Reducing Language Anxiety Through the Medium of English in EFL Classes: Focusing on Instructor Intervention and Learner Response in Tertiary English Classes

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Abstract

The reform of English education in Japan aims to equip students with a "Global Outlook" by encouraging non-native (NN) English teachers to teach through the medium of English. The situation is a challenge for NN English teachers due to their lack of experience which may lead to language anxiety for the students and interrupt their comprehension processes. Noting this aspect, this research presents the findings of a questionnaire survey focusing on to what extent and how language anxiety was reduced by the medium of English for instruction among college EFL learners throughout a 15-class semester. The survey was administered twice: the first time in Week 6 (Survey 1) and the second time in Week 11 (Survey 2). The participants for this research were first-year Japanese students from three different faculties of a national university (*n*=68). After the application of the paired-samples t-tests on the pre and post surveys were carried out, the results did not show any significant difference in terms of the students' perceptions and understanding of the instructor's use of English for instructions. At the same time, some improvements were observed in the utilization of TETE (Teaching English Through English) in terms of the students being able to ask questions in a spontaneous manner and answer questions asked of them by the instructor.

Keywords: TETE, language anxiety, instructional methods, tertiary EFL learners, questionnaire survey

Introduction

Focusing on the aim of educating Japanese students to cultivate a "global mind", the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) made its first proposal to teach English classes through the medium of English in 2009 (Mochizuki, Aizawa, Kasahara, & Hayashi, 2016). The idea was to increase the English input and output experiences of Japanese students in the classroom. The goal was to enhance Japanese students' communicative competence in the delivery of their thoughts and ideas on the international stage (MEXT, 2014). This education reform has been drawing attention to methods such as Teaching English Through English (hereafter TETE), English-Medium Instruction (hereafter EMI) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (hereafter CLIL).

TETE, refers to "establishing English as the main language of communication between your students" (Willis, 1981, p. xiii) and using English as often as you can for instructions and socializing

with the students during the lesson. Willis (1981) emphasizes that students should be notified that making mistakes in English usage is allowed and they do not necessarily have to understand every word the teachers say. It is also pointed out that when correcting students' mistakes, it should be kept at a minimum and be conducted only "during the presentation and practice stages of the lesson" (ibid, p. xiii) when the main idea of the teaching is misunderstood. L1 use is also permitted, for there are times when L1 usage is effective for L2 understanding. However, the teacher should be careful that the students use L1 only when they are given permission to do so from their teacher.

Content and Language Integrated Learning is a methodology that utilizes the commonly used foreign language in context and combines the learning of both content and language. However, for most CLIL lessons, English is mainly used (Llinares & Morton, 2017). One of the characterizations of CLIL can be found in the works of Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010). They refer to the 4Cs: content, communication, cognition, and culture. Coyle (2018) emphasizes that eventually, the methodology is aimed at acquiring the learning process. Coyle further argue that language plays a crucial role in facilitating an improvement in the thinking processes of the learner.

EMI is currently spreading world-wide; and Brown and Bradford (2016) stated that there is no concrete or "universally agreed-upon" (p. 328) definition for EMI. EMI and CLIL are frequently categorized as similar approaches. However, according to Dearden (2014), in comparison to CLIL, EMI differs in having "no specific contextual origin" (p.4) and as the name of the method itself suggests, it is "quite clear that the language of education is English" (p.4). Also, it is said that EMI's "focus is on students' content mastery and no language aims are specified" (Brown & Bradford, 2016; see also Dearden & Macaro, 2016). Although the primary focus of EMI is content, Brown and Bradford (2016) point out that the significant use of L2 leads to enhanced English skills.

Foreign Language Anxiety (hereafter FLA), is a term devised by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986). It is considered to be an obstacle for language learners and it is also regarded as a natural phenomenon in the process of language learning. According to Horwitz (2001), the anxiety in foreign language learning, as distinct from problems found with personality traits in psychological studies. It is interpreted as a reaction to "a particular anxiety-provoking stimulus" (Horwitz, 2001, p.113). Other researchers in this field, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), defines FLA to "describe the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including, speaking, listening, and learning…. most closely associated with second language performance" (p. 284). Stemming from the learners' "immature second language communicative abilities" (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986, p.114), Horwitz et al. (1986) suggest that FLA is composed of the following three anxieties which relate to performance evaluation: (1) communication apprehension, (2) test anxiety, and (3) fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension is a type of anxiety which occurs from a shyness in learners that manifests itself in their display of a lack of confidence when communicating with people in pair or group work, and in public. This comes from experiencing difficulty in comprehending each other. Test anxiety results from learners' fear of failing, if they are not able to perform perfectly when they are evaluated through essential tests. Fear of negative

evaluation refers to "apprehension about other's evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively" (ibid, p.128). This occurs not only in tests, but also in interviews and speaking in language classes. They emphasize that these fears occur from "the uniqueness of the language learning process" (ibid, p.128). Young (1991) refers to other external factors of the "stimulus" which centers in the instructor's behavior and choice of classroom procedure: how errors are corrected, having students speak in front of the class. Another cause of FLA comes when students compare themselves with other learners, concentrating far too much on achieving a native-like accent (Young, 1991). Other causes of FLA include: misunderstanding the cultural background of the target language culture (Arnold, 1999), and interaction between instructor and student (Horwitz et al., 1986), and being confused with language in terms of comprehension and pronunciation (Oxford, 1999). The instructor-learner interaction which refers to the role of instructors is also recognized as the "stimulus" for FLA (Young, 1991). Although instructors can be too careful in their correction of their students' errors in case it leads to an increase in FLA, it should be noted that a too friendly approach is of great concern by many instructors (Young, 1991).

As for tips on teachers' instruction for L2 learners, Oxford (1999) suggests that instructors assure students that their anxiety will diminish in time, create a relaxed classroom atmosphere for them, have learners become confident by being successful in the L2 classroom, and give them a positive feedback which is meaningful and useful. Oxford also suggested other strategies that groom learners in order to enable them to speak out in class without worrying about perfection and encourage them to have positive attitudes towards learning. Devos (2016) emphasizes on the idea of promoting cooperative learning environment in order to make the language classes student-centered. The reduction of teachers' role and becoming the facilitator of the class, is also an important factor to help debilitate students' anxiety (see also Horwitz et al., 1986). Moreover, in cooperative learning, students are given the chances to practice language so to acquire declarative and procedural knowledge. As instructors play an important role in regulating L2 learners' language practices, it is crucial for them to understand the kind of anxiety tertiary-level learners will face and what instructors can do to be creative in the process of facilitating their learners' L2 input and output for effective learning.

With the previous studies in mind, this research will focus on FLA conducted under the TETE methodology to explore the effects of FLA among the EFL students in tertiary education.

Research Purpose and Questions

To date, classes mediated in English are still at the initial stage in Japan and research on anxiety reduction in tertiary-level English classes in Japan is scarce. Anxiety becomes an obstacle when learning a foreign language, especially with listening and speaking skills (Horwitz, Horowitz, & Cope, 1986). With the aim of investigating this phenomenon in mind, this research seeks to examine learners' response to TETE classes in tertiary EFL contexts. As such, it will seek to better understand how we can encourage our learners to fully participate in a TETE environment. The need for this kind of research has, in part come about because compared with other skills, Kudo, Harada, Eguchi, Moriya,

& Suzuki (2017) point out that L2 learners especially lack confidence in their speaking skills, mostly due to "limited speaking ability" (p.17). To help us with the aims of this investigation, the following three research questions (hereafter RQs) were prepared.

RQ1 To what extent will tertiary EFL learners be able to reduce language anxiety by listening to English instructions for the duration of a class?

RQ2 To what extent will tertiary EFL learners be able to reduce language anxiety by asking questions to the instructor for further understanding?

RQ3 To what extent will tertiary EFL learners be able to reduce language anxiety by answering the instructor's questions in English?

Method

Participants and Materials Used in Classes

The participants of the study were first-year advanced level Japanese university students studying at a national university (n=89, male=47, female=42) in the second semester of the 2016 academic year. Eventually, the participants of this research were narrowed down to 68, to those who had answered the two surveys, so to observe the shift of their anxiety. They belonged to three different faculties, Science (n=34); Law (n= 26); Agriculture (n=29). They were divided in accordance with their results from the Center Test (the national university entrance examination of Japan). Their learning materials for each English course were chosen with the agreement of the two instructors responsible for the spring and fall semesters. Although the three courses were all advanced-levels, the materials used in each course differed.

The Basic Class Procedures for Each Unit

The classes (i.e., 15-class periods in total) conducted for each course were provided according to the following tasks based on the seven procedures below.

Basic Instructional Approaches
 1) Group discussion on a topic related to the unit
 2) Notetaking for the summarization of a unit read aloud by the instructor (Notetaking practice 1)
 3) Reading aloud and calculating word per minute (WPM)
 4) Comprehension check conducted by Q&A, or the creation of a summarization chart
 5) Q&A created by the instructor and /or questions generated from the textbook
 6) Notetaking for the summarization of a unit read aloud by the instructor (Notetaking practice 2)
 7) Watching DVD materials supplied with the textbook. Dictation and Q&A conducted afterwards

In addition, the instructional methods to reduce the student's anxiety, before and after Survey 1, are shown in Table 1. Prior to Survey 2, adjustments were made for the instructional methods based on the participants' comments in Survey 1 and the instructor's observation.

Table 1

Instructional Methods Conducted by the Instructor to Reduce the Students' Anxiety

Instructional methods conducted before Survey 1
・Students (Ss) summarize each paragraph of a reading text in Japanese for preparation
・Use of visual material (power point, pictures)
・Focus on synonyms then paraphrase the text
・Use of facial expressions, body language, gestures and pointing
・Use English as much as possible (explaining content, instruction for activities)
Further instructions and methods conducted before Survey 2
(a) Have Ss prepare for the group discussion prior to the class
(b) Add visual materials (use of animation function and charts)
(c) Use L1 (code-switch) more frequently in vocabulary and phrase level
(d) Give instructions in Japanese on grading-relevant assignments
(e) Have Ss think more about synonyms and paraphrasing
(f) Write key words and new vocabulary on the black board as much as possible.
(g) Explain to Ss how TETE and activities conducted in English can help them

The additional instructional methods conducted after the first survey, (a), (c), (d), (f), and (g) as referred in Table 1, were attempted to reduce anxiety. As for (a), topics were given in advance so that the students have a chance to think deeply about a given topic or do research on the topic and look up new vocabulary and English expressions in order to be prepared to express their opinions. In response to the participants' requests, (c) and (d) were conducted to facilitate a smoother understanding of the classes. As for (c), code-switching was conducted paying close attention to the participants' expressions and responses. However, the instructor was careful not to use too much L1 or Japanese, so that the flow of the English instructions was not interrupted. As mentioned in (d), many requests arose from the participants that the instructor use Japanese for assignment instructions since they were worried about their grades. Instructions (f) and (g) was decided under the instructor's judgment. (f) was done more frequently in the hope that it will make participants pick up the words which were difficult to catch and assist a smoother understanding of the classes. The instructor felt that (g) was especially important to clarify what the difficulties they may be experiencing in class. The aim was to motivate the students acknowledge the necessity of English use.

Instrumentation and Analysis

Utilizing the three RQs, a questionnaire survey (see Appendix) relevant to their English classes in university was prepared. The original questionnaire survey was comprised of 26 items.   However,

regarding to this research, three items were focused on for the previously presented RQs. Students were asked to choose one answer from the 6-point Likert scale provided respectively for each question. They were also asked to write specific reasons if they chose measurements 1, 2, or 3 in their answer (negative answers).

The survey was administered twice: the first time in Week 6 (Survey 1) and the second time in Week 11 (Survey 2). A quantitative analysis of the results was undertaken using SPSS ver.22.

Results

For RQs 1, 2, 3, paired-samples t-tests were conducted to compare the students' perception of anxiety in Survey 1 and Survey 2 (See Table 2).

Table 2

Paired-Samples t-tests for RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3 (N=68)

	Survey 1	Survey 2				
	M (S.D.)	*M (S.D.)*	*t*	*df*	*Sig. (2-tailed)*	
RQ1	3.66 (1.18)	3.68 (1.29)	.11	67	.916	n.s.
RQ2	2.63 (1.13)	2.91 (0.98)	2.401	67	.019	
RQ3	2.93 (1.04)	3.15 (1.06)	2.071	67	.042	

Note. RQs 1,2,3 are based on the questionnaire survey (Appendix A).

In RQ1, the perception of the students when the instructor spoke only in English for all classes showed no significant difference as seen from Survey 1 (M = 3.66, SD = 1.18) and Survey 2 (M = 3.68, SD = 1.29) [t (67) = 0.106, p = 0.916]. Taken from the open-ended comments, some students mentioned that they became worried when they could not understand instructions and explanations given in English and therefore, Japanese instructions were necessary. Interestingly, in Survey 1, many students requested that Japanese instructions be given occasionally as they felt it would help them understand the classes better and confirm this understanding. However, in Survey 2, more concerns emerged in terms of not understanding the instruction for assignments related to course grading. In RQ2, perceptional differences between Survey 1 (M = 2.63, SD = 1.13) and Survey 2 (M = 2.91, SD = 0.98) [t (67) = 2.401, p = 0.019] were examined. The results showed a significant difference between Survey 1 and Survey 2 t-tests. The mean scores drawn from the RQ2 results were the lowest among the three research questions, with the largest difference being +0.28; this was indicative of a slight improvement in class participation with the teacher. Although, a small reduction in anxiety has been seen, the results have indicated that the students continued to face difficulty in expressing their opinion and spontaneously ask questions to the instructor. A comparison of the responses to RQ3, highlighted perceptional differences in terms of answering the instructor's questions in English in Survey 1 and Survey 2. These differences were gleaned from the mean scores obtained from the analysis of the significant differences in the results of Survey 1 (M = 2.93, SD =1.041) and Survey 2

($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.06$) [t (67) = 2.071, $p = 0.042$]. However, if we compare the results between RQ2 and RQ3, it can be inferred that the students are more comfortable with "drill" type questions from the instructor than they are in volunteering their own opinions.

Discussion and Limitations

It is suggested that the students acknowledge the necessity of the usage of English for instructions in EFL classes, as can be implied from a sample of the positive comments listed below. There were a few comments which shared the idea that English classes should be taught through the medium of English to some extent; more than half and no less than a quarter of the class was a typical response. Otherwise, they would not recognize the class as a tertiary-level English class. Some of the salient comments elicited from the two Surveys are summarized in the following Tables (Table 3, 4).

Table 3

Comments on All English Classes From Survey 1

Survey 1: Positive comments for all English classes
・It will help me improve my English ability.
・English classes are the only time when I can use my English skills.
・If only a quarter of the whole class period was conducted in English, it is not an English class. It's good to have English instructions because it's good training for my listening skill.
・If only Japanese is used, it is just like high school English classes.
・I am against the idea of using less English. I don't want to ruin the chance to practice English in class.
・I prefer classes taught in English because I can listen to the instructor's English and learn from it.
Survey 1: Negative comments for all English classes
・Students are just listening without comprehension.
・It would be helpful if Japanese was spoken occasionally to summarize the content.
・It's difficult to catch the content and keep up with the class. However, I think about half of the class should be conducted in English or it is not an English class.
・Though I can catch the words, I am not sure if I have understood it correctly. I want to make sure if my understanding is correct using Japanese.
・I could only catch and comprehend certain words. Sentences are so difficult to understand.
・I don't know what to do, if I cannot follow the instructions spoken in English.

Note. The comments are translated from Japanese to English by the author.

Table 4

Comments on All English Classes From Survey 2

Survey 2: Positive comments for all English classes
・I want to enhance my skills as much as I can in English classes.
・English classes are the only given opportunity in which I can use my English skills.
・If only Japanese is used, it is just like high school English classes.
・I am against the idea of using less English. I don't want to ruin the chance of practicing it in class.
・I prefer English classes to be conducted in English as much as possible.
Survey 2: Negative comments for all-English classes
・I could not understand everything.
・Only the students who are good at English will succeed in class, and I don't want to miss out on important information relating to course grading.
・It would be better if some Japanese were used. If not, I would have a hard time.
・I don't want to misunderstand (the instructions).
・I prefer Japanese instruction for assignments related to course grading.
・If all of the classes were conducted in English, I wouldn't be able to join the class. So, it would be helpful for me if more simple expressions were used in every class period.

Note. The comments are translated from Japanese to English by the author.

Dedicated students felt that it will help them improve their listening skill. On the other hand, many students preferred partial Japanese instruction to be used in the class, for they were uncertain of their comprehension of instructions and explanations which triggered anxiety. Therefore, in TETE classes it may be effective for instructors to use L1 occasionally to check students' understanding. Also, allotting time to have students engage in self-monitoring and self-reflective activities could be effective as well. In that case, instructors should be careful about how much L1 should be used depending on the course progress and course level. These instructional treatments are crucial for the implementation of effective TETE classes.

As for encouraging spontaneous questions and opinions, the results from the analysis of RQ2 may have reflected a cultural context of traditional teacher-student behavior in Japan where asking questions to the instructor is regarded as rude. Another reason for this may be related to "peer pressure" (Horwitz et al, 1986; see also Kudo et al, 2017; Oxford, 1999). In one of the comments, the students answered that it is difficult to come up with an appropriate expression and they become anxious about whether or not they are understood by their classmates and teachers. Therefore, to encourage spontaneous questions and opinions, it should be noted that instructors must create a relaxed, "safe" atmosphere in which students can feel comfortable in freely expressing their ideas and questions. In this way, college EFL learners attending the class can make mistakes knowing that they can learn something from them. In a similar way, instructors showing a positive attitude towards the incorrect

answers and ideas of their students are absolutely necessary in an English- mediated learning environment. In addition, helping them acknowledge the anxiety generated in class and giving them practical advice to overcome it may help to ease their anxiety.

As for the questionnaire survey, it should be pointed out that the conducted period of study should be taken into consideration when evaluating the results. If Survey 2 had been conducted on the 15th class period (Week 15), instead of the 11th (Week 11), more tangible numerical differences might have emerged. Furthermore, new questions targeting their satisfaction of TETE should have been included in Survey 2. For the purposes of collecting more precise data, the evaluation of learners' learning outcome in terms of improving the four language skills should be further investigated.

Conclusion

This study explored the feasibility of reducing college EFL learners' anxiety through the TETE methodology. Three aspects of the language classroom were examined: listening, asking questions, and answering questions through in-class activities throughout a one-semester period of 15 weeks. In this research setting, it was found that a slight reduction of anxiety emerged in terms of asking questions of the instructor and responding to the instructor's questions. Even so, the students faced great difficulty in spontaneous output. This is strongly related to the classroom environment including the instructor's in-class instructions using the English language. Continuous efforts in this field of research are necessary to elicit significant differences using the same instrumentation. In addition, despite the class under study being a TETE classroom, it was found that L1 instruction was also necessary to a certain extent in order to decrease the students' anxiety. It is important for instructors to redesign their teaching methodologies, with their students' experience of TETE and English level in mind. These recommendations are indispensable in creating a student-centered effective EFL class.

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Appendix: Sample of Questionnaire Survey (An abridged version)

Note. The following survey questionnaire is an abridged version of the original, focused on the research questions for this research. Originally, this question survey is administered in Japanese.

以下の質問に対して、あてはまる番号をそれぞれの尺度から選んで下さい。

(Choose the appropriate measurement for each following questions.)

［6］

   3. 教員からの英語の質問に英語で答える。　　　　　　1----2----3----4----5----6

    (Answering the instructor's question in English.)

4. 理解できないことについて、英語で教員に質問する。　　1----2----3----4----5----6
　　(Asking questions to the instructor for further understanding.)

[6] 3,4　とても苦手だ　　=1　　　　　　やや得意だ　　=4
　　(experiencing great difficulty)　　　(having some confidence)
　　苦手だ　　　　　　=2　　　　　　得意だ　　　=5
　　(experiencing difficulty)　　　　　(having confidence)
　　やや苦手だ　　　=3　　　　　　とても得意だ　=6
　　(experiencing a little difficulty)　　(have a lot of confidence)

[7]
(1) 現在（大学入学後）、自分にとって英語学習は ――　　1----2----3----4----5----6
　　(How do you feel about your English studies in university?)
(2) ※(1)の答えとして 1,2,3 を選んだ方のみお答えください。
　　(If you have chosen 1, 2, or 3, for (1), please answer the following question.)

　大学の英語授業で英語を使う場合、あなたが一番苦手に感じている活動は何ですか。その理由もお願いします。（1、2 行で簡潔に）
　(What kind of activities do you find the most difficult in using English in your English classes at
　　university? Write the reason for your answer within 1 or 2 lines.)

苦手に感じている活動 (Activities you find difficult) :

理由(Reason) :

[8]
10. 教員が毎回の授業を全て英語で話す。　　　　　　1----2----3----4----5----6
　　(The instructor speaks only in English for the whole course.)

[8] 10. とても違和感を持っている　　=1　　　やや好感を持っている　　　=4
　　(feel very uncomfortable)　　　　　　(have a rather good impression)
　　違和感を持っている　　　=2　　好感を持っている　　　　=5
　　(feel uncomfortable)　　　　　　(have a good impression)
　　やや違和感を持っている　=3　　とても好感を持っている　=6
　　(feel rather uncomfortable)　　　(have a very good impression)

[8] 10. の答えとして 1,2,3 を選んだ方のみお答えください。

  (If you have chosen 1, 2, or 3, for [8] 10., please answer the following question.)

大学の授業で、日本人教員が英語を使う場合、あなたが一番違和感を持っていることを教えて下さい。その理由もお願いします。　（1、2 行で簡潔に）

(What makes you feel the most uncomfortable when a Japanese instructor teaches English courses in English at university? Write the reason for your answer within 1 or 2 lines.)

違和感を持っていること(Situations that make you feel uncomfortable)：
理由 (Reason)：