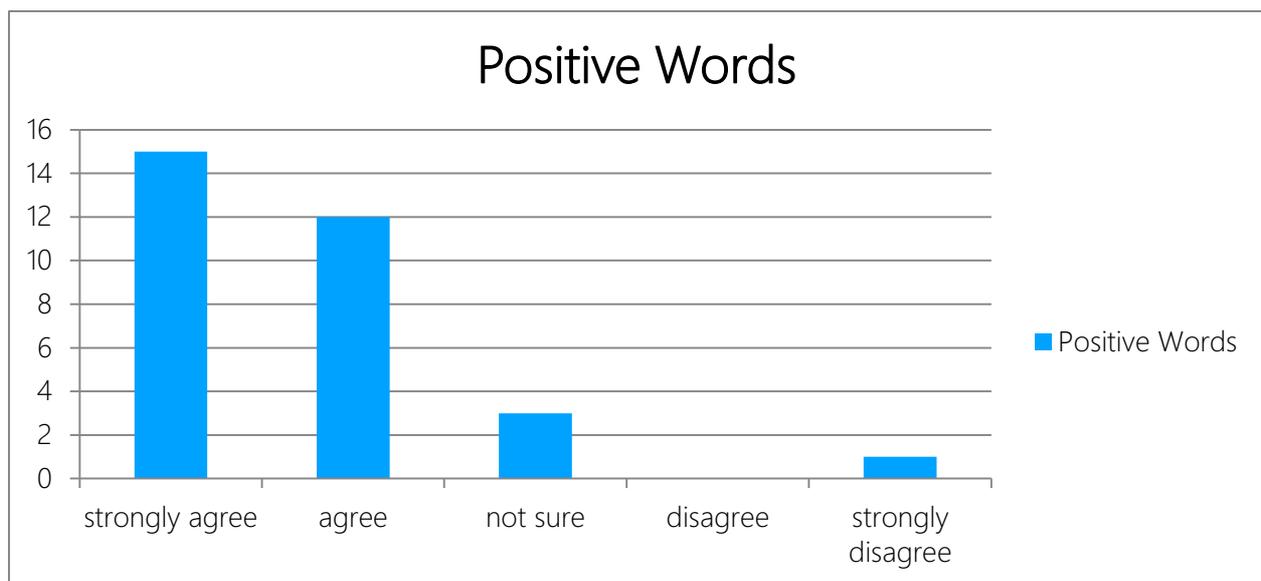


As this table indicates; eighteen students strongly thought that the teacher's smile boosted their self-confidence. Nine students relatively think that their self-confidence was improved and three do not know if the teacher's smile influences their self-confidence. One student thought that this factor did not achieve additional self-confidence. This result may attribute to the fact that students can feel more relaxed and accepted in this classroom when a teacher is smiling at the students. From this data, albeit small in quantity, it appears to show that JS may feel more confident when the teacher smiles at them.

4.2.2 Positive words

Having had a look at how important the teacher's smile was, we then moved to the next factor, positive words. In the class, the teacher tried to give as many positive words as possible to the students where necessary. For instance, positive words such

as “good question” were said to the students when they asked questions to the teacher. It is considered that students require much courage to ask questions. For this reason, if the teacher gives positive words when a student asks a question, they may feel more accepted. The teacher therefore frequently used the following words; “that is great”, “you can do it”, “that is a very good question”, “well done for asking”, “you are doing so well”, ”you can do it”. The reason why the teacher used these words is because it is thought that it is necessary to encourage students for what they said even though they made mistakes.

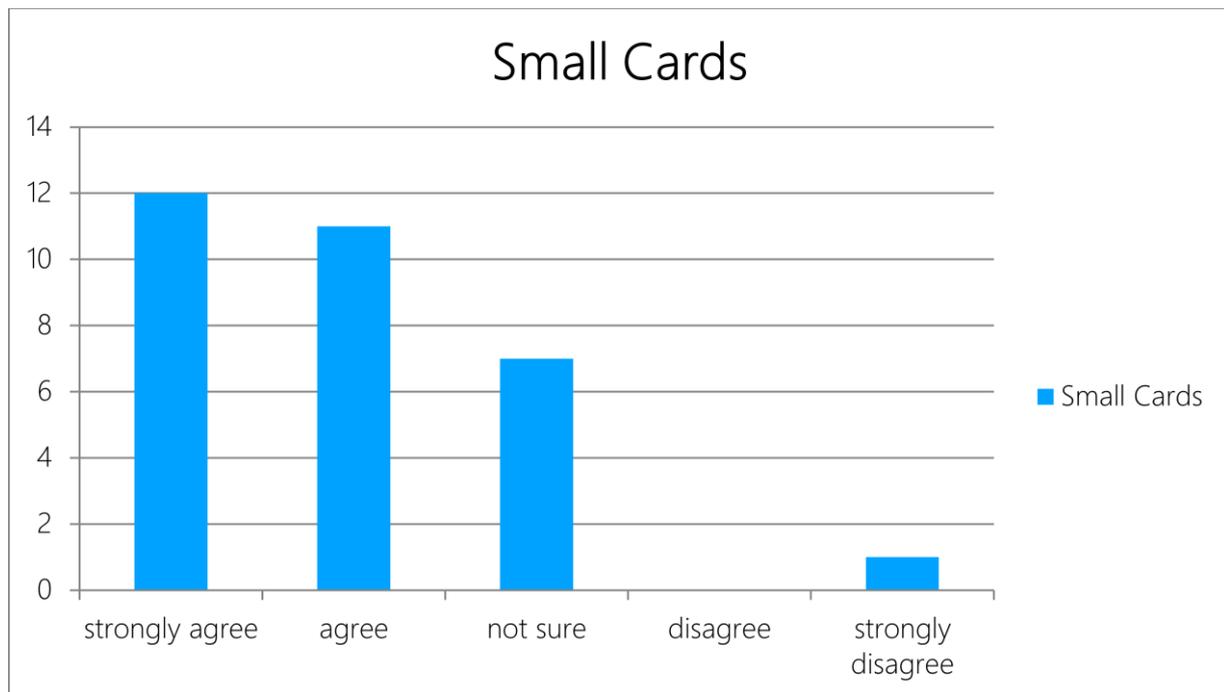


This table shows the words from the teacher helped the students increase in their self-confidence. As this graph indicates; fifteen students felt much more confident when the teacher gave them positive words, twelve students relatively thought so, three students were not sure if they were helpful or not and one student did not feel they were useful. This result provides sufficient evidence to say that the positive words from the teacher were necessary for the students to increase in their self-confidence.

4.2.3 Small Cards

The next factor is small cards with positive affirmations written on them. The small cards were given to the students at the end of most lessons. Sometimes the words were handwritten and other times, the words were not. The teacher always wrote the message, wishing that all students would have wonderful futures. The following words were written: You are wonderful the way you are, you have infinite possibilities, you

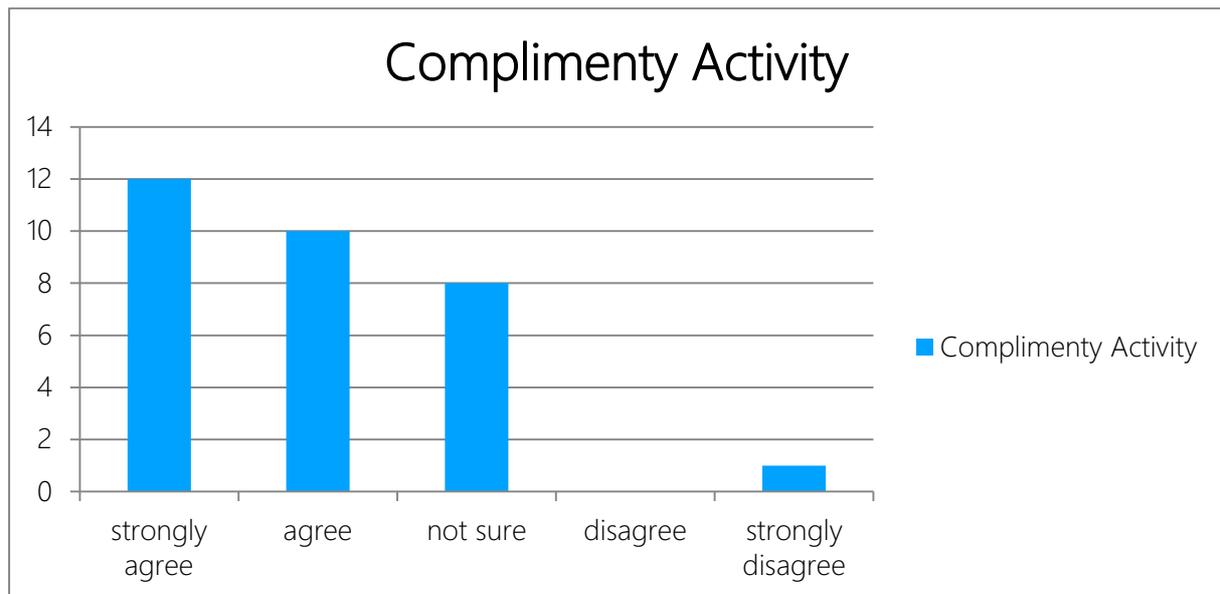
can do it, you are doing so well, don't worry, everything will go well and you have incredible ability.



This table clearly shows that twenty-three students thought the small cards were helpful in order to increase their self-confidence. Seven students were not sure whether they were useful or not and one student thought that this did not help him increase his self-confidence. This graph provides sufficient evidence to say that most students felt the small cards were essential to boost their self-confidence.

4.2.4 Compliment activity

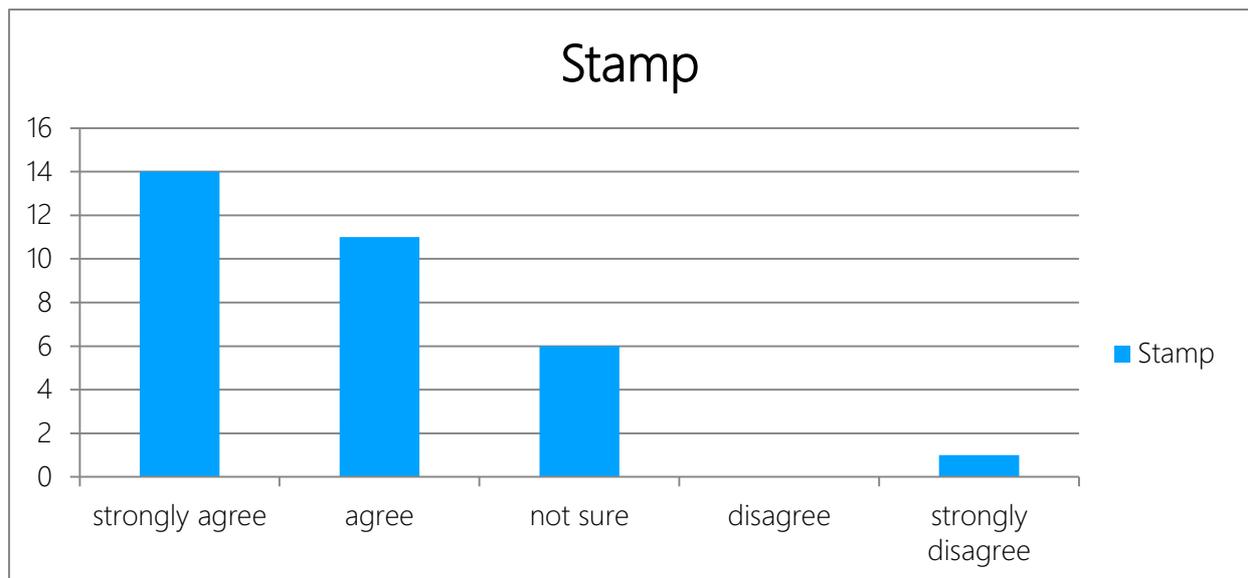
The next element is the compliment activity. This activity is where students pair-up and praise each other. The hope is that students can find good points about their class-peers. Sometimes it is difficult to find the good points about other people and they might only see negative points. Often it is easier to find the negative points of other people. However, if we continue to have this way of seeing other people, we cannot build up a constructive relationship. Therefore, in order to feel secure in the classroom, the teacher wanted them to find the good points of their class-peers and to feel accepted in the class. Furthermore, the teacher advised them not to say "No" when they were praised. Instead the teacher suggested to say, "Thank you very much. I think so too."



This graph summarises how a complimentary activity was useful for the students' confidence. Twenty-two students thought that this activity helped them feel more self-confident than before and eight students were not sure whether this activity helped them. Doing this complimentary activity has resulted in an increase in students' self-confidence.

4.2.5 Stamp

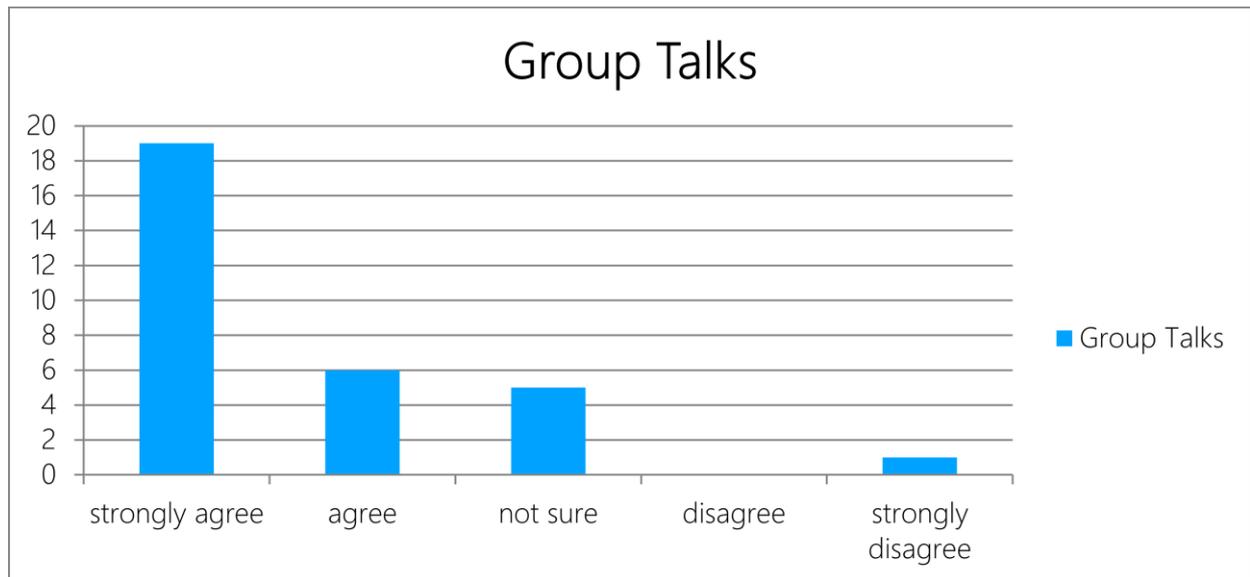
In this section, we will have a look at the result of how a stamp worked to increase the students' self-confidence. The teacher pressed the stamp whenever there were opportunities. For example, when students concentrated on answering the questions in the textbook, the teacher pressed the stamp where "Good job" was written. Also, when they showed the teacher their essay or the presentation, the stamp "Wonderful" was pressed. The teacher personally thought even though the stamp may be used normally for children, adult learners can also feel that their self-confidence is improved by what they are doing or what they have done. Therefore, the teacher tried giving them as many stamps as possible.



This table shows that fourteen students became much more confident when the teacher pressed the stamp for their works, eleven students were relatively pleased with the stamp, six students were not sure if the stamps were useful or not and one student did not feel they that they were useful.

4.2.6 Group talks

This section will look at the results of having group talks. The teacher would tell the students to discuss the answers within the group or in pairs beforehand. Afterwards, they would mention their opinions to the whole group. It is felt that the group talks were exceptionally important because the students tended to be silent when asked to give opinions to everyone without the discussion in advance. Once they had the opportunities to talk with their peers within their groups, they seemed to be much more confident to give their ideas to everyone. The students' discussion in advance of the group talk was considered important to boost self-confidence and the table below documents their opinions of how successful this was.



The data above shows that students appear to be considerably self-confident when they have a chance to discuss their ideas with their class-peers in advance. It is clear that the group talks gave the students the most confidence in all of the factors. Significantly, nineteen students felt that they could increase their self-confidence through the group talk. Six students said that communicating in a group talk may have boosted their self-confidence. In addition, five students were not sure that their self-confidence would increase. Like other factors, only one student felt his self-confidence did not increase.

4.2.7 Other comments by the students

The students' self-confidence was evident outside of the six factors. The comments by the students are listed below:

Comment 1. Students felt more self-confident when the teacher gave positive comments when mistakes were made.

Comment 2. The teacher corrected every student's essay. This led the student to have more confidence than before.

Comment 3. The student did not feel afraid of writing an essay in English and speaking in front of everyone anymore.

Comment 4. The teacher's eye contact gave the student more confidence.

Comment 5. The teacher taught the student how to memorise the English words.

When the student achieved the ability to memorise the vocabulary more, it gave the student more self-confidence.

Comment 6. The teacher gave the student positive words after the lesson. That gave the student more confidence.

Comment 7. The piano lesson in English gave the student more confidence.

Comment 8. When the teacher gave them positive words outside the classroom, the student felt more confident.

Comment 9. Writing an essay in English made the student more confident.

Comment 10. The teacher explained necessary information until the student could comprehend everything. This gave the student more confidence.

Comment 11. The students felt that they could improve their English skills.

Comment 12. The teacher praised the student even when the student understood the answer only slightly. Also, when the teacher looked at each one of the students it made the students more self-confident.

Comment 13. Presentation and giving speech made them more confident.

Comment 14. The teacher would praise a student when a correct answer was given leading to increased self-confidence.

Comment 15. When the teacher motivated the student to study English and practice music more, this would make the student feel optimistic about their life and in turn feel self-confident.

4.2.8 Summary of research evidence

Consequently, from the data above, Japanese students were influenced by the teacher's smile, positive words, small cards with some positive comments, compliment activity, stamps, and group talks with their peers. Particularly, it was clear that the teacher's smile and the group talks had a significant influence on their self-confidence. Also, when observing the students comments, it was clear that the positive comment in the class and also outside the class had an enormous influence on their self-confidence. In addition the teacher's precise and kind explanation about the problems the students face in learning English as a second language was necessary.

We have discussed the findings in some detail. The conclusions will be considered, highlighting any implications for teachers.

5. Conclusions and teaching implications

5.1 Introduction

At this point, it may be helpful to repeat the two research questions: (i) Can students increase self-confidence when learning English as a second language? (ii) To what extent are the six factors successful in boosting the students' self-confidence when learning English as a second language?

Research question 1, It seems reasonable to conclude that the students could boost their self-confidence through learning English as a second language.

Research question 2, It seems reasonably accurate that all factors such as teacher's smile, positive words, giving small cards with positive affirmations, compliment activity, stamps, and group talks with other students were helpful enabling the students' self-confidence to increase. Notably, it was reasonable to say that the teacher's smile and the group talks with class peers boosted their self-confidence.

5.2 Limitations

It was difficult to judge how much the students could increase their self-confidence compared with the beginning of the course. Furthermore, the score of the English test at the beginning and end of the course could not be compared. Therefore, it was not clear how much they could improve their English skills by boosting their self-confidence.

5.3 Teaching implications

Finally, we would like to focus in this section on the teaching implications for the classroom.

First, the reason why this important area of research might be of interest in teaching English as a second language is discussed. If the students can be made more aware of the importance of their existence, they could have high self-confidence and become more positive in speaking in English. Also, they may improve their English

skills when mistakes are made. When students are afraid of making mistakes, they may not be brave enough to give their opinions. This in-turn can lead to their demotivation of learning English, thereby decreasing their English skills.

Furthermore, in Japan, we have a culture of "sassuru". This means even if we do not mention the words, we try to guess what other people want to say. On the other hand, in a foreign country, they may not have such a culture. Therefore, students could benefit from increasing their self-confidence. This potentially can give the students self-confidence to express their opinions more strongly.

5.4 Conclusion

From the results of this small research, the following points emerged: In the first place, it was found that students could increase their self-confidence through English language learning. It also became clear that a teacher's positive attitude towards students has a considerable influence on boosting their self-confidence. Eventually, it will lead to improving English skills. As a teacher, we believe we always have to be sensitive to learners' feelings, have to observe the students and provide them with the appropriate positive words.

Bibliography

- Brody, J. (2003) 'A linguistic anthropological perspective on language and culture in the second language curriculum'. In: Lange, D and R, Paige (ed.), Culture as a the core: Greenwich. Age Publishing Inc. 37-51
- Chen, R. (1993). Responding to compliments: A contrastive study of politeness strategies between American English and Chinese Speakers. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 20, 49-75.
- Chen, H.J. (1996). Cross-cultural comparison of English and Chinese metapragmatics in refusal. Indiana University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 408-860).
- Rubio, F (2007) SELF-ESTEEM AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Furnham, A. (1993) 'Communicating in foreign lands: The cause, consequences and cures of culture shock', *Language, Culture and Curriculum*: 6: 91-109.
- Holmes, J (1995) *Women, men and politeness*. Harlow: Longman
- Heyde, A. (1979). The relationship between self esteem and the oral production of second language. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of Michigan, USA.
- Krashen. S. D (1982) *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Loveday, L (1982) *The Sociolinguistics of Learning and Using a Non-Native Language*. Oxford: Pergamon Press Ltd
- MacIntyre, P.D., Dornyei, Z., Clement, E., & Noels, K (1998). Conceptualizing Willingness to communicate in a L2: A situational model of L2 confidence and affiliation. *Modern Language Journal*, 82, 545-62.
- Morain, G. (1986) 'Kinesics and cross-cultural understanding' In: Valdes, J (ed.), *Culture bound: Cambridge*. Cambridge University Press. 64-76
- Park, H., & Lee, A. R. (1995). L2 learners' anxiety, self-confidence and oral performance. *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology*, 5, 197-208.
- Prada Arango, H. (2015) 'Students' self-confidence as a way to improve English oral production in tenth grade students at recaurte school'
- Pride, J and J, Holms (1972) *Sociolinguistics*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd
- Scollon, S (2001) *Intercultural communication*. Oxford: Blackwell

Appendix 2

Please answer the questions below:-

Have you boosted your self-confidence because of your English lessons?

If so, please answer the questions below:-

(Teacher' is written as T.)

1. Did T's smile have a good influence in boosting your self-confidence, and did it help you to have a more positive attitude toward learning English in the class?

2. Did the positive words from T such as "Well done, You are doing so well, Wonderful, I'm proud of you" encourage you to study more and did it increase your self-confidence and help you to have a more positive attitude for learning English in the class?

3. Did the words written on the small cards boost your self-confidence and help you to have a more positive attitude toward learning English in the class?

4. Was the compliment activity good enough to increase your self-confidence and help you have a more positive attitude in the class?

5. Were the stamps pressed on the textbook or papers after, and while you answered the questions, the best influence on you to boost your self-confidence and help you have a more positive attitude in the class?

6. Did the discussion time within the group, or with the neighbours before giving answers in front of every one, give you confidence and help you have a more positive attitude in the class?

7. If there were any other things which had a good influence on you and increased your self-confidence, and motivated you to attend the class, please write it down.

(1) I strongly agree (2) I agree (3) I'm not sure (4) I disagree (5) I strongly disagree

Appendix 3

下記の質問に答えてください。

英語の授業を通して、自分自身、または英語への自信はつきましたか？

もし、少しでもつきましたら、以下の問いに答えてください。

1. 先生の実顔は、自信をつけるのに役に立ちましたか？そして、それは、英語の授業をもっと積極的に学ぶことの役に立ちましたか？
2. 先生からの前向きな言葉、「よくがんばったね。よく頑張ってるね。素晴らしい。流石だね。」などは、自信をつけるのに役立ちましたか？そして、それは英語の授業をもっと積極的に学ぶことの役に立ちましたか？
3. 授業の最後に配った小さなカードに書いてある言葉は、自信をつけるのに役立ちましたか。そして、それは、英語の授業をもっと積極的に学ぶことの役に立ちましたか？
4. クラスメイト同士で褒めあう、コンプリメントアクティビティは、自信をつけるのに役立ちましたか？そして、それは、英語の授業をもっと積極的に学ぶことの役に立ちましたか？
5. 問題を解いている間、もしくは、解いた後に、先生が押したハンコは、自信をつけるのに役立ちましたか？そして、それは、英語の授業をもっと積極的に学ぶことの役に立ちましたか？
6. 皆の前で発表する前に、隣同士、またはグループで質問の答えを話し合うことは、自信をつけるのに役立ちましたか？そして、それは、英語の授業をもっと積極的に学ぶことの役に立ちましたか？
- 7・他に自信がつくのに役立ったことは何ですか？

(1) 全くそう思わない (2) そう思わない (3) どちらでもない (4) そう思う (5) とてもそう思う