

**Blended learning and the motivation to learn the English language:
A mixed methods study based on first-year university students in
Japan**

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degree of Doctorate of Education.

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the effectiveness of implementing a blended learning (BL) initiative among a class of first-year university students in a mandatory English class in Japan. The research explored how the BL environment affected student interest, how this interest impacted the motivation of the participants, the social and cultural factors at play in this context and the activities participants found most interesting and why. The BL activities took place over a five-week period where participants engaged in solo and pair activities in both a traditional classroom setting and in an online environment. Using a BL approach to combine in-class and online activities was new to many of the participants and literature suggested that the combination of activities and formats as well as a rich social environment would lead to an increase in interest in, and a more positive stance toward, English study. The goals of the research were to assess the effectiveness of the BL environment in enhancing student interest, to improve motivation toward English study, to investigate social and cultural factors affecting English as a Foreign Language (EFL) study as well as to determine which activities participants found interesting and why.

Data was gathered through paper entrance and exit surveys as well as an online follow-up survey. The paper surveys included the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Survey (FLCAS) in a before-and-after assessment to specifically target quantitative changes in anxiety and motivation as a result of the BL programme. The mixed methods approach used gathered further quantitative data in the form of login dates, times and locations as well as the participants' satisfaction with the activities in order to explore their stance toward the BL environment.

Results indicate that most participants enjoyed the range of activities and content as well as the social aspect of the in-class component. Participants did engage in the online activities, although this generally occurred immediately following the scheduled class with friends and peers still physically present. Some participants who disliked English at the beginning of the study did not change their stance. However, at the end of the study most participants indicated a more positive stance toward English, more interest and more positive motivation toward English language study.

This dissertation explains the rationale of the study with an in depth examination of the cultural, education and social factors at play in Japan and between the Japanese participants and their non-Japanese instructor. It concludes with a discussion of the findings as well as acknowledgment of the dissertation's limitations and recommendations for further research.

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Finally, to my family who endured the time and inconvenience, I could not have done it without you - M, M, N, G & P & L. Thank you for not giving up. Sorry it took so long, Pop.

Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for any other award or credit at this or any institution of higher education. To the best of my knowledge, the thesis is wholly original and all material or writing published or written by others and contained herein has been duly referenced and credited.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'J. Chap', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
Tables and figures	9
Abbreviation list	10
Glossary	11
Chapter 1: Introduction	12
1.1 Background	12
1.2 Impetus for the study	12
1.3 English as a symbol of status in Japan	14
1.4 The current state of English, globalisation and education in Japan	16
1.5 Challenges facing higher education in Japan	18
1.6 Foreign staff and working conditions in HE in Japan	20
1.7 Challenges facing instructors in the EFL classroom	21
1.8 Cultural challenges for foreign teachers	22
1.9 Challenges facing students in the EFL classroom	23
1.10 Understanding the difference between ESL and EFL	25
1.11 Thesis Structure	28
Chapter 2: Literature Review	29
2.1 Introduction	29
2.1.1 The approach used to review the literature	29
2.2 Blended Learning	30
2.2.1 Defining blended learning	30
2.2.2 Advantages and disadvantages of BL in EFL	31
2.2.3 BL, EFL and Japan	36
2.3 Motivation	39
2.3.1 What is motivation?	39
2.3.2 Motivation and anxiety	41
2.3.3 Motivation, anxiety and EFL in Japan	43
2.3.4 Language study, anxiety and gender in Japan	44
2.3.5 Interest and motivation	46
2.3.6 Interest in task, course and domain	48
2.3.7 Defining motivation for this study	49
2.3.8 Motivation, interest, like and anxiety in this thesis	51
2.4 Learning theory: Connectivism, social constructivism and sociocultural theory	52
2.4.1 Identifying an appropriate theoretical framework	52
2.4.2 Connectivism	52
2.4.3 Communities of Practice	53
2.4.4 Social Constructivism	55
2.4.5 Sociocultural theory	56
2.4.6 The role of learning theories	59
2.5 Identifying gaps in the literature	60
Chapter 3: Methodology	62
3.1 Introduction	62
3.2 Research aim	62
3.3 Research Questions	63
3.4 Methodology selection	63
3.4.1 Mixed Methods	65
3.4.2 Case Study	67

3.4.3 Data trustworthiness, validity and reliability	69
3.4.4 Data integrity	70
3.5 Design Process	73
3.5.1 Positionality, implications of acting as both practitioner and researcher	73
3.5.2 Reflexivity	77
3.5.3 Ethical considerations	78
3.5.4 A model for the study	79
3.6 The participants	81
3.7 The pilot study	81
3.8 Data Collection	82
3.8.1 Survey design	82
3.8.2 Survey issues	85
3.8.3 Administering the consent forms, research outline and surveys	86
3.8.4 The orientation session	87
3.9 Blended Learning Intervention	88
3.9.1 The BL environment	88
3.9.2 The BL activities	88
3.10 Summary	89
Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings	91
4.1 Introduction	91
4.2 Population and sample	91
4.3 Presentation of Quantitative Data	92
4.3.1 Reliability tests based on the FLCASD main survey and subscales	92
4.3.2 Factor Analysis of the FLCASD (entrance and exit)	93
4.4 Changes in FLCASD and comparison to the Yashima study's findings	95
4.4.1 Main survey – 33 questions	95
4.4.2 Subscales – 20 questions	95
4.4.3 Comparison of subscale results by gender	97
4.4.4 FLCASD: five biggest changes between entrance and exit surveys	99
4.5 Other quantitative findings	100
4.5.1 Respondents' stance toward English	100
4.5.2 Satisfaction with the BL environment	102
4.5.3 Instructor feedback	102
4.5.4 Online login data	103
4.5.5 Findings regarding the participants perceptions of the consent forms	104
4.6 Presentation of qualitative findings	105
4.6.1 Introduction	105
4.6.2 Coding of survey comments	105
4.6.3 Analysis of survey comments and reflective log book entries	108
Increased skills	109
Participant enjoyment and interest	109
Challenges related to IT proficiency	113
4.7 Additional findings (quantitative and qualitative combined phenomena)	114
4.7.1 Games received the highest satisfaction score but the lowest "hits"	114
4.7.2 Participants did not engage asynchronously as anticipated	115
4.7.3 Contact with instructor	116
4.8 Summary	117
4.9 Themes for discussion	118
Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings	120
5.1 Introduction	120

5.2 Factors affecting ‘how hard’	120
5.3 Investigating the three stand-alone phenomena	122
5.3.1 Games received the highest satisfaction score but lowest “hits”	122
5.3.2 Participants did not engage asynchronously.	124
5.3.3 Contact with the instructor was positive but online engagement was low	125
5.4 What constitutes low IT proficiency?	126
5.5 The applicability of self-determination theory (SDT) in this context	131
5.6 Better models to explain the phenomena?	134
5.6.1 Revisiting Gardner’s (2007) theory of classroom motivation	134
5.6.2 Introducing Communities of Inquiry (COIs).	136
5.7 The importance of the instructor	140
5.8 The applicability and overlap of the theoretical frameworks	141
5.9 Answering the research questions	142
5.10 Implications for future research	145
5.11 Summary	146
Chapter 6: Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations	148
6.1 Conclusions	148
6.2 Limitations of this study	150
6.3 Recommendations	152
6.3.1 Improvements to the BL model	152
6.3.2 Organisational recommendations	156
Ensure the hiring of excellent, enthusiastic teachers	156
6.3.3 Recommendations for practice	158
Teachers should be prepared to speak Japanese in class	158
Foreign instructors should receive Japanese language and cultural sensitivity training	159
Instructors must be prepared to do what is necessary to motivate their students	161
6.4 Final comments	162
References	164

Appendices

Appendix 1: Sample English teaching job in Japan	180
Appendix 2: Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) and Common European Framework (CEFR) comparison	183
Appendix 3: Ethics approval local institution	184
Appendix 4: VPREC Approval (University of Liverpool)	185
Appendix 5: Personal Information Sheet (PIS)	186
Appendix 6: Participant Consent Form	187
Appendix 7: Further details regarding the pilot study	188
Appendix 8: Entrance Survey	190
Appendix 9: Exit Survey	193
Appendix 10: Online follow up survey	194
Appendix 11: The website (main and login pages)	196
Appendix 12: Weekly Blended Learning Activities	197
Appendix 13: Survey coding themes	202
Appendix 14: Sample page from the researcher log book	203

Tables

Table 1.2 ESL versus EFL study (Krieger, 2005)	27
Table 2.4 Stages of ZPD development and language acquisition	58
Table 3.3 Demographic comparison: Yashima et al. (2009) and this study	80
Table 3.4 Survey response rates and gender breakdown	85
Table 4.1 Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) calculated using SPSS version 25	92
Table 4.2 Entrance survey factor analysis	93
Table 4.3 Exit survey factor analysis	94
Table 4.5 FLCASD subscale results for comparison	96
Table 4.9 FLCASD main survey – largest changes from entrance to exit survey	99
Table 4.10 Tracking stance of participants who disliked English	101
Table 4.12: Participant responses to consent forms (follow-up online survey)	105
Table 4.14 Exit survey quantitative analysis	107
Table 4.16 Satisfaction scores (exit survey)	117
Table 4.17 Overarching themes and subthemes affecting how hard	119
Table 5.1 Satisfaction scores from the exit survey	125

Figures

Figure 1.1 Kachru's Three Circles of English	26
Figure 2.1 Motivation continuum	40
Figure 2.2 Potential benefits of implementing BL	47
Figure 2.3 The motivation engine for this study	50
Figure 3.1 Research, format, weighting and timing	65
Figure 3.2 Worldview and research design	74
Figure 3.5 BL activities (flow and timing)	89
Figure 4.4 Motivation continuum	96
Figure 4.6 FLCASD subscale results by gender (entrance survey)	98
Figure 4.7 FLCASD subscale results by gender (exit survey)	98
Figure 4.8 FLCAS results by gender	99
Figure 4.11 Online hits by activity by week (from website data)	103
Figure 4.13 Coding cycles	106
Figure 4.15 Website activity within one hour of the scheduled class (by week)	115
Figure 5.2 FLCASD subscales (entrance/exit surveys superimposed)	132
Figure 5.3 Self-determination continuum	132
Figure 5.4 Communities of Inquiry	137

Abbreviations

ALT - Assistant language teacher
CEFR - Common European Framework
CJU - Central Japan University (alias)
CMC - Computer mediated communication
COIs - Communities of inquiry
COPs - Communities of practice
CP - Cognitive presence (COIs)
FL - Foreign Language
FLCAS - Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Survey
HEI/HEIs -Higher Education institution(s)
HR - Human resources
IP address - Internet Protocol address - a unique identifying number assigned to each computer on a network.
IT - Information technology
LMS - Learning Management System (Moodle)
MMARS - Mixed Methods Article Reporting Standards
MS Word, MS Excel - Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel
PC - personal computer
SP - social presence (COIs)
SS - student-student interaction
TOEIC - Test of English for International Communication
TP - teacher presence (COIs)
TS - teacher-student interaction
USB - universal serial bus
WIFI - wireless internet
ZPD - Zone of Proximal Development
ZPTD - Zone of Proximal Teacher Development

Glossary

Japanese words used in this dissertation

eikaiwa: private, for-profit English language study schools

hensachi: university rankings, published nationally

kanji: Japanese writing style using pictographs

kata: the Japanese way of doing things

kohai - junior ranked people (see *sempai*)

MEXT - Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

sempai - older people given seniority and respect due primarily to age

yakudoku - traditional teaching style in Japan - direct translation and grammar study

Key concepts

Communities of Inquiry (COIs)

- a philosophy specifically related to online learning which posits that social presence (SP), cognitive presence (CP) and teacher presence (TP), when successfully supported can create a positive online learning environment

Communities of Practice (COPs)

- groups of people, usually practitioners, who voluntarily form communities to share knowledge and learning in a particular domain

Connectivism

- a learning theory which posits that where to find knowledge is perhaps more important than knowing that knowledge, particularly since the life span of much of the knowledge in the modern world is becoming shorter and shorter.

Social constructivism

- a learning theory which believes that knowledge is largely constructed through social interaction with others

Socio-cultural theory (SCT)

- a learning theory which takes into consideration social and cultural factors in learning

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

The researcher spent more than 20 years teaching English in Japan. As a new teacher, he started in for-profit *eikaiwa*, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), an industry where students pay fees to study at private schools. He then moved to the corporate world of EFL where businesses contract English programmes. In some cases, elite employees were nominated by management (such as Toyota Motors), while in other cases students were sometimes required to attend English classes to improve their skills. He then moved into Higher Education (HE), teaching as many as 16 classes per week, mostly mandatory, beginner English classes. Throughout his career, he has experienced a range of interest and motivation levels among his students, from quite high levels among students who had elected to study, to most recently, the lowest levels of motivation among mandatory first-year English classes at universities. The goal for this study has been to investigate, in an effort to better understand, the reasons behind the lack of interest and motivation among students in this context and to investigate if techniques, particularly the implementation of technology, can enhance interest and motivation. To this end, this thesis undertakes to examine the effects of employing a Blended Learning (BL) programme to better motivate and interest a group of first-year Japanese university students in a mandatory English class.

1.2 Impetus for the study

The impetus for this study comes as a result of three driving factors. The main reason relates to the realities of EFL teaching at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Japan. Having taught in HE for more than 10 years, the researcher regularly experienced a very heavy teaching load of uninterested students in mandatory English classes, mostly non-English majors. These classes are often lamented among colleagues in HE and most

instructors consider them very difficult work, consisting of large classes of low-level students, often first-year students recently having completed high stakes entrance exam testing and who are exhausted, reluctant and/or shy to participate. It is largely the stress of these difficult classes for himself and for colleagues which led him to want to understand more deeply why these students were consistently uninterested and appeared to have little or no motivation to study English.

Secondly, a review of the literature starting with national governmental guidelines and narrowing to institutional goals reflected a consistent ambition to participate in globalisation, meaning a more robust interaction with the world through improved proficiency in English as the global lingua franca. Results from this study may help in providing data to assist in decision making at the institutional level about modern techniques to improve interest among first-year university students studying English. Finally, the researcher's experimentation with implementing technology in the classroom previously had positive results in a similar context. After completing an integrated computers and English course, he noticed more student interest when rich online content, easily personalized to the interests of students, was introduced into the class. This thesis offered an opportunity to investigate whether integrating a BL environment was indeed more interesting for students and what challenges would need to be addressed in implementing BL in more of his classes.

This dissertation represents an effort to improve as a practitioner by more effectively engaging students, thereby improving his own effectiveness and enhancing his own enjoyment of teaching, to align with institutional and governmental goals for university graduates to acquire improved English proficiency; and to assess the effectiveness of implementing technology in the EFL classroom.

1.3 English as a symbol of status in Japan

The ability to communicate in English is a status symbol in Japan. Japanese companies use English to signify a global presence and image. For instance, the Japanese car manufacturer Toyota's global website is presented in English to enhance their image and "index the brand's global presence and credibility" (Kelly-Holmes, 2014, p. 145). Some Japanese companies reveal the importance they place on English language skills by making the latter their official language for their businesses. Following less traditional companies such as Rakuten (an online retailer) and Fast Retailing (a Japanese clothing manufacturer), the tyre manufacturer Bridgestone, a well-known and traditional Japanese company, has established minimum English language requirements for new employees while also directing that English will now be used as their language for everyday business (Mukai, 2013).

English ability is valued in life as well as in work in Japan. Japanese people who communicate well in English are considered elite and seen as worldly and international; "It's cool to study English" (Kubota, 2015, p. 66). Over the course of a year, Kubota (2015) interviewed 30 Japanese adults and, alongside ethnographic observations, found that English study for work purposes is supported by many companies. Employers will subsidise lessons, and workers study for career-related benefits, research opportunities and other "economic capital" (p. 62), particularly in companies with aspirations of doing business internationally and who wish to partake in the benefits of globalisation. In other words, communicating in English is a demonstrably important skill which can enhance social and economic ranking in Japanese society.

In Japan, social capital is afforded to those of Western appearance who enjoy benefits of membership of a recognised group (Schwartz, 2012). Significantly, Bourdieu (1986) has acknowledged that social capital – including cultural capital such as the positive and envied cultural traits of a particular group – can result in cases where members of a recognizable

group are “sought after” (p. 248). Meanwhile, Rivers and Ross (2013) have found in a study of 80 Japanese non-English major freshman students in compulsory EFL classes that “Japanese students in the current context have a strong preference for white male teachers aged 30 to 35, originating from the United States, possessing conversational Japanese abilities, and having 5 to 10 years of teaching experience” (p. 334). The authors of the study showed cards of different instructors with their pictures and credentials to four classes of EFL students. Participants were asked to rank, using a Likert scale, the strength of their preference for each candidate as a potential English instructor. The research was conducted using only quantitative data and would have benefited from follow-up interviews, ideally conducted in Japanese by Japanese researchers. Nevertheless, the results support findings that there is often a certain social status afforded Western-looking foreigners, particularly males, in Japan.

A report by Appleby (2013) has examined social power and status resulting from being an identified white, Caucasian male in Japan, specifically in the language teaching industry where “Western men are perceived to embody an idealised, romanticised version of the West ... and to symbolise an enlightened and liberated alternative to traditional gender hierarchies” (p. 127). The author interviewed eleven male Caucasian volunteers with a variety of work and life experience in Japan, although most had experience of the for-profit *eikaiwa* private English language school industry as opposed to HE. There is no explanation of the method used to assess the volume of qualitative data generated, although there appears to have been several rounds of coding and thematic analysis and the author seems to have struggled to remain neutral with respect to the appropriateness of the behaviour of some of her subjects, suggesting a sound research approach. However, the overall findings align with the experiences of this researcher who has more than 20 years experience living and working in Japan, namely that in some cases Caucasian males may benefit from certain amounts of goodwill, particularly on the part of some female Japanese students, simply by being a white

Caucasian male. Although Appleby's (2013) research on social capital is limited to *eikaiwa*, it is important to recognise the potential of male foreign instructors to have a form of social capital in EFL classes and how this can shape the relationship between students and teachers.

In contrast, it may be that not all Japanese have a positive impression of Western-looking instructors. There remain many instances of xenophobia in Japan. In the lead up to the 2019 Rugby World Cup and the 2020 Olympic Summer Games, a Japanese Ministry of Justice questionnaire investigating racism revealed instances of racism and xenophobia related to pay equity, hiring policies and discriminatory remarks in the workplace as well as no-foreigners-allowed policies at real estate agencies and public bath houses (Hurst, 2017). So while foreigner-looking instructors may enjoy some inherent benefit simply by appearing Caucasian, there are also cases of negative impressions toward foreigners in evidence in modern Japan. In terms of any positive or negative effect based on race or country of origin, the effect, if any, may balance out and will not be taken into consideration in the analysis of the results.

1.4 The current state of English, globalisation and education in Japan

'Globalisation', a term used interchangeably with 'internationalisation' in Japan, has resulted in the increased mobility of people, programmes and providers around the world. Governments and higher education institutions (HEIs) are eager to position themselves in order to take advantage of what has become "a substantial and worldwide business of international student recruitment" (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016, p. 9). This new interconnectedness has resulted in the worldwide acceptance of the importance of English as the lingua franca (Altbach, 2001), not just for scholarship and science, but also for attracting more foreign students to come to Japan to study. This global focus on all HEIs internationally has led to comparisons and rankings of HEIs around the world as "*the* international measure of quality" (Hazelkorn, 2015, p. x), in the high-stakes and competitive global fight to attract

lucrative international students. Japanese HEIs need to be better positioned in the world education market in order to compete for their share.

Globalisation efforts are well underway in Japan. In 2008, the Ministry of Education in Japan (MEXT) set itself the goal of “improving international competitiveness” (MEXT, 2008, p. 10), mandating a nationwide improvement in English proficiency. In 2013, MEXT policy stated that elementary to high school levels needed to “enhance English education substantially ... Timed with the 2020 Tokyo Olympics” (MEXT, 2013, pp. 1-2) by empowering teachers, incorporating external staff (native English-speaking teachers) and the development of more effective teaching materials. In 2015, MEXT directed that an English curriculum be implemented early on in primary education and that compulsory English education begin in grade three (8-9 years old) (MEXT, 2015a). A national survey was introduced to gauge students’ academic levels in the four skills, namely reading, listening, writing, and speaking, in order to “ascertain students’ English abilities in the lower secondary school compulsory education phase” (MEXT, 2015b, p. 2). MEXT has also directed that current Japanese teachers of English undergo retraining and that the Ministry prepare new and updated model teaching materials. To improve English instruction in the classroom, MEXT will “Proactively utilize external human resources including Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs)” (p. 2) and native or near-native English speakers to co-teach with their Japanese counterparts in EFL classes from elementary to high schools.

At the HEI level, MEXT is implementing further policies on two fronts by improving English proficiency and attracting international students and scholars. Starting in 2008, MEXT instituted several reforms to “develop an educational environment where Japanese people can acquire the necessary English skills” (MEXT, 2008, p. 17). The year 2008 also marked the start of the Global 30 programme, where MEXT designated 20 of the highest profile HEIs in Japan as “centres for internationalization” (MEXT, 2008, p. 18). These HEIs

were charged with a range of responsibilities including attracting international scholars and students and assisting in the production of English training programmes and teaching materials for Japanese teachers of English. Many high-profile institutions are publicly aligning themselves with the government's policy shift towards globalisation, such as the University of Tokyo, a national university, which aims to “nurture global leaders” (University of Tokyo, 2019, para. 1) and Waseda University, one of the most prestigious private HEIs, which considers its mission to be cultivating “Good Global Citizenship” (Waseda University, n.d., para. 10).

Globalisation efforts are also visible at the local level. Central Japan University (CJU, an alias), the location of this study, is a middle-ranked institution in the Tokai area of central Japan which aligned itself with MEXT initiatives by stating prominently on its website and in publicity documents that it aims to produce quality graduates for the world market. In 2015, the university president issued a position paper defining several important targets for the university including developing good global citizens. CJU has also followed recent trends by restructuring and introducing new programmes with a more global title and focus which include mandatory overseas study periods. Once again – and reflecting recent trends – CJU undertook campus-wide infrastructure improvements consisting of renovations, the construction of new buildings, the purchase of hundreds of new computers, and upgrades to hundreds of others with funding assistance from the government of Japan.

1.5 Challenges facing higher education in Japan

According to Stewart (2016), the Japanese education system is outdated and has hindered the country from moving forward globally. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2012) reports that young Japanese adults are performing below average in problem-solving skills in comparison to other developed nations. Obe

(2015) believes universities are not providing quality instruction and using curricula that do not develop job-related skills. In the 2017 Asian university rankings, Tokyo University fell from first to seventh place, a concern for the entire HE system in Japan and an embarrassment for the university (“Best Universities”, 2018). According to Stewart (2015), the precipitous drop was largely the result of insufficient government funding and the inability of graduates to perform in the global market. HE institutions are therefore seen as not adequately preparing students for their future careers. Recent graduates appear to be unprepared for the job market and employers are unable to find recruits with the skills required to meet the needs of their businesses.

However, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has declared that Japan should focus on STEM disciplines (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and in 2014 mandated a cut to humanities programmes – and therefore English language programmes – in favour of STEM-related courses (Nakata Steffanson, 2015). This has resulted in friction between the government and higher education institutions (HEIs) with MEXT being denounced as “anti-intellectual” (Grove, 2015, para. 4). While the government has stated that English language skills are in the national interest due to globalisation (MEXT, 2008), conversely, recent governmental policy changes have reduced funding for these programmes in favour of STEM-related courses.

HE in Japan also faces the challenge of a decreasing number of 18-year-old high school graduates moving on to HE (Lewis, 2017). Fewer candidates has meant that those who previously would not have been accepted into universities due to low scores on entrance examinations are now being granted admission (Harada, 2015). As colleges and universities are forced to accept less capable students in order to achieve targets for incoming class numbers (Matsutani, 2012), the lack of fundamental knowledge in all disciplines on the part

of the incoming freshman student population is of concern to teaching staff (Yamaguchi & Tsukahara, 2016).

The lack of proficiency in English among new HE entrants is often the result of a lack of exposure to English at the primary and secondary school level; all four quadrants of English skills (reading, writing listening and speaking) of junior high and high school students in Japan are well below the government's recent targets, with "dismal results" (Aoki, 2017, para. 1). Students' lack of English skills is also reflected in Japanese society more generally. According to the Education First English Proficiency Index (Education First, 2018) Japan ranks 49th in the world, down from 37th in 2017 among non-English speaking countries and 11th in Asia. Not surprisingly, English proficiency has fallen in recent years: "In the past six years, Japanese adults have not improved their English. If anything, their skills have declined slightly" (Education First, 2013, p. 16).

1.6 Foreign staff and working conditions in HE in Japan

Skilled and experienced instructors play a critical role in enhancing English proficiency in Japan. Elementary and high schools are supported by non-Japanese ALTs, often foreign language teachers who move from school to school each day. There are many part-time English teaching staff at the university level but more advanced educational requirements, such as a mandatory master's degree, mean that HEIs often include many foreign full-time faculty, a factor which has also become a selling point in the market for international students.

Although institutions are moving toward a more international approach to staffing, the terms of such contracts differ greatly from those of similar Western positions. One of the Tier A institutions also located in Central Japan, Nagoya University (2014), has mandated an increase in world class researchers, support for young female Japanese researchers and an

effort at “cultivating Globally-Minded leaders” (p. 1). However, in contrast to a creating a globally-minded environment for foreign teaching staff, Nagoya University recently advertised a single position for an Associate Professor in English Linguistics requiring a doctoral degree, responsible for eight weekly classes of 90 minutes, limited to five years with no opportunity for extension or transition to tenure track. Working hours are Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 5:15pm (see Appendix 1) with 20 days of annual leave, working conditions which differ significantly from those of traditional academics in Western institutions in terms of the heavy teaching load and rigid time scheduling mandated by the institution.

It is a common practice in Japan to hire foreign instructors with limited-term contracts with specific terminal dates which, although technically full-time, are actually temporary and non-renewable, leading to a life of transitory employment and little job security for many instructors at the university level. Consequently, contract employees do not enjoy important life stability (for example, limited contract employees cannot qualify for home loans) due to the temporary nature of their employment situations and are less likely to be of long-term benefit to the institution. These policies raise concerns about how to nurture and maintain excellence in an EFL programme in Japan due to this mandated regular instructor turnover. When considering the important role of professional, qualified and experienced EFL instructors in the classroom in Japan, there is tension between what Japanese institutions are offering in terms of working conditions and the kind of candidates they are likely to attract in the long term.

1.7 Challenges facing instructors in the EFL classroom

In 2011, MEXT implemented a student-centred approach to language learning focused on communication skills using “high level linguistic activities (presentations,

debates, negotiations)” (MEXT, 2011, p. 2). Students were expected to interact with each other, rather than focusing on the teacher as the centre of learning, which is more typical in Japan. Humphries and Burns (2015), in a study of EFL in-service teachers at a Japanese high school, found that MEXT goals were filtering down to the classroom but, although English teachers were given the flexibility to implement new government initiatives, most reverted back to familiar *yakudoku*, the direct translation teaching approach common in Japan (Thompson & Yanagita, 2016). Philpott (2016) contends that transforming Japanese students, who are more familiar with teacher-centred approaches, into autonomous learners is a significant challenge, “especially ... for students who have progressed through the public Japanese high school system and are now studying at a Japanese university” (p. 65). In HE, students are expected to interact more with each other and to be more active participants in their own learning. This requires student autonomy sufficient for students to engage in student-student (SS) and student-teacher (ST) interaction. In addition, Sato, Nakatake, Satake and Hug (2015) contend that learner autonomy represents a learner’s ability to negotiate their own needs with those of the group and enhanced learner autonomy leads to “more deep-level learning [and] better grades” (Oga-Baldwin, Nakata, Parker, & Ryan, 2017, p. 141). However, creating opportunities for students to engage autonomously in the EFL classroom can be difficult. Lockley and Promnitz-Hayashi (2012) suggest that social barriers affecting Japanese students, such as their low confidence and unfamiliarity with the approaches used in HE, must be overcome to effectively implement communicative language teaching in Japanese classrooms.

1.8 Cultural challenges for foreign teachers

This thesis is written from the perspective of a foreign instructor in Japanese HE. This is a vastly different perspective from those of Japanese instructors bearing in mind

employment equity, xenophobia, social capital and the myriad differences in culture which can be exciting but are often challenging. McVeigh (2015) underscores just how vastly different he believes HE is in Japan: “Professors do not teach, but they pretend to teach; lectures are delivered but students do not take notes; homework is assigned but never collected; tests are given but not taken seriously. Students are graded on how many times they attend class” (p. 274). Further, Gattig (2012) feels that he is “part of a farce” (para. 5) acted out in universities in Japan, and comments that “There is an aloneness unique to a teacher in front of an unmoved class. And no class is more unmoved, some burnouts attest, than teaching English at university in Japan” (para. 7). To be fair, there are elite programmes that engage HE students in Japan more proactively while study habits and classroom interactions differ greatly between students and between grades. However, it is true that in a vast number of lower-level classes, there exists a wide gap between the expectations of foreign teachers and what Japanese students are able to deliver. It would benefit both students and instructors if instructors – particularly foreign instructors – had a better understanding of how to handle the challenges and tensions in an EFL classroom in Japan and were in possession of modern, effective teaching techniques to overcome these challenges.

1.9 Challenges facing students in the EFL classroom

Japan is a culture where high school students spend thousands of hours after school and on weekends preparing for high-stakes university entrance exams (Allen, 2016). Getting into the right university can set one’s path for life. Elite companies, such as Toyota and Sony, select freshmen employees based largely on the university they attended or the programme they studied. There is little focus on grades or performance (McVeigh, 2015). University students are aware of their own place in the social strata, since their university ranking – *hensachi* in Japanese – is published regularly in national magazines, which also includes the ranking of each programme at the university where they have been admitted. With rankings

and hiring policies so interconnected and embedded in the culture, students in low- to middle-ranked programmes at middling universities anticipate becoming only middle-managers in middling Japanese companies with no future need or use for English. It is understandable that students who cannot see a future requiring English are not motivated to participate in EFL courses.

Hierarchal rankings are also prevalent within the student body. Universities, the majority of which are private, have extensive internal hierarchies. As in high school, first-year students are usually required to join a club where senior students, *sempai*, have a higher rank and thereby reinforce the hierarchy through rigid rules: “It is common for *kohai*, juniors, to clean the rooms, collect balls and manage the equipment for *sempai*” (Davies & Ikeno, 2011, p. 191). Freshman students are keenly aware and frequently reminded of their place in the social order by other members of their clubs or circles. As a result, many first-year students attend classes with no expectation of being asked to participate or asked for their opinion, while their low social position can make them reluctant to engage.

All HE programmes include mandatory English Oral Communication (OC) classes in the first year of study. For some freshman students, it may be their first experience with a foreign instructor. In Japanese culture, speaking up and asking questions is considered rude. Sasaki and Ortlieb (2017), in a study of Japanese university students attending school in Australia, found that, despite knowing that their participation was required, students remained silent in order to preserve harmony and to aid instructors by not interrupting them. Deep-seated cultural values of respect for authority, deference to those of higher rank, and group harmony combine to make students cautious when participating in classes. In addition, a freshman student’s expectations of an EFL class are based on their high school experience which was teacher-centred and did not require their participation. High school English classes taught by Japanese teachers are more often teacher-centred, focusing much more on language

forms than meaning and rarely involve actually speaking English (Thompson & Yanagita, 2016). In fact, McVeigh (2015) posits that some students pretend to be unable to answer questions so they do not stand out among classmates. Thereby, there are cases where some freshman students, who are actually capable in English, choose not to participate for fear of being ostracised by classmates.

1.10 Understanding the difference between ESL and EFL

In order to understand the unique context and motivation toward English study in Japan, it is necessary to differentiate between the study of English as a second language (ESL), English as a foreign language (EFL), and the role of English in everyday societies and cultures around the world. There are significant differences in approaches to teaching, classroom dynamics and motivation so, when assessing the literature, it is important to consider whether the context is ESL or EFL.

Kachru (1985) is considered among the first scholars to describe how the role of English in various societies can be seen as being made up of concentric rings. Among inner circle countries, English is spoken as a native language (Canada, the US, the UK) and learned as an “important foreign language in formal instructional settings” (Rautionaho, Deshors, & Meriläinen, 2018, p. 42) where study is considered to be ESL-based. Toward the outer rings, the importance of English diminishes with lesser importance placed on ability and study within society (Figure 1.1). In Japan, among the outer rings, English is not common in the community and is not often overheard on the street or on television, nor is it necessary for daily business, therefore study is considered as EFL. However, in Japan English can be a valuable life skill and has been deemed important according to MEXT’s goals in relation to globalisation, namely making English mandatory starting in elementary schools until university, where English language study is required, albeit usually only in first year.

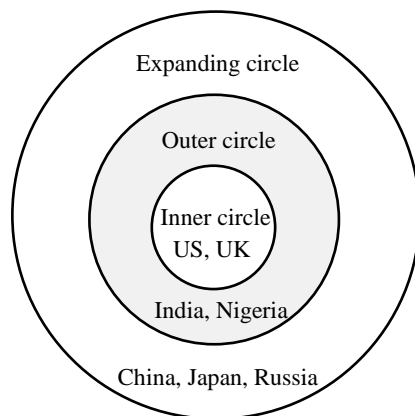


Figure 1.1 Kachru's Three Circles of English (adapted from Kachru, 1985)

The way English is taught, the way learners are able to interact with English outside of the classroom and the importance placed on English language skills within different societies are vastly different between ESL and EFL environments (Jamil & Khan, 2013). A typical ESL course includes content which focuses on the language necessary for passing interviews to be granted citizenship or for language commonly used in job interviews. ESL students are surrounded by English on television, on buses, interaction with shop staff and at school. Even while studying, since classes are a mix of cultures and languages, the students usually communicate socially with each other in English as the common language. The classroom often consists of a mix of adults, sometimes entire families, from cultures around the world. In contrast, in an EFL environment, learners are surrounded by their native language and culture and are only briefly immersed in an English environment when studying before returning to their own language and culture. Within the class, students are often from a homogenous culture and similar ages and are capable of communicating with each other in their native language.

Krieger (n.d.) highlights some of the main differences which can deeply affect approaches by instructors and, importantly for this study, the motivation of learners (Table

1.2). ESL learners are often more internally/intrinsically motivated to learn English in order to get a job and to negotiate necessary daily communication at hospitals, schools and in their jobs. EFL students are often extrinsically motivated since they see less need for English in their daily lives. Inherent in these differences between ESL and EFL is the importance of utilizing relevant content. In ESL, content related to everyday life – ensuring clear pronunciation and in daily problem solving– is often driven by students as they seek improvements that they can make which can immediately impact their daily lives. However, in the EFL context it is more important to make content interesting and engaging to learners because much of English language study is theoretical and learners have little or no opportunity to put their learning into practice outside of the classroom. This can make students less motivated to learn when they have no opportunity to experience the need for English ability in their lives.

Table 1.2 ESL versus EFL study (Krieger, 2005)

	ESL	EFL
Student Motivation	Intrinsic motivation is high; content is important (needs to be real)	Intrinsic motivation is low; content is less relevant (needs to be fun)
Class size	Small – 8-10	Large - 30+
Class make up	Mixed cultures & languages (communicate in English)	Homogenous culture & language (communicate in local language)
Use of English in class	Important as a baseline communication tool	Often mixed with the local language
Role of culture	Students benefit from/are motivated to learn authentic local cultural norms	Students already know their local culture and interest in English cultural norms is less powerful
Implementation	Learning can be immediately tried and tested outside of the classroom	Implementation of teaching points is limited to classroom time
Attendance	Based on availability	Mandatory

It is also important to differentiate between ESL and EFL when sourcing literature to inform a research design. There are significant differences in student motivation, course design, approaches and content depending on the source of the literature, either from within Japan or sourced from conventional Western publications. This thesis will weave together

findings and theory from Western literature, balance the perspectives of EFL and ESL as well as the real situation in the EFL classroom in Japan.

1.11 Thesis Structure

Chapter 1 has offered a broad examination of HE in Japan, including governmental perspectives and policies before focussing on the local institutional level, in the process outlining some of the challenges facing the unique context of this study before outlining the researcher's background and the research goals. Chapter 2 examines the literature related to the teaching of English as Foreign Language (EFL) globally, EFL in Japan, blended learning (BL), the latter's issues and benefits, the phenomenon of motivation and its impact on the study of EFL study, specifically self-determination theory (SDT). The Foreign Language Class Anxiety Survey (FLCAS) is a tool based on SDT so it will be assessed here while examples of its implementation will be critiqued. The literature review also explores the strengths and weaknesses of a case study approach, introducing the three theoretical frameworks used for the study and concludes by identifying gaps in the current literature. Chapter 3 outlines the process of undertaking the study, explains the research design and approach as well as elaborating the steps used to gather and analyse data. Chapter 4 outlines the findings and investigates some of the overarching themes suggested by an analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data. Chapter 5 discusses some of the overarching themes uncovered during the research, while investigating some anomalies and suggesting better ways to interpret the data after which it addresses the research questions. Chapter 6 closes the thesis by delineating conclusions, research limitations, recommendations and some final thoughts.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This review begins by explaining the approach used to review the literature, followed by a definition of Blended Learning (BL) and an exploration of the advantages and disadvantages of implementing BL in the context of the study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Japan. Motivation, a key component of the study, will also be explored, including an explanation of self-determination theory (SDT), the role of anxiety, the link between interest and motivation, before closing with a definition of motivation. The review will further introduce the theoretical framework and rationale for four learning theories. The chapter closes by identifying gaps in the literature.

2.1.1 The approach used to review the literature

Whenever possible, literature from worldwide sources was used to investigate fundamental concepts such as research design and approaches in order to make decisions regarding the study's direction and philosophical underpinnings. As discussed earlier, it is critical to tease out relevant findings and discern differences between international perspectives and those specific to this study of Japan – particularly related to ESL and EFL – which helped to shape the research design. Research was gathered from a variety of sources, among them governmental organizations, teachers conducting research among their students, and published monographs and journals. The literature was then assessed, to the extent possible, for validity and transparency, which helped to inform the issues and challenges facing this research.

2.2 Blended Learning

2.2.1 Defining blended learning

Blended learning is most often considered as a fusion of information technology (IT) with a range of content and delivery methods (Caravias, 2016). One challenge when undertaking a BL initiative is to clearly define the way that technologies and content will be integrated. Oliver and Trigwell (2005) warn that the term blended learning itself is misleading; there are so many possible variations, the term BL can lead to a confused mix of content and pedagogical approaches. Chen and Yao (2016) define BL as a combination of traditional face-to-face, instructor-led training in the classroom and an online component within or outside classroom space and time. Lim, Morris and Kupritz (2014) add that BL is a method where several delivery modes are used “to optimise learning outcomes (through) instructor-led training ... with technology-based learning, and the mix of traditional and interactive-rich forms of classroom training with any of the innovative technologies” (p. 28). A BL initiative incorporates a range of modern multimedia formats and activities, combined within and outside a traditional classroom setting in order to enhance student interest levels (Tang, 2013).

For the purposes of this study, BL is defined, as in Chen and Yao (2016), as a mix of traditional classroom-based textbook activities followed by rich, online content, sometimes to be completed outside of scheduled class time. This definition aligns with the goals of the local institution and those of the Japanese government in relation to developing global citizens and IT proficiency by having the participants interact online using computers and by employing engaging, modern content within the parameters of weekly-scheduled classes integrated with the textbooks and curriculum guidelines assigned and set by the institution. The BL approach in this study was designed to integrate both the classroom and online approaches in order to benefit from the strengths of each (Garrison & Vaughan, 2013).

2.2.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of BL in EFL

Poon (2013) states that BL “facilitates improved learning outcomes, access flexibility, a sense of community, the effective use of resources, and student satisfaction” (p. 274). Caravias (2016) lists four further benefits to implementing a BL programme: flexibility with lesson pacing; eased time constraints on teachers; additional time for reflection; and the ability to address a variety of student needs and learning approaches. The flexible pacing inherent in BL may allow the instructor to extend focus on areas of difficulty for students or, alternatively, help facilitate serendipitous moments where students are deeply engaged. Remaining lesson content can then be assigned as homework and completed online and outside of class time. The instructor can implement fresh content or modify timing to maintain student interest throughout the class. A BL initiative can ease time constraints by allowing teachers to prepare classes remotely and at a time convenient to them. Instructors are then free to modify lesson plans before or during class, as needs dictate. With the ability to instantaneously integrate online activities, the instructor is provided with a range of tools to add rich and interesting content to the lesson which, according to Obari and Lambacher (2015), leads to improved language proficiency. The asynchronous nature of the online components in this study – such as discussion forums – affords greater opportunity for reflection by allowing participants the time to more deeply consider what they post in online forums while working at their own pace (Huang, 2016). BL can extend the contact time of traditional classes by providing unlimited access to online content and review opportunities as well as when and where the student chooses (Herbert, Velan, Pryor, & Kumar, 2017). In a research study conducted in the United States, Tseng and Walsh (2016) examined the effect of a BL intervention on students (n=52) enrolled in an English literature course. Similar to this study, the majority of participants were under 20 years of age, although there is no indication that any were Japanese. Results indicated that participants using the BL format

reported higher motivation, learning outcome levels, and final grades respectively. It is significant, however, that more than half of the participants had previously experienced an online learning course during which they may have previously encountered and overcome many of the IT difficulties which can be challenging for first time users of a BL programme. Agosto, Copeland and Zach (2013) further suggest that BL can help to foster student-centred collaborative learning through increased student-student (SS) interaction where “learning moves beyond interaction with the course instructor and with course content... to learning from knowledge building and sharing with their fellow students” (p. 102). Given that EFL classes in Japan often contain more than 30 students, enhancing student autonomy and collaboration through the use of BL environments may lead to improvement in English language skills. Among a group of first-year university students in Malaysia, Chen and Yao (2016) found that BL is more effective than face-to-face or online learning alone. Data was collected in a study of 14 volunteer students on average 20 years old, although only 64% (n=9) were in the first semester of their first year of university. The researchers used Likert scales with scores from 1 to 5 to assess satisfaction with online learning component. The results indicated that design (in this case making the content relevant to the participants in furthering their studies) and ease of use appeared to strongly impact the participants’ satisfaction with the online content. Although the study was based in Malaysia and had some non-first year participants, the use of surveys with a Likert scale measuring satisfaction are relevant to this study as are the findings regarding the importance of ease of use and relevance of the content.

Challenges in implementing a BL programme can include issues concerning technology and pedagogy. Teachers require technological competence to be able to effectively access and modify online content, assess student performance, and support students who may be struggling with IT proficiency. To oversee such a programme, teachers

must be trained and provided with the “knowledge and confidence necessary to implement... the technologies associated with blended learning” (Riel, Lawless, & Brown, 2016, p. 170). Student IT proficiency must also be taken into consideration, ensuring that students are able to operate a PC, access the online activities, and engage with content (Boelens, De Wever, & Voet, 2017).

Jung, Kudo and Choi (2012) conducted three surveys to identify stressors in online learning in order to refine and hone the stressors while a final online survey gathered data from 226 respondents from six universities in Japan. The researchers found that the most common form of participant interaction consisted of face-to-face classes with follow-up online activities over periods ranging from one to ten weeks. Like this study, English was the main medium of communication. Although only 19.9% of respondents were first year students and there is no indication of when the data was gathered during their first year, like this study none of the participants were English majors. The authors’ analysis is thorough and transparent while the findings suggest that a participant’s feeling of self-efficacy – namely that they feel they can complete the task – strongly impacted motivation to study English. In addition, the researchers found the participants’ interaction with technology to be stressful due to their unfamiliarity and lack of confidence with online study – the latter being uncommon in Japan – and a similar lack of confidence with English due to low self-efficacy, fear of negative evaluation, and negative previous experiences with English.

In another study conducted in Japan among 299 university non-English majors, more than half of them freshmen, Mehran, Alizadeh, Koguchi and Takemura (2017) found that many participants judged themselves unprepared to engage with online learning as indicated by low self-ratings related to the students’ confidence in relation to the use of technology for the purpose of study. The participants, on average 19 years of age, were given a paper survey which had been translated into Japanese by the author and the results were analysed using

SPSS and Microsoft Excel. Like the participants in this research, more than 90% of respondents had easy access to a laptop, smartphones and the internet, but Mehran et al. (2017) were surprised that some students were unable to use fundamental word processing applications. These findings are relevant to this study since the participants were of similar age with a balance between male and female students in a mandatory EFL class. One important difference with this study is that none of the participants in Mehran et al. (2017) were in the first semester of their first year and therefore may have already overcome many of the stresses associated with the transition to university life before participating in the study. Students who are unfamiliar with how to login, access the internet and perform other basic tasks on the university computer may experience added stress due to low IT proficiency in their initial weeks of university classes. Ferguson (2012) suggests that a lack of confidence with IT may result in situations in a BL environment where students, out of the instructor's sight and in a darkened room with monitors blocking the line of sight, can become disconnected, easily bored, uninterested, and lost.

A BL initiative requires careful consideration with respect to pedagogy. Beetham and Sharpe (2013) argue that pedagogy reflects the process of learning and teaching. The flexibility offered by BL can combine a range of pedagogical approaches (Harris & Park, 2017). Gordon (2014), in a project for the Higher Education Academy (HEA) in the UK, suggests that it is important that the instructor is able to identify and incorporate effective teaching methods to address the role pedagogy in design, execution and assessment. Some of the research used in the report is dated, for example, one paper cited about learning in the digital world was almost 20 years old (Berners-Lee & Hendler, 2001), but the report appears well-researched, unbiased, and findings and recommendations are in line with more recent literature.

Liang and Bonk (2009) mention the importance of designing a BL programme with three pedagogical perspectives in mind, namely textual, social, and technological components. The textual component consists of the materials and activities and should include combinations of content that help learners construct meaning and that lead to deeper engagement. Socially, a successful BL programme should enhance student interaction and peer learning which can be achieved through online collaborative writing activities and online interactive discussion forums. Boelens, De Wever and Voet (2017) warn that if the transactional distance (defined below) in the online component of a BL environment is too great, it can result in a failure to develop an effective learning community. Moore (1993) defines transactional distance as the relationship between instructor and learner when they are separated by space or time. Too great a transactional distance can lead to psychological and communication misunderstandings. It is important, therefore, during the physical in-class component of a BL intervention that teachers try to overcome the negative effects caused by transactional distance. Teachers should encourage communication between participants while nurturing student-teacher (ST) and student-student (SS) relationships to strengthen them so that they can manage the online components of the BL environment. Docktor (2016) posits that a strong relationship between instructor and student can provide an additional reason for participants to remain engaged in an online course and that this enhances social interaction while also improving learning. Teachers should frequently engage with students in both face-to-face and online environments (Boelens et al., 2017), which also benefits the instructor by allowing further opportunities to explore and identify individual learner needs. This also serves to inform pedagogy while enhancing SS and TS communication as well as social interaction (Liang & Bonk, 2009).

2.2.3 BL, EFL and Japan

Creating positive learning environments in the BL classroom requires a level of social relationships that may be unfamiliar to many Japanese students. In Japan, transactional distances are often purposefully kept large to reinforce a teacher's higher status in the social and cultural structure. When working with first-year students just out of high school and who are experiencing unfamiliar language classes and a BL environment, it would be beneficial to ascertain those methods that may prove more effective in terms of enhancing ST and SS interaction, thereby maximizing learning opportunities while nurturing positive feelings toward the study of English.

Miyazoe and Anderson (2010) have found evidence that the use of BL resulted in positive feelings towards EFL in a study of 61 second-year students at a university in Japan. They used a BL approach based around textbook-derived classroom activities with follow up online activities, including forums, which the data suggest positively impacted the participants' learning of English. Using a mixed methods approach, the authors conducted surveys, interviews and a statistical analysis of texts the students had written to determine gains in English writing proficiency. The participants had a more advanced level of English than those in this study, therefore they may have been less anxious about English classes than the participants in this research. However, there are many similarities in the mixed methods approach adopted in both studies, including the use of paper surveys using the Likert scale and researcher observations being used as one data source for the purpose of triangulation. In addition, the class met once a week and the activities were designed around a textbook with optional online activities to be completed outside of class. For these reasons, the data and approaches used in Miyazoe and Anderson (2010) proved a valuable framework in the design of this study.

In another study conducted in Japan, Yamauchi (2009) implemented a BL initiative in a 15-week English course to help students learn research and presentation skills using English and computers as a way to meet a range of learner needs and to “get/keep students motivated” (p. 17). Like this study, the author employed Moodle as a learning management system (LMS) over one semester in a class of 19 post-first year female students of lower-intermediate English ability consistent with a TOEIC score below 350 or CEFR level A2-lower B1 (see Appendix 2) and also with limited computer experience. It is important to note that the research took place in an elective English class that may have affected the motivation of students toward the class content, unlike the compulsory class which is the subject of this study. The online activities included blogging and the sharing of YouTube videos and original content through Google Docs. The author found that the flexible content assisted the instructor in meeting a range of learning needs and that the activities produced positive results among students. In addition, online dictionaries were useful, students were interested in the YouTube videos and they enjoyed expressing themselves through blogging.

Zeng and Takatsuka (2009) also employed the Moodle LMS in a BL initiative among sixteen second-year volunteer students in an EFL class in China in an effort to enhance their collaborative English language learning opportunities. It is noteworthy that participants differed in age and nationality to those in this study, their English language skills were slightly higher – namely intermediate level – and the sample size was quite small. However, the study took place in China in an environment which the authors identified as “teacher-centred and test-oriented” (p. 437), similar pedagogically to educational approaches in Japan, so the results may be helpful when investigating similar English language learning techniques like the collaborative learning employed in this thesis. There are three main findings that shape this dissertation’s research design: collaboration helps to engage the participants’ zone of proximal development (ZPD); the instructor plays a role in guiding learning in a computer-

mediated communication (CMC) environment; and that part of the instructor's role includes orienting students to the online learning environment in cases of low levels of IT proficiency.

In Taiwan, Wu, Yen and Marek (2011) studied 227 non-English majors of varying ages in a mandatory EFL class over the course of one year. The research utilised a modified questionnaire based on Gardner and Lambert's (1972) motivation research. The questionnaire was tested for validity and reliability through a series of factor analyses with an overall reliability of .92 (Cronbach's alpha). The authors found that the incorporation of authentic, online English activities – such as blogging with English-speaking students overseas – increased the students' enjoyment of and interest in English language study as well as their confidence in using English.

More recently, Hseich, Wu and Marek (2016) conducted a mixed methods study consisting of 48 non-English majors and sophomores in two mandatory English classes in Taiwan. The participants were between 19-20 years old with a high-intermediate English level of either B1 or B2 using the international Common European Framework (CEFR) over the course of a semester. In the first half of the course, participants completed an 8-week traditional textbook-based face-to-face style course, while in the second half students were given extensive online homework prior to classroom activities, consisting of chatting during class using an app on their mobile devices. A pre- and post-test as well as two questionnaires were employed with a response rate of 100% and the data analysis process is rigorously explained. Results from the Hseich, Wu and Marek (2016) report suggest that the online interaction proved effective at motivating students, which led to gains in English language skills. It is noteworthy that the aforementioned researchers found that incorporating online activities in class can be effective at improving English skills. The authors also posit that motivation can increase quickly if the participants are offered suitable positive stimuli.

Many first-year students who are not English majors can be reluctant to participate in EFL classes (Talandis & Stout, 2015) since they may never have had a foreign instructor while some have never spoken English aloud, even in English class. BL can be advantageous in the Japanese context as it can more effectively engage shy, reluctant learners through asynchronous forums and enhanced content (Sahin-Kizil, 2014). In addition, Noels (2013) believes that successful language courses incorporate a range of activities and materials to enhance student interest and that “intrinsic motivation derives from the satisfaction of engaging in an activity that is stimulating and inherently interesting” (p. 16). These opinions suggest that by stimulating interest through engaging activities and content, it may be possible to improve motivation among reluctant Japanese learners.

2.3 Motivation

2.3.1 What is motivation?

Motivation is a complex phenomenon that has inspired a range of theories from behaviourist, naturalist and content perspectives. According to Bandura’s (2012) theory of self-efficacy, one’s interest in a given task deeply affects a person’s motivation; when interested in something, one’s motivation to repeat or complete the task is higher. Interest also plays a role in learner-related cognitive behaviour, where the three important factors that affect learning are the ability to complete the task (expectancy), beliefs about the importance and interest in the task (value), as well as the reaction to the task (affective), including feelings of anxiety (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). More recently, Vansteenkiste, Aelterman, Muynck, Haerens, Patall and Reeve (2018) have drawn together the threads of self-efficacy, expectancy and autonomy when they posit that the nature of the activity is an important consideration affecting one’s motivation to complete it. When the activity is of interest and appeal to learners, they are more easily drawn to the activity.

Deci and Ryan (1985) claim that human beings require that their needs are satisfied in three areas; autonomy (self-governance), competence (the feeling that one can complete given tasks) and relatedness (connection to others), which they termed Self-Determination Theory (SDT). They posit that human motivation exists on a continuum from intrinsic motivation, considered to be the best kind of motivation for learning, to extrinsic motivation and amotivation (Figure 2.1). Intrinsic motivation occurs when one chooses to engage in an activity for the internal pleasure of doing it, while extrinsic motivation occurs when outside factors push one to engage in certain activities. Intrinsic motivation is longer-lasting and leads to better, self-directed learning (Bandura, 2012). Butz, Stupnisky, Peterson and Majerus (2014), associate intrinsic motivation with interest in that “Intrinsically motivated individuals perform a behaviour for the inherent satisfaction it provides; that is, they find the activity interesting or enjoyable” (p. 212). Therefore, nurturing or enhancing interest and enjoyment in an EFL course may lead to improved internal motivation and better learning outcomes.

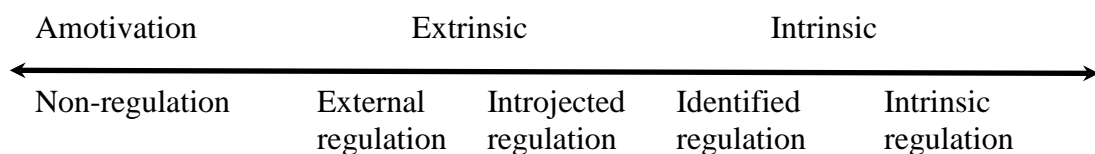


Figure 2.1 Motivation continuum (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 237)

SDT identifies “the significant role of social processes and influences in shaping motivation” (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 25) which ties together SDT, social constructivism and connectivism as tenets of this research. As Noels et al. (2000) posit,

(SDT) has an advantage over empirically derived orientation frameworks in that it provides psychological mechanisms... that can explain and predict how orientations are related to learning outcomes... the correlations between subscales suggest that one can distinguish between amotivation, less self-determined forms of motivation... and more self-determined forms of motivation (p. 75).

SDT is based on the belief that an individual’s motivation, which, when measured by a survey, can be pinpointed on a continuum. Inherent in this belief is that any change in motivation can be visible as movement along the continuum suggesting that a respondent’s changing motivation can be assessed and plotted repeatedly by administering the survey on subsequent occasions. Based on SDT, this research will measure the effect on motivation and anxiety, through the use of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Survey (FLCAS), before and after the BL intervention.

2.3.2 The role of anxiety in motivation

Anxiety plays an important role in Foreign Language (FL) and EFL study and motivation. Anxiety affects motivation and FL study in terms of “performance expectancy” (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 48). When learners are required to produce the language, they feel anxiety that negatively affects self-efficacy and self-confidence, which are critical to motivation. Khodadady and Khajavy (2013) undertook an extensive study among 264 participants in Iran. The authors administered the FLCAS in eight different classes among high school, undergraduate and graduate students. Like similar studies in Japan, the response rate was complete (100%) and an extensive analysis resulted in high reliability for the FLCAS (Cronbach’s $\alpha=.94$) as well as high construct validity according to results from the chi-square test (under 3) and other goodness-of-fit measures. The author concluded that

high anxiety strongly and negatively impacts motivation. While this group of respondents were not Japanese, there were similarities in the way anxiety negatively affects efficacy and confidence in second language study, thereby providing further support for the reliability of FLCAS.

In order to measure FL anxiety, Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) designed the FLCAS using a 33-question survey producing scores between 33 (low anxiety) and 165 (high anxiety). The first use of the FLCAS took place among a group of 75 Spanish learners in an effort to address a lack of testing for FL anxiety at the time. The original test resulted in an internal reliability coefficient of .93. The test has been rigorously and repeatedly tested for validity and reliability since then and is generally considered to be among the most reliable tools to assess anxiety in the FL classroom (Sham & Azmi, 2018; Panayides & Walker, 2013). Students experiencing high anxiety are believed to have low motivation toward a FL so methods to reduce such scores would indicate lower anxiety and, according to research, lead to gains in English proficiency (Dewaele, 2014).

Noels, Pelletier, Clément and Vallerand (2000) developed a set of subscales, consisting of 20 further questions added to the FLCAS, which they posit can be used to more accurately plot a respondent's current position on the motivation continuum (Figure 2.1). The scales were developed in a study undertaken with a group of 159 adults with an average age of 22. The study is detailed with a robust statistical analysis. Results indicate that the survey "supported the distinctiveness ... of the subscales" (Noels, Pelletier et al., 2000, p. 68) and reliability was high with internal consistency scores ranging between .67 and .88. Other researchers have found the subscales to be pedagogically sound (Dornyei & Skehan, 2003) and statistically reliable (Khodadady & Khajavy, 2013) so the subscales were considered suitable for this study.

2.3.3 Motivation, anxiety and EFL in Japan

Motivation specific to foreign language learning involves several factors. Gardner (2007) underscores the importance of recognising the impact of cultural context on motivation in the EFL classroom. Unlike other subjects, English in Japan requires that students engage with different forms of writing (roman characters versus *kanji*), pronunciation and grammatical structures, which, unlike ESL, are not present in everyday Japanese life. In addition, engaging in debate, giving advice and other common language teaching techniques may make Japanese EFL learners feel pressured to take on elements of the new culture which may be at odds with their own beliefs and personality traits, leading to increased stress which can negatively impact motivation to study (Turnbull, 2017).

Dörnyei (2005) proposes a second language (L2) *motivational self* system which represents a combination of psychological and second language research related to *possible selves*. These *selves* manifest in the way learners see “what they might become, what they would like to become and what they are afraid of becoming” (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 80). Although *self* in learning is important, the position of self may play a slightly less prominent role, particularly in English study in Japan. Given the pre-determined life of the students in this context, ranked in the lower third of a low-ranked programme in a middling university, there is some question as to whether many of the students have ever considered any image of their English speaking *future selves*. In the hierarchal and structured world of Japan, the young have their careers largely mapped out so there is some question about their ability to create and nurture an image of their future selves involving English.

Gardner (2007) proposes an additional theory with respect to EFL motivation in which he differentiates between language learning and classroom learning motivation. Language learning motivation refers to an individual’s internal desire or personal interest to learn a second language while classroom motivation refers to an individual’s feeling toward

language learning as manifested in the classroom setting while under the influence of factors such as the classroom environment, the teacher and lesson content. Importantly, this theory may help to illuminate components of classroom culture that take place in a BL environment and help to explain social interactions with classmates and friends, students and the teacher as well as the impact of using computers in a BL environment.

The issue of motivation and interest in study, not just EFL, for freshman university students in Japan is a concern. The literature suggests that, as a result of completing the final stage of years of high-stakes testing, some starting in pre-school, university students in Japan are often uninterested, de-motivated and simply tired of studying. In fact, Berwick and Ross (1989) famously commented that once “the university examinations are over, there is very little to sustain this kind of motivation, so the student appears in freshmen classrooms as a kind of timid, exam-worn survivor with no apparent academic purpose at university” (p. 206). Little has changed in the past 20 years. Despite recent MEXT guidelines mandating English education in high schools and universities, “students are not always willing to learn English; some students even experience demotivation when learning English” (Agawa & Takeuchi, 2017, p. 3). When combining a lack of daily English contact, low inherent interest and mandatory EFL courses for those not in an English department, student motivation to study English can be understandably low. Since addressing issues with low motivation is the main thrust of this study, it is important to establish a framework that identifies the mechanisms which combine to create motivation.

2.3.4 Language study, anxiety and gender in Japan

An additional task for this study is to identify differences in study habits, anxiety and stance toward English language study based on gender. Some recent research suggests that females tend to feel higher levels of anxiety toward English study, although there is

disagreement about whether achievement differs by gender. In a study of more than 200 university learners in Yemen, Razak, Yassin and Maasum (2017) found slightly higher anxiety among females ($n=87$) than among males ($n=68$), although the t -value (-1.211) was greater than the significance level of 0.05. Notably, survey scores were separated by age (first year, second year etc.) which allowed a more direct comparison of that study's findings regarding the anxiety of first year students, to participants in this study who were also first year university students. Researchers found no evidence of a relationship between anxiety and academic achievement. The researchers outlined an extensive statistical analysis, which helps to legitimise the study. However, there is some concern that the subjects were enrolled in the English department, where interest in and anxiety towards English study may differ from the participants in this study, non-English majors enrolled in mandatory English classes.

Park and French (2013) found that females experienced higher levels of anxiety but received better grades than males. Like in this study, the subjects were non-English majors studying English in once-a-week classes with native English instructors from the US, Canada, the UK and Australia, although the subjects were in their second year ($n=948$). The study employed the FLCAS although data analysis differed from this thesis since the authors compared average scores for each FLCAS question (from 1 to 5) as compared to most of the literature where overall scores (33-165) were compared (Horowitz & Horowitz, 1985; Yashima et al., 2009; Razak, Yassin, & Maasum, 2017). Education First (2018) posits that females have scored higher in English ability “in almost all countries regardless of region, wealth, or overall English proficiency” (p. 18). This is compelling evidence that females are consistently more skilled than males in English proficiency although the report indicates that averages for Asia differ by only 1.50 points or (54.57 - female, 53.07 - male) or less than 3%.

In the literature based in Japan, Fryer (2015) calls gender “an essential background variable that must be controlled for if questions regarding either motivation or achievement

are asked” (p. 109). The author undertook a study among 381 first-year students, of whom 135 were female, in order to investigate motivation and interest in compulsory English classes at a private university in Japan. The report explains a robust and transparent statistical analysis in which females achieved at a higher rate than males although it is unclear what the rate was. Given that females have been shown to outperform males in English in Asia by around 3%, it would have been helpful to have that data stated clearly.

A review of the literature suggests that females are generally more competent than males at English around the world and specifically in Asia, although the gap is quite small. In addition, females may feel more anxiety toward English study but the difference does not appear to be significant. For the purposes of this study, differences by gender will be examined when possible in order to assess if there are any noteworthy findings.

2.3.5 Interest and motivation

Crookes and Schmidt (1991) hypothesise that interest represents one’s curiosity and desire to learn more, an important consideration alongside relevance, expectancy and satisfaction. Noels, Pelletier, Clément and Vallerand (2000) believe that intrinsic interest in an activity is important to developing intrinsic motivation. Hidi (2006) defines interest as “a unique motivational variable... that occurs during interactions between persons and their objects of interest, characterized by increased attention, concentration and affect” (p. 70) with interest playing an important role in developing and sustaining motivation (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2013). Dornyei (1994) suggests that interest is a key consideration in successful language learning. According to Tang (2013), BL can help to boost and sustain interest through rich, engaging content, thereby leading to improved motivation and better learning (Figure 2.2).

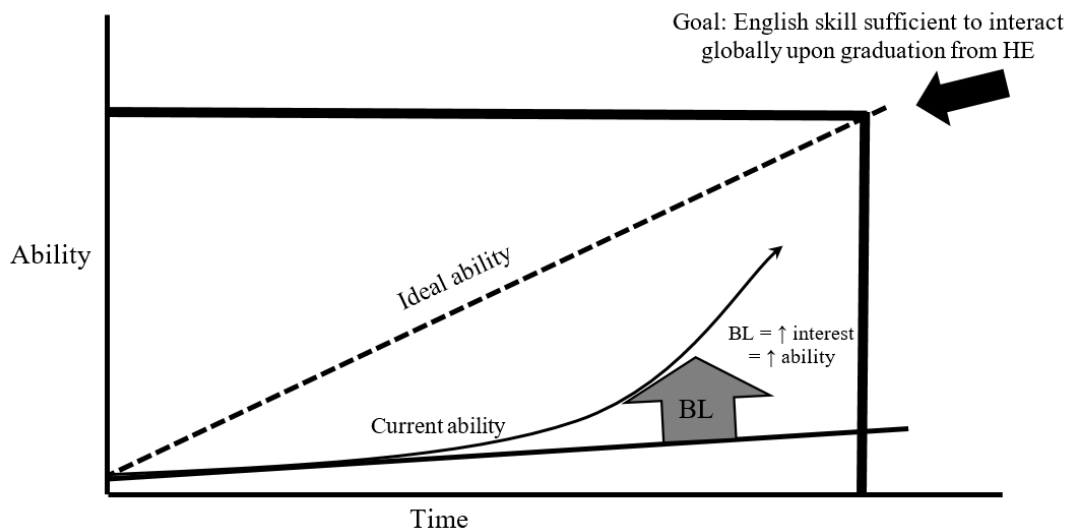


Figure 2.2 Potential benefits of implementing BL

Hidi and Renninger (2006) posit that interest contains four chronological stages of development: triggered situational interest; maintained situational interest; emerging individual interest; and well-developed individual interest. The authors also note that the stages are cumulative, meaning that not only does interest need to be sustained and nurtured but it will eventually fall back to zero. Like priming a pump, if sufficient intrinsic motivation can be established, the activity becomes self-sustaining. Bandura and Shunk (1981) found in an investigation of elementary school children that self-efficacy and interest in mathematics were enhanced as the students made gains in attainable sub-goal tasks. Most importantly, Bandura and Shunk found that as students developed skills and reached sub-goals, their interest in mathematics increased, even though many had expressed a dislike of mathematics prior to the study. More recently, Ng and Ng (2015) posit that part of motivational teaching practice should include setting achievable sub-goals which will support and nurture motivation. In addition, the authors comment that goals and materials should be made relevant to learners.

An increased interest in course materials results in increased motivation toward the course. Fook, Narasuman, Dalim, Sidhu and Fong (2016) conducted a year-long study of 500

participants in Malaysia (average age 21-25), the majority of whom were female (79.1%), and found their BL approach “elevate[d] students’ curiosity and motivation” (p. 77) and resulted in improved learning outcomes. One concern with the study was the timing of the questionnaire, which was administered after final exams but before respondents received their final grades. Although the response rate was high (88.8%), there is no indication that students were assured that their participation was voluntary and that their decision to respond or not would not have any bearing on their final grades. Nevertheless, the findings from this study indicate that BL can enhance student success and that BL supports “active learning [which] elevates students’ curiosity and motivation to explore their interests associated with the materials” (p. 77). These results support other findings that BL can enhance student interest in course content (Henrie, Bodily, Manwaring, & Graham, 2015; Shih, 2015).

2.3.6 Interest in task, course and domain

Interest is cumulative; interest in tasks leads to interest in a course which results in increased interest in the domain (English language study). Following a recent study in Japan with first and second year university students (n=221, females=46), Fryer and Bovee (2016) found that a cumulative interest in class tasks led to an increase in overall domain interest. In addition, the authors specifically designed the BL intervention to bring together “classroom instruction, traditional pen-and-paper homework, and e-learning” (p. 22). Although much of the data was self-reported, it includes several sources collected over a longitudinal study of one school year, indicating that interest can be enhanced through engaging classroom tasks and that sustained interest at the task level is cumulative in terms of achieving intrinsic self-interest at the course level. The authors performed an exhaustive statistical analysis and were transparent in searching for alternative explanations for findings and in reporting study limitations.

Rotgans and Schmidt (2014) investigated how interest affects learning and knowledge. It included three studies involving students in Singapore averaging 14 years of age (n=178). Although undertaken in a different context, the report suggests three important sequential and inter-related factors that could be relevant to this study: that interest can be triggered in cases of novelty or surprise; that this situational interest can serve as “a motivational indicator of the preparedness of the person to engage” (p. 45) in an activity; and that the resulting increased engagement leads to increased knowledge. These findings underscore the importance of developing and maintaining interest in order to increase motivation and enhance learning. The challenge is in maintaining a steady stream of input to build up interest levels from the task level, through interest in the course, and finally to a point where interest becomes self-sustaining at the domain level (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2014).

2.3.7 Defining motivation for this study

Much of the literature highlights the importance of *interest* in generating or enhancing motivation. For this study, the relationship between interest and motivation can be seen much like the relationship between fuel and an engine, where interest represents the fuel for the motivation engine that powers English study (see Figure 2.3). As Bandura (2012) states, interest in an activity powers one’s motivation to repeat or complete a given task. In terms of output, Dörnyei and Ushioda’s (2011) definition of motivation is based on the output or the results from the data generated, such as *why* did the participants see how English can positively affect their lives?, *how hard* did participants study harder, participate more, enjoy the class, or feel more interested in English study?, and *how long* did participants enjoy and engage in the activities?

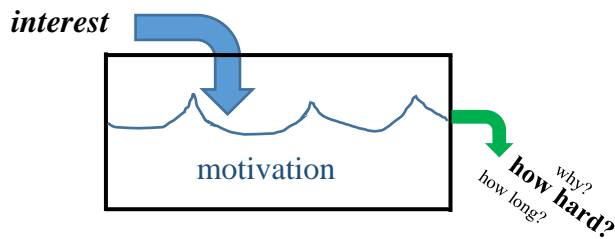


Figure 2.3 Motivation and interest for this study

However, in terms of what kind of output to expect, a BL intervention may not impact all three areas of output equally. Much of the reason *why* students need to or choose to study English in Japan has been reinforced by parents, teachers and the government, largely based on the importance of English for the students' futures. Although the students have been made aware that English competence could provide greater opportunities in terms of accessing future jobs, alongside the well-defined social stratification of HEIs discussed earlier, some students may not see the value in English study given the strict cultural constraints on their futures as reflected in the well-known social rankings of their course and the level of their institution. It is important to recognize that there are certainly students – some of them participants in this study – who were already interested in English and will require less assistance in nurturing their motivation to engage in the classroom. However, given the overarching cultural setting, findings affecting the *why* of motivation to study English are not expected to be substantial. Secondly, with respect to *how long* students would potentially study EFL, MEXT guidelines mandate 90-minutes in a weekly scheduled class and a further 90 minutes of homework outside of class. Those who choose to study for the love of English may be encouraged to engage longer as a result of the BL intervention, particularly in the online activities. Online data will help to determine if participants are engaging for longer periods than mandated during the study but *how long* is not expected to be strongly affected during this study either. The main impact which is expected from the BL environment relates

to providing rich, engaging activities to drive their interest, which most closely reflects *how hard* participants study. Indications of *how hard* participants study may become evident through more frequent contact time (quantitative), satisfaction with the activities, as well as a more positive stance toward the BL environment, which will require both qualitative and quantitative data for analysis.

Therefore, the definition of motivation in this study is based on elements from Bandura (2012) with respect to the importance of interest in generating motivation as well as Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), assessed through an examination of the output of the BL programme, through data related to *how hard* the participants engaged in the activities.

2.3.8 Motivation, interest, liking and anxiety in this thesis

After a review of the literature, it is an underlying assumption of this research that by increasing *interest* in English study, the participants may *like* English more, leading to greater motivation to study. It is also a fundamental assumption that by decreasing the participants' *anxiety* toward English study, they may experience less fear and reluctance toward EFL study, leading to improved motivation to study. Outcomes such as participants *liking* English more, being more *interested* and feeling less anxious about English are believed to nurture a more positive stance toward English while leading to positive gains in English language skills. Throughout this thesis, the words *like* and *interest* are used to indicate a positive stance toward English on the part of the participants and are considered positive indicators of an increased motivation to study.

2.4 Learning theory: Connectivism, social constructivism and sociocultural theory

2.4.1 Identifying an appropriate theoretical framework

There are four theoretical frameworks that were considered for the context of this study: connectivism; social constructivism; communities of practice (COPs); and sociocultural theory (SCT). Connectivism is attractive to the researcher since it combines elements of technology that are of interest to the researcher from his experience in utilizing this in the classroom and given the importance of technology in the lives of the participants in this study. The importance of social constructivism as a learning theory underscores the importance of social interaction in language learning and is also derived from the researcher's long history of language teaching. It is also supported by Vygotsky and Piaget in terms of the importance of the social component of language learning (Vygotsky, 1979; Piaget, 2013). Many of the fundamental classroom techniques the researcher was taught and taught to others are based on the principles of this theory. In addition, the nature of language teaching – which often includes pair work – requires social interaction that suggests that COPs may apply. During the module phase of this thesis, COPs was introduced and discussed, particularly as it relates to social learning and Japanese culture. Finally, as part of the research process for this thesis, SCT was introduced by a mentor as a thought-provoking stance on language learning, one considered suitable for an investigation strongly impacted by the context in Japan. These are not the only theories which play a role in this study but they are the most relevant and meaningful to the researcher and the context.

2.4.2 Connectivism

Connectivism represents a theoretical framework in which learning is regarded as a “network phenomenon influenced by technology and socialisation” (Goldie, 2016, p. 1064). It purports to explain many aspects of the modern world's connectedness. Siemens' (2005) seminal paper underscores the growing importance of accessing nodes of information and

states that “nurturing and maintaining connections is needed to facilitate continual learning” (p. 4). Siemens posits that websites represent nodes of interaction in addition to the physical classroom and can therefore offer further opportunities for learning and growth through social interaction. Connectivism takes into account the interconnectedness of the modern world and helps to better understand the effect of rich and instantaneous communication (often through the use of mobile devices) both inside and outside the classroom as well as in teacher-student (TS) and student-student (SS) interactions. However, Kop and Hill (2008) argue that connectivism may explain where learning occurs but not how and why. If this were the case, it would be difficult to demonstrate conclusively if learning took place in an online environment or the extent to which it did so. Further, connectivism does not include a place for the role of culture in online interaction. However, connectivism values where learning takes place, namely that it occurs at nodes and that learners must learn to identify where the nodes are, which is more important than knowing the information itself. Connectivism is relevant in the context of this study given the importance and ubiquity of technology and the excellent infrastructure commonly utilized by learners in this context.

2.4.3 Communities of Practice

Wenger-Traynor and Wenger-Traynor (2015) define COPs as a group who engage together and share ideas in a particular domain of mutual interest for the purposes of furthering their learning and development. In discussing their area of interest, group members share areas of expertise and, as a result of membership, develop a communal base of knowledge from which all members can draw. COPs and the role of COPs in language learning is well explored in the literature (Kimura, 2018; Marlow & Siekmann, 2013; Barton & Tusting, 2005) and therefore merits consideration as a learning framework in this context.

COPs certainly exist in Japan, although there are some unique characteristics within educational environments that make them operate differently than as outlined in some

literature (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015; Marlow & Siekmann, 2013). As discussed earlier, social groupings in Japan tend to be rigidly hierarchal with new members generally being considered unworthy of participation or adding to the collective. As an example, new members to clubs at university are often not allowed to touch equipment except to carry it to the field and then to return it to storage at the end of practice, and are not allowed to compete even though they may be more skilled in that discipline than more senior members. There exists a very formalised ranking system of participation and presumed value on the part of the participant to the collective based primarily on age. A further characteristic that differs greatly from a Western understanding of COPs is mandatory membership in some structured COPs in Japan, such as mandatory membership of a sports team or club in some universities for first year students. If a member is not allowed to choose their COP, then there are questions as to how a Western-derived lens on community learning may apply.

With respect to the EFL classroom in Japan, particularly within the first few weeks of a university career, each class may resemble a COP but there are again issues with a member's decision to participate. Students are often streamed into classes based on English language levels determined through standardised testing. These groups are assigned the same schedule and attend the same core classes together for much of the first few years of university so there is no choice about membership of these learning groups. That the available population within a particular class is small, with only twenty to thirty members to choose from, all of them freshman and the same rank, also raises questions about who may provide expertise in English to share with the collective. Further, given that EFL is mandatory, the characteristic of COPs that members share a mutual interest in the topic may not apply in a mandatory EFL class in this context. For these reasons the COPs model did not seem a good fit for explaining outcomes given the unique context of this study and was therefore not initially used.

2.4.4 Social Constructivism

Scholnik, Kol and Abarbanel (2006) comment that the mind is not simply an empty vessel waiting to be filled, but is “an agent actively seeking to satisfy its curiosity and resolve troubling issues” (p. 12), which highlights the importance of the relevance of the task or new knowledge to learners. Wang (2014) posits that learning is constructed through personal experience that occurs in the classroom environment and in social and interpersonal relationships between learners themselves and between learners and the instructor. Further, since learners are active participants in constructing their own knowledge, three important concepts should be taken into consideration: that learner autonomy is a central focus; that teachers play the role of facilitators; and that learners should “criticize new knowledge” (Wang, 2014, p. 1553).

According to Cook (2008), language is learned from both parents and social interactions from a very early age, therefore the links between social constructivism and language learning are a natural line of inquiry for this research. However, when examining the social characteristics of school learning in this context, there appear to be several areas that merit consideration. As mentioned above, Japan is well-known for rote memorisation as an educational philosophy which has led to success when compared with different international contexts, particularly in terms of mathematics skills and literacy (McCurry, 2013). However, a teacher-centred, rote memorisation approach, lacking interaction between participants, is not considered an effective approach in modern second language learning, although it is the most familiar language teaching approach for many of the subjects in this study. As a result, while social constructivism is fundamental to language learning in the West, it is not common in Japan. In addition, informal contact between teachers and students, with a high value placed on autonomy and questioning new knowledge, are not common practices in the Japanese context. These characteristics of Japanese society are important to

developing an understanding of learning in Japan and represent key barriers to overcome in order to interpret the interactions of learners and the phenomenon of learning in this context. Without an understanding of the impact of culture on learning, social constructivism seems limited and inflexible in terms of helping to understand how and why learning occurred in this study so it will not be used as a primary lens to interpret the findings.

2.4.5 Sociocultural theory

Sociocultural theory (SCT) is considered to have originated with Vygotsky (1937) who believed that learning and development occur when learners interact within socially and culturally nuanced environments. According to Swain, Kinnear and Steinman (2010), SCT takes into consideration “the relationships between the individual’s physiological aspects and the socially and culturally produced artefacts that transform the individual’s cognitive or mental functions” (p. xiv). SCT is often used as a framework when investigating English language learning in the Japanese context (Nicholas, 2016; Feryok, 2013; Cross, 2010).

SCT is based on the premise that humans use higher-level cultural tools (language, literacy, numeracy, categorization, rationality and logic) as buffers to mediate interaction between themselves and the outside world (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). This mediation occurs in two forms, through regulation and through the employment of symbolic artefacts (such as language) as tools (Sinha, 2015). Humans internalise language learned from interactions with adults and our communities in order to regulate their own behaviour leading, eventually, to self-regulation, the point at which they become self-sufficient. Humans employ symbolic artefacts to mediate behaviour: “Language imbues humans with the capacity to free themselves from the circumstances of their immediate world... to talk and think about entities and events” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007, pp. 201-202). The importance of the

development of language socially, and of receiving assistance from peers and from our environment, apply to the BL environment employed in this study.

Another key component of SCT is the zone of proximal development (ZPD) which refers to the concept of the potential one can achieve with assistance, where guided participation from parents, peers, teachers and tools assists with learning and development within a given cultural framework (Scott & Palincsar, 2013). The term ZPD, coined by Vygotsky (1937), is further affected by face-to-face guidance through the use of language. Further, ZPD recognises not simply the abilities that one naturally possesses but in what they are able to achieve with help. This help is often referred to as scaffolding. Like the role of scaffolding in building a structure, it allows one to reach higher and higher levels and, once the structure is complete, the scaffolding is removed (Storch, 2017). Scaffolding is a fundamental part of the approach to online learning undertaken in this study, where tutorials and links to websites were made available as links to assist users in their early stages. Modern developments in SCT have recognised that assistance can also consist of “tacit, distal, and non-verbal forms of communication” (Scott et al., 2013, p. 3) which is particularly important in this context given the nature of language training, the cultural dynamic and the online component of this study.

ZPD is generally used as a concept to help to explain learning among children of primary school age (6-12). However, the fundamental principles of ZPD – the role of scaffolding, the social aspect of interacting with peers and the role of the teacher as mediator – is not limited to children’s development. Fani and Ghaemi (2011) offer a modified definition of ZPD related to the needs of adult second language learners where they define ZPD as “the distance between the actual developmental level [of] individual linguistic production, and the (potential) as determined through language produced collaboratively with a teacher or peer” (p. 1551). In fact, the role of scaffolding proposed by Vygotsky (1937) has

become the basis for many other kinds of learning among adults. The term ZPTD (zone of proximal teacher development) is an area of study that examines the stages of teacher development, a process likened to the development of ZPD among children (Fani & Ghaemi, 2011). Shabani, Khatib and Ebadi (2010) remark that viewing teacher development through the lens of ZPD provides “a better indication for predicting or understanding future intellectual development than a measure of independent performance because it focuses on maturing functions” (p. 240), meaning that, as adults mature, they also pass through recognisable stages of learning similar to those of ZPD.

With respect to young adults and EFL, Behroozizad, Nambiar and Amir (2014) believe that the teacher plays the role of mediator, providing scaffolding in the early stages of EFL development while classmates act as artefacts with which learners engage in order to develop. As they develop, all language learners pass through similar phases, whether children or adults, where, given that they are immature in their knowledge of the language medium, they require assistance from experts. As they progress, learners accomplish simple tasks leading to improved performance culminating in full automatization with the language (Table 2.4). These stages closely mirror those introduced by Vygotsky in his original ZPD theory, which suggests that a similar learning theory can be applied to language learning regardless of age.

Table 2.4 Stages of ZPD development and language acquisition

ZPD Stage		Characteristics (Scott & Palincsar, 2013)	ZPD and EFL (Tharp & Gilmour, 1990)
1		Assistance from more knowledgeable other	Assistance needed from teacher or peer expert
2		Assistance from self	Learner can accomplish the task without assistance
3		Automatization	Performance was improved and automatized
4		De-automatization	

SCT draws together local context, culture and social factors in an attempt to understand learning and growing. Nasir and Hand (2006) comment that

Sociocultural... approaches have increasingly been used to understand learning and development... in a way that takes culture as a core concern. These frameworks assume that social and cultural processes are central to learning and argue for the importance of local activity settings in... learning. From this perspective, understanding learning requires a focus on how individuals participate in particular activities, and how they draw on artifacts [*sic*], tools, and social others to solve local problems (p. 450).

It is the ability to investigate this mix of social, contextual and cultural elements, which makes SCT attractive to this study, which has been led by a foreign instructor and conducted among a group of Japanese students in a language learning setting. Therefore, SCT is a logical choice to use as a theoretical framework in this research.

2.4.6 The role of learning theories

The exploration of the learning theories outlined above resulted in only two being applied to this research. Connectivism and SCT will be used to design the study, the data gathering tools, and to analyse the findings. However, it is important to note that social constructivism is inherent in SCT so while it is not being used as a separate lens, the recognition of the social aspect of learning will still play a key role. COPs will not play a role in the fundamental design of this research. The explanation of how decisions were made with respect to utilising the study's theoretical lenses have been woven into subsequent chapters, particularly in laying out methodology (Chapter 3) and in discussing findings (Chapter 5). The choice of these learning theories and how effective they were in guiding this study will also be critiqued in Chapter 5.

2.5 Identifying gaps in the literature

This literature review has identified many areas where there is little or no research that directly matches the unique context of this study. This is both a challenge and a disadvantage; there is a lack of literature to inform every step of the research's design and implementation, however the research itself attempts to address some of these gaps.

In terms of general principles – such as language learning, motivation, anxiety, mixed methods and case study – there is a wealth of information from Japan which helps in framing the context but it is limited in scope, due largely to the fact that there are far more contributions to these topics from outside of Japan. Therefore, it was necessary to investigate a broader perspective that required taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of applying findings from research conducted from a Western perspective. The fundamental concerns of this study, including its understanding of the role of motivation in language study, are widely shared and often form the basis of research studies in Japan similar to this one. However, it is important to be forthright and transparent in the way and extent that certain theories have been used to inform this research. When literature could not be identified about the Japanese context specifically, other Asian cultures were also investigated including those involving Japanese studying overseas. These perspectives have informed this study in a broader sense and every effort was made to identify the similarities and differences, with the appropriate caveats, when introducing literature from outside of Japan. Therefore, the use of literature not concerned with Japan is both a thesis strength and limitation and the latter will be addressed in Chapter 6.

A review of the literature uncovered gaps in the existing research in relation to this dissertation, namely the effectiveness of a BL intervention in English study measured using the FLCAS instrument in a before-and-after assessment. In addition, there is no literature that specifically investigates the effect of a BL environment's components and their impact on the

interest and motivation of research participants and their stance toward study in a mandatory English class. This dissertation will also investigate the participants' stance toward English study during their first few weeks of university life, another area that reflects a significant gap in the current literature.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with the research aim and questions as well as a description of the positionality of the researcher. It explains the layout and timing of the pilot and main studies. Based on the context of this research and the phenomena under study, a mixed methods approach was undertaken and the rationale for this will be outlined and critiqued with an explanation of the data collection's mixing, weighting and timing. The decision to undertake a case study examination will be discussed and the benefits of such an approach will be outlined including how concerns with this approach were addressed. Next, there is an explanation of the positionality and role of the practitioner/researcher. The implications, advantages and disadvantages and how the challenges of being an insider are also addressed. This is followed by a discussion of ethical concerns and the selection of the participants. The final section will explain the study's chronological steps from design to pilot study, the implementation of blended learning (BL) activities up to the execution of the main study and the closing of the follow-up online survey. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key points of this chapter.

3.2 Research aim

This thesis aims to fill gaps in the existing literature, produce tangible recommendations to enhance English learning in the Japanese context in support of governmental and institutional responsibilities as a teacher/employee at the site of the study, and may lead to improvements for the researcher as a practitioner. Recent MEXT initiatives have outlined the government's desire to be a player in higher education on the world stage. In order to do so, there is a need to develop effective communication in English among those representing Japan globally. However, Japan's English language standing in the world

continues to plummet, having dropped 12 places, to 49th, since 2017 (Education First, 2018). Governmental policies and programmes are not having the desired effect.

This study explores whether BL can be an effective means of enhancing interest and motivation among first-year university students in this context. The findings are relevant in terms of addressing the need for more effective and innovative ways of teaching English in Japan. Findings related to the effectiveness of employing a BL approach alongside the stance of first-year students new to university, can also help educators, institutions and the government to make English study more effective. Specifically, when faced with a challenging group of what appear to be uninterested learners of English, perhaps some of the techniques employed which worked well, and some of the challenges which were difficult, can help other instructors in more effectively meeting the needs of other participants, similar to the ones involved in this study.

3.3 Research Questions

- 1) How does implementing a BL environment in the first-year non-English major EFL classroom affect student interest in EFL in this context?
- 2) How does interest affect student motivation towards EFL in this study?
- 3) What social and cultural factors affect student interest in EFL study in this context?
- 4) What BL components do students find interesting in this context and why?

3.4 Methodology selection

Taking into consideration the worldview of the researcher, the nature of the phenomenon under study and the context, a concurrent triangulation mixed methods approach within a case study design was selected. Although the researcher's worldview is predominantly interpretivist/constructivist, suggesting a qualitative approach to data

collection and analysis, there were several barriers which made a strictly qualitative approach challenging. The local university was very conservative with respect to ethical guidelines regarding interviewing participants. This meant that interviews, considered a rich source of qualitative data, would have been difficult to undertake. Further, given the relationship between students, particularly first-year students, and teachers in Japan, it was thought that one-on-one interviews may have put undue pressure on the subjects of this study and that the researcher needed to remain further removed from the data collection process. For these pragmatic reasons, a mixed methods approach was undertaken in this dissertation.

Quantitative and qualitative data was collected at different times and analysed separately. Then findings were compared and similarities were examined for the purpose of corroboration (Creswell, 2013). A case study aligns with the theoretical frameworks of connectivism and SCT by providing opportunities to explore how the participants interacted with each other in the social and cultural setting unique to this group. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected and analysed separately, then findings were compared in an effort to enhance reliability through triangulation. Data was collected at several stages (Figure 3.1) through the use of both paper and online surveys, online analytical data logs as well as detailed researcher observations, then it was investigated holistically in an effort to identify patterns of meaning (Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mills, 2017). These interactions were then viewed from the perspectives of connectivism and SCT to help better understand any changes in the participants' interest and motivation toward EFL study as a result of the BL intervention.

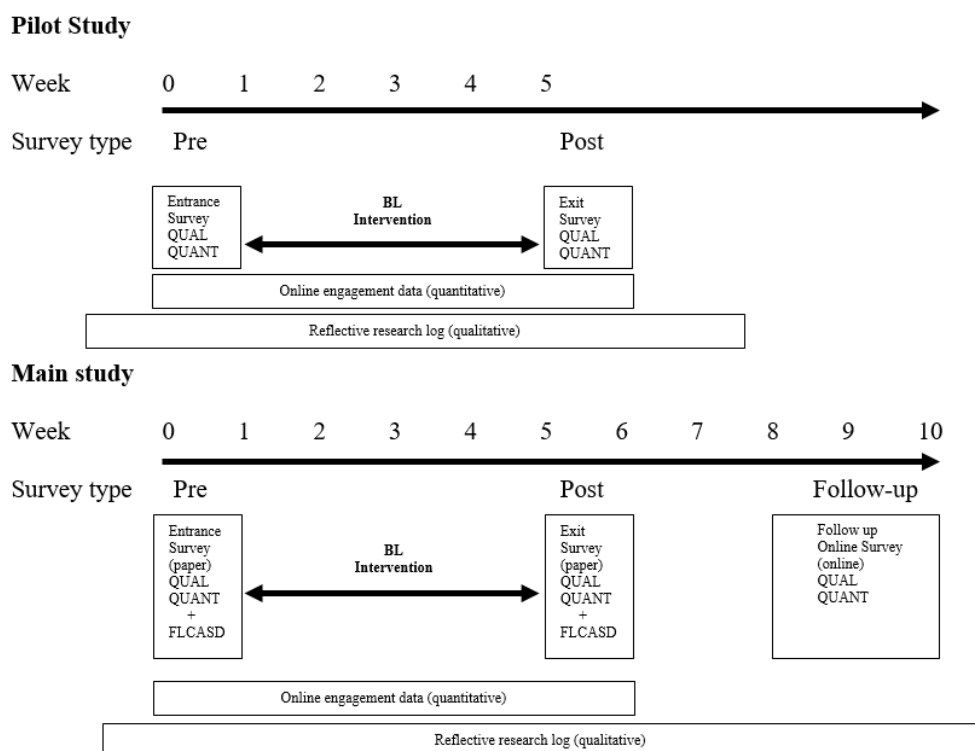


Figure 3.1 Research, format, weighting and timing

3.4.1 Mixed Methods

A mixed methods approach can be an effective way to “simultaneously contribute distinct epistemological perspectives to a multifaceted and highly-contextualized phenomenon” (Almutairi, Gardner, & McCarthy, 2014, p. 2). The advantages of mixing qualitative and quantitative approaches include enriching the experience for participants, potentially increasing their number, “instrument fidelity” such as fine tuning via a pilot study, “treatment integrity” where the researcher has the opportunity to assess the reliability of interventions, and “significance enhancement” which aids in data interpretation (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006, p. 497). It is for these reasons that a concurrent mixed methods approach was adopted in this study.

Creswell (2013, p. 266) makes four recommendations when undertaking a mixed methods approach:

- Both quantitative and qualitative data should be collected and analysed;
- Procedures for data collection should be rigorous with adequate sampling, sources, analysis;
- The mixed methods design should take into account the timing of data collection and weighting;
- The two data forms should be integrated through a merging and connecting of the data.

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed. At the design phase, it was felt that quantitative data would be weighted more heavily since the FLCASD was considered a powerful and well-researched tool. However, survey comments and reflections in the research log also provided valuable qualitative insights so the decision was made to weigh each form of data equally.

From the perspective of the theoretical framework, data was needed which would help inform the technological, social, cultural and contextual elements in play. For instance, survey comments were collected to provide richer data related to the changes in participants' interests and their likes or dislikes after the completion of the online activities in both qualitative and quantitative forms. Qualitative data was also collected to provide insight into context and culture in the surveys and through observations recorded in the research log (Holloway & Galvin, 2016).

Data from all sources underwent a rigorous analysis including several phases of pattern matching in order to distil data into meaningful groupings. According to Yin (2017), pattern matching is an effective technique to employ in a case study in order "to be mutually illuminating, thereby producing findings that are greater than the sum of parts" (Wooley, 2009, p. 7). Every effort was made to be transparent and to address concerns suggested by Creswell (2013) and others in the design and execution of this study.

A mixed methods approach can enhance rigour in the design, analysis and reporting of findings. Levitt, Creswell, Josselson, Bamberg, Frost and Suárez-Orozco (2018) recommend following the Mixed Methods Article Reporting Standards (MMARS) at each stage of the research undertaking in order to improve trustworthiness. For example, MMARS sets standards for the physical layout of the manuscript, such as the title page and abstract up to the research design and analysis. In terms of the explanation of methods, writers should include a table of sources of qualitative and quantitative data for clarity as well as an explanation and justification of the reasons why each kind of data was collected and how the data was analysed in order to meet “the standards of both quantitative and qualitative research methodology in the design, implementation, and reporting stages” (Levitt et al., 2018, p. 43). This study incorporated several of these recommendations, for example, how the data was combined is presented, the approaches are explained with rationales provided, and their relationship to the researcher is explained. These steps were taken in an effort to enhance transparency to help the reader independently assess the validity of the research undertaking.

Mixed methods provided the opportunity to explore quantitative and qualitative data relevant to the frameworks of connectivism, social constructivism and SCT. Quantitative data was used to assess where, when and how long participants engaged with the online activities. Qualitative data provided insights into how students engaged with each other, the lesson materials and the BL environment through comments in the research log and surveys and in quantitative data derived from surveys and online engagement data.

3.4.2 Case Study

A case study approach was selected in this context for the following reasons; it is usually comprised of a representative population of a larger group, it can encompass the

context of learning in its natural setting and be “richly descriptive (in order to) bring to life the complexity of the many variables inherent in the phenomenon being studied” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2015, p. 16). A case study approach also offered opportunities to better understand the interplay between the contextual and social factors evident in this study (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Tellis, 1997).

However, Zainal (2007) suggests that there are several common criticisms of case studies. One concern is lack of rigour. In instances of lengthy studies, the researcher may have been careless when collecting, recording and analysing data and findings, thus leading to poorly supported conclusions. Case studies often contain large volumes of data which may have been collected over a long period of time and require careful attention to data management and organisation (Zainal, 2007). Furthermore, case studies are often undertaken by a single individual so concerns about managing data without an additional researcher being present are a potential risk. There is also a potential for bias when only a single researcher interprets and analyses the data. Case studies may be based on small samples or even a single subject so there is some question as to the applicability of any findings to the general population (Yin, 2013). These concerns should be addressed in order to strengthen the case study design.

These concerns were addressed in several ways. Careful record keeping and transparency were employed in order to strengthen reliability. Reflective research notes consisting of thoughts, concerns and observations were immediately recorded in the log book whenever possible. When it was not possible to record directly into the log book, memos were used and then transferred to the log book. Gerring (2004) argues that if the case under study is “especially representative of the phenomenon under study (“typical” cases)” (p. 16), the case may be considered suitable to be used as causally related to broader situations. This case study closely represented typical first year lower level freshmen students who have

recently completed high stakes entrance examinations; therefore, their behaviour may be applicable to larger groups.

Yin (2017) recommends a case study strategy in order to investigate a real world phenomenon but warns that a successful case study requires an array of data sources in order to triangulate data findings. Through an investigation of quantitative and qualitative data, a case study strategy is well suited to investigate this context, particularly the social and cultural nuances and interplay between the participants (Tellis, 1997). Almutairi, Gardner and McCarthy (2014) posit that when employing a case study approach where a range of data collection and analysis methods are employed in order to explain “a multifaceted and highly-contextualized phenomenon” (p. 2), a case study represents the most effective approach given the complex and unique phenomena at play.

3.4.3 Data trustworthiness, validity and reliability

In order to increase trustworthiness with respect to quantitative data, Greene (2014) recommends addressing credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In an effort to enhance credibility, every effort was made to triangulate and confirm results by examining a range of data sources including notes that were recorded in the reflexive research log as qualitative data. Triangulation is not a single way to confirm findings but rather should be seen as a method to more deeply understand an issue. As Flick (2018) comments, “triangulation aims at broader, deeper, more comprehensive understandings of what is studied – and that often includes ... discrepancies and contradictions in findings” (p. 35). Themes generated from entrance and exit surveys were overlaid at the conclusion of the study for further comparison.

Persistent observation helps to identify the most pertinent issues in a given research project and thereby facilitates efforts to address them (Greene, 2014). The pilot study was a

valuable tool in this thesis by uncovering issues so they could be addressed in the main study. As an example, participants found it difficult to understand how to complete the classroom and online activities; therefore, a more detailed task sheet was designed and implemented in the main study. Transferability and dependability can be strengthened by transcribing in-depth the situation, context and the research process in the research log. Copious contemporaneous notes were taken and have been included in this thesis to enhance transferability and transparency. Finally, confirmability can be addressed through maintaining a reflexive journal including thoughts and concerns leading up to the studies, daily activities during the studies including observations of the participants, and in the days after the study including during the data analysis. The researcher's years of experience in the fields of EFL, online learning and HE in Japan inevitably shaped these comments and observations and helped to identify potential issues as well as solving problems when they arose.

3.4.4 Data integrity

In order to enhance the integrity of qualitative data, it is important to address four areas of concern: internal validity, construct validity, bias, and objectivity (Mariotto, Zanni, & Moraes, 2014). In order to enhance internal validity, this research established a research framework while triangulation was addressed through the collection of multiple sources of data investigated using pattern matching. Where the data uncovered a questionable or unique phenomenon, other data sources were examined to investigate the phenomenon further, including from differing perspectives. For instance, when the participants showed a reluctance to engage with the online activities outside of the scheduled class time, an analysis of the entire range of available data was undertaken in order to provide a holistic overview of the behaviours and attitudes of the participants, thereby enhancing internal validity. Construct validity refers to how much the study investigates what it is designed to investigate and

should be addressed in the data collection phase (Gibbert, Ruigrok, & Wicki, 2008). In order to address construct validity, a clear chain of evidence was recorded in the research log book and every effort was made to ensure triangulation of findings by collecting data from a range of sources. Internal validity refers to the data analysis phase and relates to whether there is “a plausible causal argument [and] logical reasoning that is powerful and compelling enough to defend the research conclusions” (Gibbert et al., 2008, p. 1466). Several data sources were analysed at different times. For instance, upon receiving the entrance and exit surveys, an analysis was performed in order to search for outlying data and to assist in modifying the next survey to address or more deeply investigate phenomena. Writing in the research log after an investigation of the exit survey results, the follow-up online survey was modified to gather data to investigate the effect of the BL environment, including the atmosphere, classroom and classmates. An overall examination of the data, including coding, was performed on the study’s conclusion in order to avoid coding data that does not fit (Oppenheim, 2004). However, a real time ongoing sensitivity to phenomena during the BL intervention was important in ensuring that data could be collected in subsequent surveys that would help to answer questions that arose during the study. External validity was addressed by providing “a clear rationale for the study” (Gibbert et al., 2008, p. 1468), consisting of a mix of extensive experience of the culture and a thorough investigation of the available literature. The researcher was aware of governmental and local institutional objectives for improving graduates’ English language skills while this researcher’s experience in this context helped to inform the scope of the intervention as well as the study’s rationale. Although an investigation of the recent literature did not locate studies that shared a similar context, through transparency, honesty and careful reporting of the research process, findings from this study might be combined with those from future cases to form “replication logic” (Yin, 2013, p. 37) which may be more generalizable to larger populations.

Gibbert et al. (2008) suggest that, to enhance reliability, the researcher should outline the research procedures clearly and organise and store results to allow replication at a later date. To this end, data was organised in a spreadsheet and will be made available as appropriate while protecting the identities of participants and the data's fidelity. While this research was based on a small sample group over a relatively short period of time, the measures adopted in research design and data collection were reported as transparently as possible to ensure that validity and reliability can be assessed by readers and that similar interventions can test the study's findings.

The researcher's colleagues, due to their experience and differing perspectives, were also consulted to seek out alternative perspectives and these were taken into consideration in the process of designing and revising the research tools. During the preparation for the pilot study, the second instructor provided input into lesson content, timing and the way the activities should be explained to students. The Dean of the department needed to be informed on progress, helped to maintain ethical regulations and offered perspective and assistance with respect to translation of the surveys and the respondents' comments.

The collection and handling of data was based on Yin's (2013) three principles: using multiple sources, creating a database, and maintaining a chain of evidence, all in order to enhance "truth, applicability, consistency, and neutrality" (p. 11). Qualitative and quantitative data were collected using three surveys; paper-based entrance and exit surveys and a follow-up online survey. Quantitative data was derived from logs on a Moodle website consisting of data such as login times, duration, frequency of visits, user location, and when participants engaged with the online activities. A database was created using a spreadsheet, which allowed data to be combined and viewed from a range of perspectives. After the data was integrated on the study's completion, a holistic approach was undertaken to search for patterns that could be used to provide an overview of the phenomenon under investigation.

The research log served as a record for qualitative observations throughout the study including during the design and execution of both the pilot and main study as well as the data collection and analysis. It also served to track the data handling and the chain of evidence in terms of how the data was stored and protected.

3.5 Design Process

3.5.1 Positionality, implications of acting as both practitioner and researcher

The position of the researcher, also referred to as ‘worldview’, is shaped by a researcher’s background, life experiences, interests and field of research, the impact of their belief system and their approach to their research topic. In understanding how worldview affects the design and approach to research, Creswell (2013) suggests addressing three components; understanding the study’s philosophical worldview, explaining how the worldview shaped the study, and outlining considerations for the study.

In this study, the researcher’s long teaching career and personal view on learning denote a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm. According to Petersen and Gencel (2013), a worldview and its ‘reality’ is constructed by humans in their own unique context so it is necessary to design the study such that data which can inform the context, and the participants actions within that context, can be collected and analysed. Every learner has a unique story that informs their learning, thereby meaning making is different for individuals (Creswell, 2013). From the constructivist/interpretivist perspective, the researcher’s worldview shaped this study in that the researcher had to be in a position to observe and interpret the interactions of learners as they created meaning in their surroundings (McMahon, 2017). Culture, history and social factors played a role in interpreting meaning so the researcher had to gather sufficient data to be able to investigate these interactions and

assess the impact on the research design in the context in which the learning occurred (Creswell, 2013).

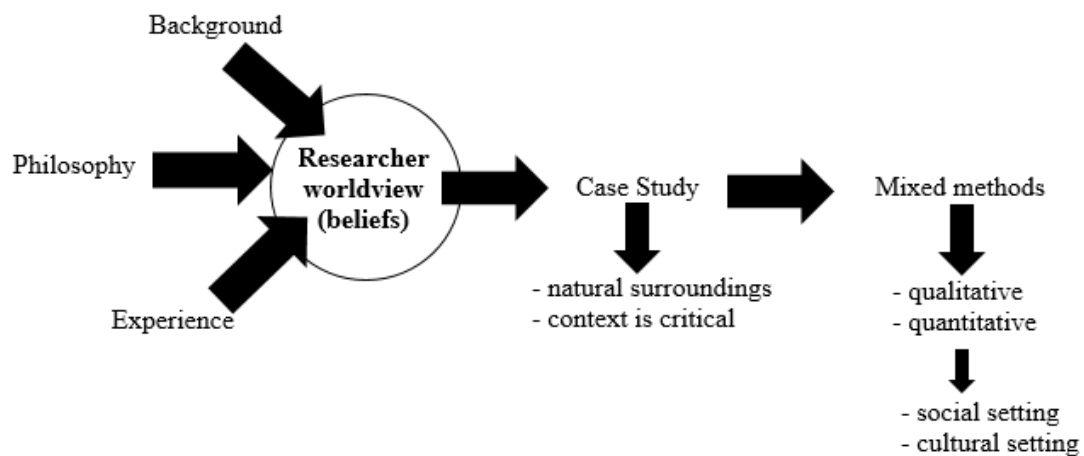


Figure 3.2 Worldview and research design

All of these factors played a role in the design of this study and in shaping an appropriate research methodology. When using a constructivist or interpretivist framework, Peterson and Gencel (2013) recommend using a case study approach, including surveys designed to provide qualitative and quantitative data in order to help to highlight the social and cultural factors at play in the study (Figure 1.3). Therefore, this study employed a case study and mixed methods approach, including surveys and several other streams of qualitative and quantitative data to ensure that the phenomena under study could be examined from several perspectives.

As Patton (2015) contends, it can be both beneficial and challenging for the researcher to act as participant and observer in a research initiative. A practitioner/researcher has “the power to be transformative at the institutional, communal, interpersonal, and individual levels” (Ravitch, 2014, p. 9). However, Coghlan (2015) warns of the myriad ethical concerns that emerge when the teacher is also the researcher, particularly in terms of decision-making where researchers must be aware of the positioning and bias present in their

own value systems and conceptual frameworks. It was desirable, therefore, for the practitioner/researcher to be as transparent as possible in every aspect of the research undertaking, including explaining rationale for every step from design to conclusions while being forthcoming in addressing errors and shortcomings in the execution of the study and in framing the researcher's stance (Alexakos, 2015). Cowie, Otrell-Cass, Moreland, Jones, Cooper, and Taylor (2010) recommend that researcher-practitioners use multiple sources of data and strong data analysis, which takes into consideration the researcher's own biases in order to ensure that the research is authentic and overcomes the challenges of the researcher also playing the role of practitioner.

In this study, the researcher was also an insider due his long career in Japan. Unluer (2012) outlines three advantages for an insider conducting research: that the researcher has a deep knowledge of the culture in which the research is taking place; that they understand the culture sufficiently that the research can proceed smoothly; and that the insider possesses the insight to assist in the "telling and the judging of truth" (p. 1). Given the importance of the recognising, recording and interpreting the social and cultural factors in this study as part of SCT, the insider position was extremely important in this study. The researcher possesses awareness of the uniqueness of this context through extensive interactions with similar learners. In addition, the researcher's knowledge of Japan also helped to inform how students would engage with each other and technology (connectivism) and how they could be expected to work together in building meaning through contact with other students and the instructor (social constructivism).

However, there are concerns with insider researchers. Finefter-Rosenbluh (2017), warns that they may be so close to the research that they find it difficult to withdraw themselves sufficiently in order to be able to provide a detached, unbiased point of view. Additionally the researcher may overlook certain behaviours as routine due to familiarity

with the culture and context and may assume they know the participants' views and attitudes (Unler, 2013). These issues represented a very real concern in this context given the higher status afforded teachers in Japan in general and Japanese speaking, foreign-looking males in particular. There was concern that the participants may have joined the research under duress given that the request came from the teacher. There was also a risk that students may have responded to questions about the activities more favourably anticipating what they feel the researcher may have wanted to hear. To address this issue, students were told that they could choose to opt out of the study during the research explanation session before the orientation session and participants were reminded of this option during the weekly activities as well. Furthermore, there is a risk that reactions to the BL intervention by the participants may be missed, or misinterpreted, as such behaviours may have become common to the researcher over years of experience in Japan. Additionally, findings were discussed specifically with the Dean and generally with colleagues to elicit other perspectives. However, it was this very insight into the behaviour of the participants and overarching cultural nuance that helped the researcher to provide insight regarding contextual factors, so great care was taken to record these phenomena and to take them into consideration in the analysis phase. In addition, Finefter-Rosenbluh (2017) stresses the importance of taking a social perspective, meaning "getting beyond one's own literal or psychological point of view to consider the perspective of another person who is likely to have a different psychological point of view" (p. 3). It was critical that the researcher was reflective and able to step back from the research in order to consider findings from the participants' perspectives. This was done by discussing findings with the Dean, reflecting on comments in the research log, taking a break between analysis sessions, then returning with a fresh perspective, as well as reengaging with the more recent literature. The researcher's familiarity with the context also provided sensitivity regarding the participants' perspective at every stage.

3.5.2 Reflexivity

A further method to enhance trustworthiness suggested by Greene (2014) is for the researcher to be reflexive; to recognize the many roles of the researcher and the impact of those roles at every stage of the research. The reflexive researcher engages in an ongoing dialogue and analysis, “a critical self-evaluation of the researcher’s positionality” (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2017, p. 2) in order to address issues such as how the researcher may affect the study and how the participants may respond differently in the researcher’s presence.

Researcher reflexivity helps to enhance transparency, increase self-awareness and to question assumptions made by the researcher (Engward & Davis, 2015). Trustworthiness can be further enhanced by increasing credibility, namely by ensuring that the data actually addresses the phenomena under study, that the data is dependable, and by considering the impact of the given context and culture on the findings (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

In order to be reflexive, Engward and Davis (2015) suggest that researchers consider how data is gathered and how this may have been influenced by the researcher. Researchers should reflect on how their personal perspective might impact the data analysis. In addition, researchers should also be clear about context and identify the power relationships that affect, in turn, the study, the data collection, and its analysis, use and reporting. Finally, the researcher should be transparent about claims of authority, their authority related to the field of study, and the use of language. Each of these considerations have been addressed throughout this thesis and every effort was made not only to be reflexive at every stage of the research design and execution but in the writing of this thesis as well.

3.5.3 Ethical considerations

The University of Liverpool policy on research integrity (University of Liverpool, 2017) outlines several issues that must be addressed in order to ensure ethical and responsible research. Overarching guidelines include ensuring that research is honest, compliant with laws and university policies, and that accountability of conduct is ensured. Further, all communications must be transparent and open and representatives must be professional, fair, impartial and demonstrate good stewardship, care and rigour in the design of the research. These policies closely match those of the local institution and every effort was made to follow and abide by the guidelines in all interactions with subjects, staff and the institutions concerned.

At the institutional level, this study required ethical approval from both institutions (see Appendices 3 & 4). This was sought and, although several revisions were required to timing and design, approval was granted in both cases. One consideration from both institutions concerned the handling of data. Research data, particularly participant identities, was protected to the greatest extent possible. Access to the website administrator account was password protected and data was also accessed from computers protected by passwords. In terms of participant confidentiality, all forms, documents and findings were kept in a locked desk and on a computer protected by a password. Research data was backed up on a separate drive which is also password protected and kept in a locked desk as per ethical guidelines.

When dealing with subjects, there are several ethical concerns regarding respect and care. The subjects in this context were somewhat vulnerable given that, in the hierarchal nature of Japanese culture, it can be difficult for students to refuse a request from their instructor. This concern was addressed when introducing the study by repeatedly assuring all subjects that they could refuse to participate or that they could elect to participate, then change their mind, and withdraw at any time. In fact, three students elected not to join the

study and several others did not submit all survey forms while others did not complete online activities so it was felt that the subjects were comfortable in refusing requests related to their participation in the study. Students were handed the Personal Information Sheet (PIS) (Appendix 5) and the research consent form (see Appendix 6) prior to the orientation week and were asked to discuss it with friends and family and then sign and return it the following week if they chose to participate.

3.5.4 A model for the study

Following the pilot study, changes were made to the research design to include the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Survey (FLCAS) in redesigned entrance and exit surveys as an additional source of quantitative data. An examination of previous research uncovered a study which also used a slightly modified version of the FLCAS, translated into Japanese, in a similar context. This offered not only a model and academic rationale to implement the FLCAS, but also a benchmark against which to compare this study's FLCAS scores. The research, undertaken by Yashima, Noels, Shizuka, Takeuchi, Yamane and Yoshizawa (2009) (henceforth referred to as the Yashima study) was also set in a Japanese university context although the FLCAS was only administered once, at the conclusion of the course. The Yashima paper offers several important points of similarity. In both cases, the participants were non-English major first-year students in compulsory EFL classes attending universities in Japan. All participants had at least six years of classroom experience studying EFL with most having studied English for longer. Although there were significantly fewer participants in this study (26 participants versus 183 in the Yashima study), the mix of males and females (M/F) was similar; 43% M/57% F in this study to the 57% M/43% F in the Yashima study. Most importantly, the Yashima study employed a Japanese language version of the FLCAS survey and subscales which provided a valuable tool for implementation in

this study with only minor modifications. In addition, Dr. Kimberly Noels, a well-known researcher and expert in the field of SDT, was a member of the Yashima team, which adds an important level of expertise and a Western perspective to the design of the study and the interpretation of the findings. The research also included exhaustive statistical analysis using FLCAS and its subscales, particularly FLCAS scores and breakdown by gender, which provided a valuable basis for comparison with this study.

Overall, the Yashima study represents a similar group of Japanese students (Table 3.2), of similar ages, in similar programmes (with compulsory English language classes) being assessed using a very similar survey tool. One other important consideration concerns the timing of the surveys. In this study, the participants were in the first weeks of their first year at university while in the Yashima study the participants were surveyed at the close of their first year. This is an important consideration when comparing and interpreting the results while this and other limitations will be discussed in Chapter 6. However, Yashima et al. (2009) is the best available study against which to compare the results of this research.

Table 3.3 Demographic comparison: Yashima et al. (2009) and this study

Category	Yashima study	This study
Participants	First year students - end of first year	First year - start of first year
Number	183	26
Surveys	one - end of course	two - pre and post BL intervention
Gender break down	43.1% female 56.9% male	57.7% female 42.3% male
English experience	6 yrs + = 100%	6 yrs + = 57.7% 3 yrs + = 100%
Faculties	Law, Economics, Commerce, Letters	Business

3.6 The participants

The participants were students drawn from a first-year English oral communication (OC) class of non-English majors. The class was selected because it was among the lower ranked majors at the institution according to published *hensachi* (the Japanese university ranking system), and among the bottom three streamed levels of that department. It was anticipated by the researcher that those having to take this mandatory class were likely to have the least number of reasons for interest in, and lowest motivation toward, EFL, therefore providing a much more relevant test for the BL intervention. The group of students had not been taught by the instructor previously so that may also have lessened the chance for unintended coercion.

3.7 The pilot study

A pilot study was undertaken in the fall of 2015 consisting of two classes (65 participants) and two instructors in order to streamline data collection, evaluate research tools and assess the research design (Yin, 2013). A pilot study can also help to improve question design and clarity by learning from questions that may have led to unusable data (Oppenheim, 1992). The pilot study was originally planned to include two classes from two different departments in partnership including a second, volunteer instructor and their class to provide a wider perspective, and an additional observer and participants from a different department to aid in triangulation. The volunteer instructor agreed to utilise the same materials and lesson plan for the same length of time and to participate in a follow-up debriefing with the researcher at the completion of the study. However, the volunteer instructor found executing the BL materials difficult and withdrew after the third week.

The pilot study helped to identify several areas of the research plan that needed improvement. The design and implementation of surveys and the ease by which the

participants could access and complete the online activities required simplification. The pilot also revealed that some of the surveys did not provide sufficiently robust data to address the research questions, so further modifications to the research plan were implemented. In one case, the surveys did not contain sufficient questions related to the BL environment, therefore new questions were incorporated. The pilot study also highlighted pedagogical issues such as the need to make a clearer connection for participants between the online solo activity and the textbook theme so a more robust lesson introduction was added at the start of each class containing a review of the previous week's lesson to provide continuity in relation to the ongoing weekly activities. Although online learning provides opportunities for flexible interactions between students (Gordon, 2014), the pilot study made it clear that additional activities were needed to allow the instructor greater latitude in the timing of activities, thereby allowing students to interact at their own pace. This concept and others, which became evident as a result of the pilot study, were incorporated into the design of the main research (further pilot study details can be found in Appendix 7).

3.8 Data Collection

3.8.1 Survey design

The study contained three surveys; pre (entrance), post (exit) paper-based surveys (Appendices 8 & 9) and an online follow-up survey (Appendix 10). The paper-based surveys were administered immediately before and after the BL intervention while the online survey was made available to participants starting two weeks after the completion of the BL intervention. The timing of the surveys, the method (paper or online) and the composition – qualitative and quantitative data – were shaped by the connectivism, social constructivism and SCT theoretical frameworks such that the data necessary to inform those perspectives would be collected. Since minor changes were made to the wording and layout of the original

FLCAS in Japanese taken from the Yashima study, it will be referred to as the FLCAS derivative (FLCASD). The FLCASD was administered as part of both the Entrance and Exit surveys. The surveys were based on designs by Lim, Morris and Kupritz (2014), who undertook a similar study exploring the impact of an online learning versus BL intervention. Those surveys contained a mix of open and closed questions including questions scored on a Likert scale to gauge the students' satisfaction with and enjoyment of the courses. The principles employed in designing those surveys helped in the design of this study's surveys including the layout of responses, question wording and question order. The surveys for this study included closed, multiple choice questions for speed and ease in addition to open questions, such as comment boxes, in order to probe respondents' opinions on activities and ease of access more deeply (Oppenheim, 1992).

Since questions invoking strong feelings can affect subsequent responses (Yang & Hinkle, 2012), the FLCASD was placed after other questions on the survey. The FLCASD contains emotion-evoking questions such as "*I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language*" so questions about the students' satisfaction with the BL intervention were placed before these more emotionally-charged FLCASD questions. Question order was also taken into consideration in the online follow-up survey where questions about similar topics were purposely spaced apart to reduce the assimilation effect (Yang & Hinkle, 2012). Questions querying similar concepts, such as those about the PIS and the students' feelings about their decision to participate in the study, were also purposely separated in the follow-up online survey administered at the conclusion of the study.

When utilizing surveys, consideration must be taken to ensure that sampling errors, such as variance and bias, are minimized (Czaja & Blair, 2005). Since each survey was only administered once, the variance error was not a major factor but addressing any unintended bias required careful consideration. Bias related to the collection and analysis of data was

discussed earlier. However, there was also a concern about bias in the design of the surveys. The researcher has a bias toward online learning so it was important that this was not allowed to affect survey responses. When querying feelings towards an activity, respondents were always given equal choice to indicate their like or dislike of an activity and open questions and comment boxes were provided throughout the surveys to allow participants to expand on their answers if they chose. Czaja and Blair (2005) suggest that the best way to identify and overcome errors is to obtain a sufficient response rate.

There are several factors which affect survey response rates including the type of survey (paper or online), the method (by post versus handed out face-to-face), the subject and even the instructor's skill, charisma and gender (Al-Maamari, 2015). Nulty (2008) points out that in order to determine an adequate response rate, it is necessary to consider potential responses from those who chose not to respond. If non-respondents differ greatly from respondents and if their answers would have differed significantly, then the sample may be considered biased. To overcome this, it is important to increase sample size and response rate whenever possible although "neither of these steps guarantees a reduction in either error or bias" (Nulty, 2008, p. 307).

In this study, the three surveys and response rates are shown in Table 3.3. When considering the results' potential bias and usability, it is also important to assess the potential responses of those who chose not to complete the surveys (Nulty, 2008). The biggest difference among the three surveys was a drop in the percentage of male respondents but there were also two respondents who did not include their research number in the follow up online survey. While it is always better to have more respondents, the response rate was above or in line with the recommended response rate of 48% for similar cohorts of research in the social sciences (Chapman & Joines, 2017). Other issues related to the applicability of results to broader settings will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Table 3.4 Survey response rates and gender breakdown

	Survey 1	Survey 2	Survey 3
	paper	paper	online
potential respondents	26	26	26
actual	26	19	10
response rate	100%	73.1%	38.4%
recommended (30 participants)	48%	48%	48%
gender breakdown (M/F) (42.3%/57.7% in cohort)	42.3%/57.7%	36.1%/63.8%	(12.5%/87.5%)**

** Two respondents did not include their research numbers for identification

3.8.2 Survey issues

Since a major factor in this research focused on *interest* in EFL study, accurately translating and interpreting meaning based on the survey responses from Japanese into English was critical in helping to overcome or at least limit errors. Every effort was made to interpret the respondents' feelings correctly including discussing each of the translations with the Dean prior to and following data analysis.

The purpose of the final follow-up online survey was primarily to gather data specific to anomalies that occurred during the research. For example, prior to the start of both the pilot study and the main study, many students immediately signed and returned the 13-page participation paperwork. The document was extensive, largely because it was published in two languages, so the researcher suggested that potential participants take it home and read it. The fact that some students immediately completed it and handed it back was not surprising but it was important that they were aware of their rights, so questions were included in the online survey to further investigate this phenomenon (Appendix 10: Questions 2, 3, 5 & 8). Two further issues explored in the follow-up survey included the participants' reasons for joining the study and the degree to which they read and understood the extensive paperwork (research outline and participation form).

3.8.3 Administering the consent forms, research outline and surveys

The research began with a research introduction conducted in Japanese, as required by the ethical guidelines of the local institution. The PIS, PCS and research outline, prepared in both English and Japanese, were distributed at the end of that session and students were asked to read them at home and decide if they wanted to participate in the study. A week later, the orientation session (Week 0) was held when the students were handed the paper-based entrance survey. It was a conscious decision throughout this study to offer all research forms and surveys to all members of the class and to collect forms from all those who chose to respond. The paper-based exit survey was handed to students at the end of the online activities (Week 5) so that the participants' feelings about the online activities and environment could be captured as soon as possible. Some respondents also completed the exit survey in Week 7.

The follow-up online survey, which was also piloted, was implemented using Survey Monkey and included ten closed questions with optional comment boxes. It was felt that participants were becoming less interested in completing paper surveys and less reliable in returning them. This was evidenced by declining response rates and comments in the research log that students asked repeatedly for another copy to complete. Therefore, a shorter, online survey was designed to make it easy to complete and impossible to misplace. At the beginning of the class in Week 9, all students were given a short explanation about Survey Monkey and an introduction to the final online survey. Then a link was opened on the site where the main activities were taking place and participants were asked to complete the survey if they wished. The online survey link was kept active until the end of Week 10 and then the survey was closed.

The necessity and planning of the orientation session as well as the need to familiarize potential participants with the logistics of both classroom and online activities the following week were based on connectivism, which also shaped the online engagement training. The design of the information sessions, the explanation, the need for a Japanese staff member to be present were observed to the extent possible with SCT in mind while reflections recorded in the research log provided insight into the roles of culture and social interaction which took place in the sessions themselves. Social constructivism guided the way activities were designed as participants interacted with each other and the instructor in completing the activities.

3.8.4 The orientation session

In the orientation session (week 0), students were handed a slip of paper with the website address for the online activities, a randomized user name and password, and were instructed to turn on the PCs, log in to the university system and access the website and activities (Appendix 11). Usernames consisted of randomised numbers in order to ensure, to the extent possible, participant anonymity when engaging with the online activities. Whenever participants posted to the website, only their randomised, anonymous username was visible. An additional goal of this session was to address a concern about a lack of IT proficiency, which became apparent in the pilot study where many students struggled with logging in to the university computer system, opening a browser and navigating the internet. The orientation session included sample activities that required students to demonstrate the fundamental IT skills that would be required in subsequent weeks. Students who struggled were assisted in preparation for the main study to start the following week (Week 1).

In the pilot study, respondents indicated that they found it difficult to move from the textbook to the online activities, to remember the website address and to understand the tasks

that were required. At the completion of the orientation session, the students were given a research booklet with a bright yellow cover for easy visibility, containing the research outline, a weekly task sheet and five weeks of activities and content taken from the course textbook. Students were encouraged to write in the booklet and were instructed to bring it with them every week. Those who finished activities more quickly were assigned optional activities in the workbook or were asked to assist others.

3.9 Blended Learning Intervention

3.9.1 The BL environment

The intervention took place in a dedicated computer classroom that differs significantly from a bright, open style classroom with movable desks, more typically used for language classes. Specific components of the BL environment, such as communication with the instructor and the participants' perceptions of the atmosphere, content, classmates, classroom and computer, were queried in the exit and follow-up online surveys in order to gauge the students' feelings towards the environment as separate from the activities themselves. In addition, the students' feelings toward the learning environment, such as their feelings about social classroom interaction, group dynamics and the use of PCs, were queried in the surveys. Observations of the participants' interactions with each other, their choice of seating arrangements, their comments about the paperwork and surveys were recorded in the researcher log book, as were reflections on the design and execution of the online activities and the BL environment.

3.9.2 The BL activities

The BL activities were integrated over five consecutive weeks with the online activities structured to resemble – as closely as possible – the course textbook activities including the number and style of questions and the lesson theme. This similarity and the

cyclical process of completing the textbook and then moving immediately to the online activity enabled participants to compare the way that traditional textbook activities can also be offered in an online format. The design of the activities, requirements for completion, access and the decision about pair or solo activities were also based on the theoretical framework. Each week participants were assigned five activities: a solo activity, a pair activity, a discussion, a homework activity and an optional game (Figure 3.4). A detailed explanation of the individual weekly activities can be found in Appendix 12.

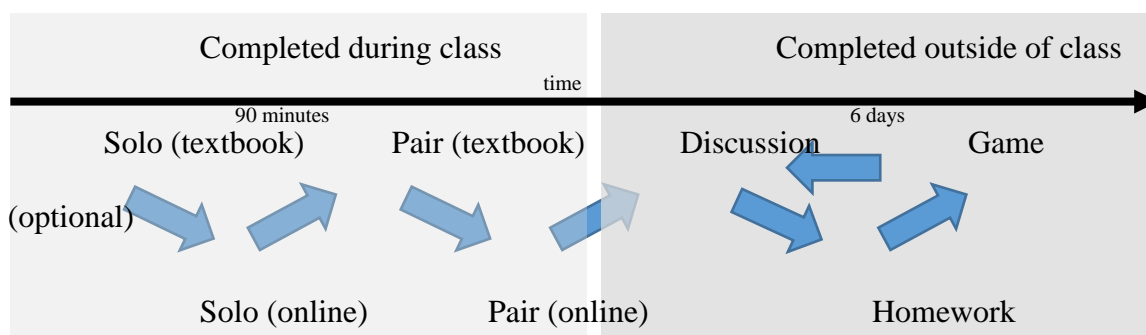


Figure 3.5 BL activities (flow and timing)

3.10 Summary

This section began by identifying a gap in the knowledge and literature related to BL and first-year students early in their university careers. The research aims, objectives and questions derived from the positionality and background of the researcher were then explained. The case study approach and mixed methods data collection were explained alongside the rationale for these decisions. Since the researcher is also a practitioner, it was necessary to investigate how the role of the insider/practitioner can present the benefits and challenges as well as how these challenges were addressed in this study. This research initiative started with a pilot study, which was explained while the lessons learned and their implementation in the main study were discussed. Next, the tools used to gather quantitative and qualitative data, surveys, online engagement data and the researcher's observations

recorded in the log were introduced. Finally, the chronological process of explaining the research, collecting informed consent, orienting the class to the study and the environment including a detailed explanation of each of the BL activities was discussed and a weekly breakdown was provided.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by outlining the demographic information of the population used for the sample. The next section will first examine the validity of the qualitative data derived from the FLCASD, second it will outline the quantitative findings, third it will introduce the qualitative findings and explain the coding process used in the exit survey comment analysis, and finally it will sketch other qualitative findings. Additional findings from an in-depth investigation of both qualitative and quantitative findings uncovering two additional phenomena are also outlined. The chapter closes with a short discussion of three overarching themes derived from an overview of the entire data which will form the basis of the next chapter.

4.2 Population and sample

The study's participants were streamed into a mandatory, first-year English conversation class at a Japanese university in central Japan. Of the 29 members of the class, 26 volunteered to participate in the study. All 26 participants completed the entrance survey, 19 completed the exit survey and ten completed the optional follow-up online survey. There were concerns expressed in the literature in Chapter 2 about Japanese students potentially feeling pressured to participate in a study conducted by their instructor due to the hierarchal nature of Japanese culture. However, three students chose not to participate and several others did not complete all activities and surveys. This suggests that students felt comfortable in refusing to participate.

The participants consisted of 57.7% (n=15) females and 42.3% (n=11) males averaging 18.3 years of age. A total of 7.7% (n=2) of respondents first experienced English study in elementary school, 50% (n=13) in junior high school with the remainder, 42.3%

(n=11), first experiencing English study in high school. In terms of online or social networking (SN) interaction, 96% (n=25) of respondents reported using blogs, Facebook, Twitter or the LINE application, while 42% (n=11) played online games and 96% (n=25) used email. One participant indicated that they had tried a form of online study before.

4.3 Presentation of Quantitative Data

4.3.1 Reliability Tests based on the FLCASD main survey and subscales

Reliability tests were performed to assess the viability of quantitative data from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Survey Derivative (FLCASD) as well as the five subscales (A-E) which were employed in the entrance and exit surveys. Table 4.1 shows the Cronbach's Alpha scores, calculated using SPSS version 25, by test section. Only scores of between .70 and .95 were used in this study's analysis as this particular range of scores is considered reliable in the social sciences (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Scores for C - Introjected regulation, collected from the exit survey, fell outside of this range and were therefore excluded from further findings and analysis.

Table 4.1 Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) calculated using SPSS version 25

	Entrance (n=24)	Exit (n=19)
Main FLCAS (33 questions)	.779	.844
FLCAS Subscales - combined (20)	.841	.753
A only - Amotivation (3)	.928	.906
B only - External regulation (3)	.802	.773
C only- Introjected regulation (2)	.827	<u>.377</u>
D only - Identified regulation (3)	.918	.794
E only - Intrinsic motivation (9)	.900	.862

4.3.2 Factor Analysis of the FLCASD (entrance and exit)

A Principal Component Analysis was performed on the FLCASD results from each of the entrance and exit surveys. After an initial test using a Promax Orthogonal rotation, none of the scores in the Component Correlation Matrix were greater than .32 or -.32, therefore the analysis was retried using a Varimax rotation (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). This resulted in four distinct factors in the entrance survey, accounting for 54.6% of variances, and four factors, accounting for 58.9% of variances with high communalities, in the exit survey (Tables 4.2 and 4.3). These thresholds were chosen in order to remain consistent with Yashima et al.'s (2009) findings where only correlations greater than 0.40 were included.

Table 4.2 Entrance survey factor analysis

	Rotated Component Matrix				
	Factor				Communalities
FLCASD question	1	2	3	4	
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.	0.857				0.883
10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.	0.845				0.864
20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.	0.592				0.824
15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	0.584				0.867
27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	0.577				0.856
7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.	0.452				0.633
12. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.		0.900			0.900
24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.		0.805			0.916
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.		0.733			0.758
16. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.	0.483	0.511			0.914
17. I often feel like not going to my language class.			0.811		0.822
1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.			0.793		0.820
26. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.			0.769		0.775
25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.			0.768		0.820
14. I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.				0.918	0.949
32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.				0.812	0.858
33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.		0.409		0.469	0.829
19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.		0.481			0.970
11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.				0.492	0.814

Table 4.3 Exit survey factor analysis

	Rotated Component Matrix				
	Factor				
FLCASD question	1	2	3	4	Communalities
33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	0.796				0.815
15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	0.795				0.881
12. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	0.733				0.773
27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	0.709				0.874
20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.	0.607			0.443	0.857
17. I often feel like not going to my language class.		0.813			0.894
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.		0.797			0.908
6. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.		0.723			0.877
26. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.			0.848		0.789
16. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.			0.780		0.917
19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.			0.747		0.788
31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.			0.459		0.802
4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.				0.808	0.788
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.				0.751	0.884
24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.				0.690	0.839
1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.				0.631	0.860

An investigation of the factor analysis did not reveal any common themes in the factors between the study's entrance and exit surveys. A comparison with the factor analysis from the Yashima study also showed no similarities. For instance, among the questions in the first factor group in the Yashima paper, only one (Question 7) appeared in the first factor grouping from the entrance survey data and there were no commonalities in the exit survey. Components for the first theme in the Yashima paper, entitled *Lack of confidence in speaking English in class* by the authors, are present throughout the factors in all groupings in the data from the entrance and exit surveys. In addition, after close scrutiny, there does not appear to be one single identifiable theme evident in any of the factor groupings in the entrance or exit

surveys in this study. There are many instances where respondents exhibit a lack of confidence in speaking English in class but these themes are present in almost all of the survey questions, so any suggestion that these feelings weighed heavily on one particular factor in this study should not be overstated.

Since there were no unique themes from the factor analysis, a further quantitative analysis was undertaken to identify the most common issues related to anxiety uncovered by the FLCASD following the implementation of the BL intervention.

4.4 Changes in FLCASD and comparison to the Yashima study's findings

4.4.1 Main survey – 33 questions

The FLCAS main scales are designed to measure the anxiety a participant feels when studying a foreign language. Possible scores range from 33 (extremely low anxiety) to 165 (extremely high anxiety) while each of the 33 questions can be scored from 1 to 5 on a Likert scale. A decrease in overall score after the BL intervention may indicate a positive effect, meaning a reduction in learner anxiety and a more positive stance toward FL learning. Scores from the FLCASD administered to participants (n=26) in the entrance survey averaged 95.00 points. At the conclusion of the BL intervention, the FLCASD average score among respondents (n=21) was 84.04, representing a decrease of 11.5%. In comparison, in the Yashima study, where the FLCAS was only administered once at the end of the course, the average score among respondents (n=182) was 100.95, suggesting higher anxiety among respondents than in this study.

4.4.2 Subscales – 20 questions

Results from FLCASD subscales in this study differed significantly compared to those in the Yashima study. The FLCAS subscales purport to measure motivation toward FL

In the scale measuring Identified Regulation, respondents' scores in this study were again consistent in the entrance (1.89) and exit surveys (1.88). However, this contrasts significantly with the Yashima study's mean score of 4.46. The Identified Regulation scale contains statements such as "*I study English because it helps in my personal development and growth*" and "*I study English because I would like to be the kind of person who can speak English,*" which suggest more internal motivational orientations. Therefore, a low score in this subscale (1=Strongly Agree) indicates a higher intrinsic motivational orientation towards EFL. In contrast to the Yashima study, with a mean score of 4.46 this study's findings suggest that the participants felt more strongly that there were personal and internal motivating factors for them to improve their English, which is considered beneficial for learners.

4.4.3 Comparison of subscale results by gender

This study's results by gender are consistent between males and females and between entrance and exit surveys, thereby reflecting a low tendency toward amotivation in both surveys (Figures 4.6 and 4.7). Scores for females and males were consistent in the surveys in almost all categories, with changes of less than 10%. Only scores for External Regulation underwent a large change, decreasing by 17.8% overall, namely -10.3% for females and -25.3% for males, suggesting that males felt more strongly than females on the completion of the activities and that there are outside benefits to English language skills.

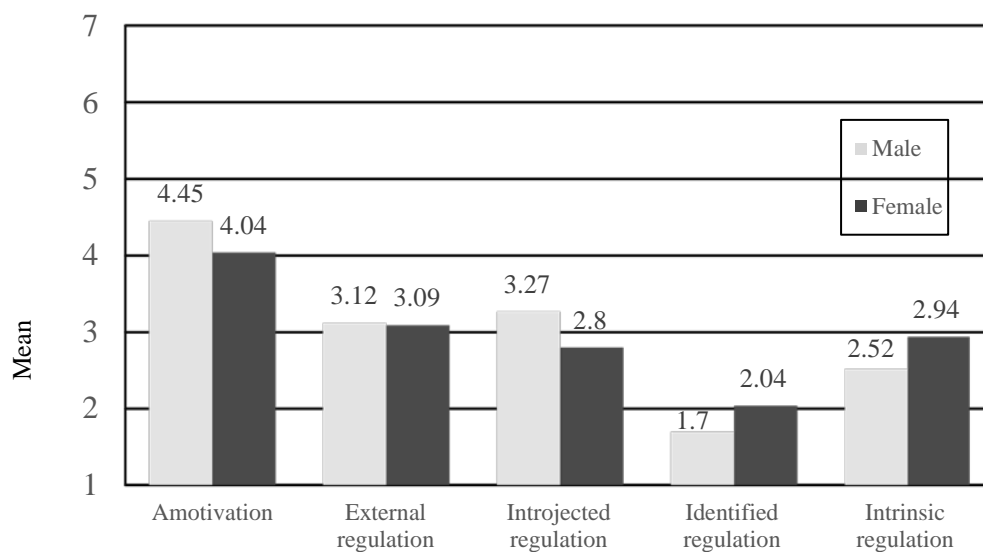


Figure 4.6 FLCASD subscale results by gender (entrance survey)

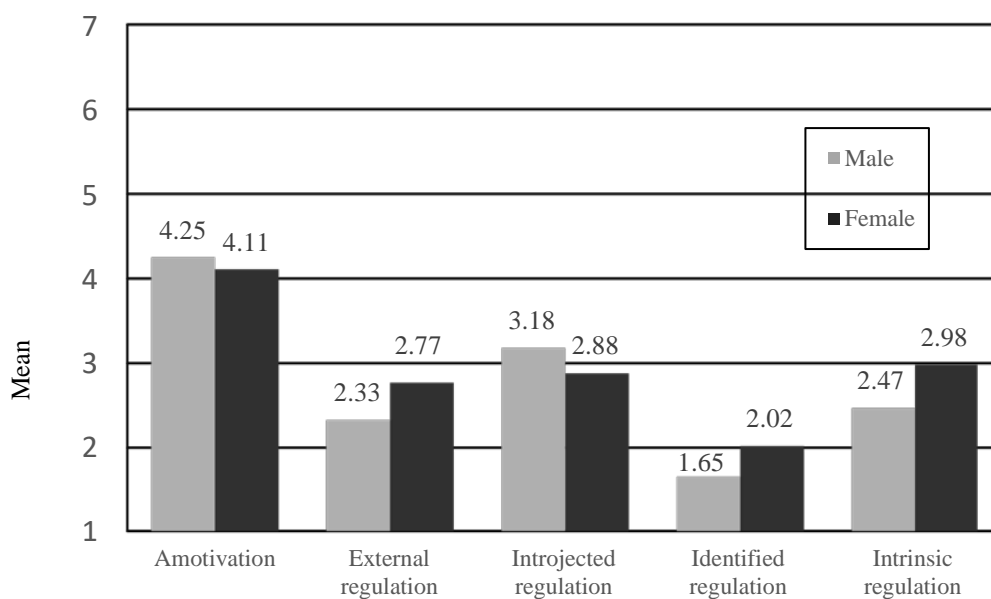


Figure 4.7 FLCASD subscale results by gender (exit survey)

Subscale survey results by gender in this study were similar to those in the Yashima study (Figure 4.8), although there are clear differences in scores by category.

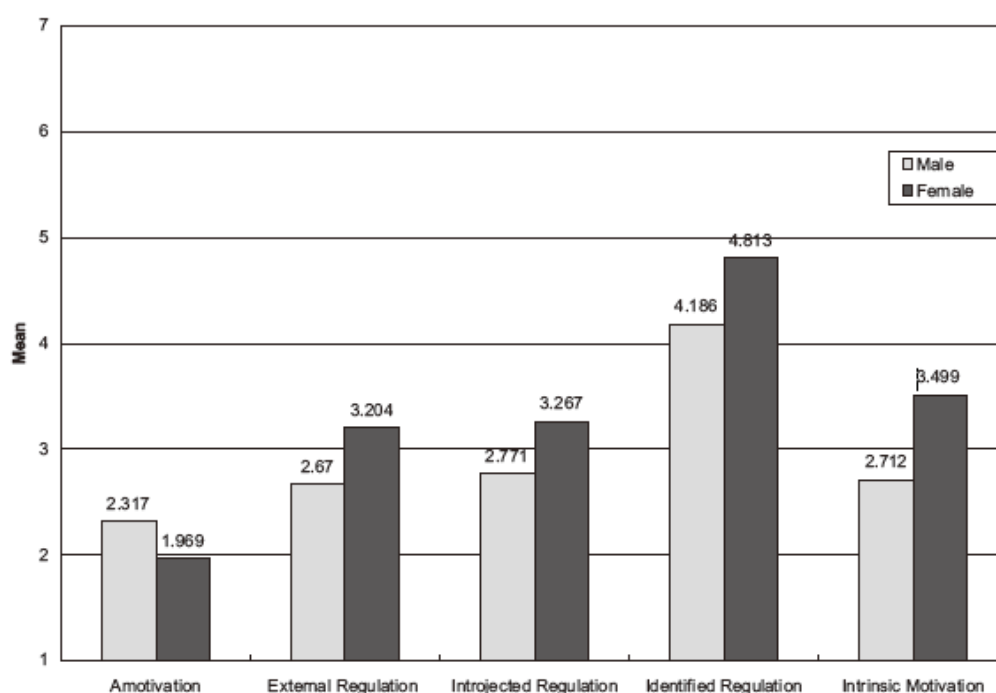


Figure 4.8 FLCAS results by gender (Yashima et al., 2009, p. 53)

4.4.4 FLCASD: five biggest changes between entrance and exit surveys

In addition to the comparison of FLCASD scores before and after the intervention, an in-depth analysis of specific questions on the main survey was performed using Microsoft Excel. The five largest changes in scores between the entrance and exit surveys all indicate a positive change in stance toward language study and a decrease in anxiety toward FL learning (Table 4.9).

Table 4.9 FLCASD main survey – largest changes entrance to exit survey (>25%)

Main Survey Question	Change	Result
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.	Disagree + 30.6%	positive
8. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.	Agree + 27.5%	positive
15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	Disagree + 25.2%	positive
27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	Disagree + 27.0%	positive
31. I am afraid the other students will laugh at me when I speak a foreign language.	Agree - 26.4%	positive

Results from the FLCASD main survey and subscales indicate an improvement in overall motivation. The average score from the main survey, which measures anxiety, decreased 10% following the BL intervention, suggesting a decrease in anxiety toward FL study among respondents. Scores from the subscales indicate that extrinsic motivation decreased which is considered a positive trend, although no corresponding increase or move along the motivation continuum toward intrinsic motivation, as measured by scores on the subscales, was found in the data (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

4.5 Other quantitative findings

4.5.1 Respondents' stance toward English

Quantitative results from the exit survey indicate an increase in the ratio of respondents who stated that they liked English after the completion of the BL intervention. In the entrance survey, 18/26 participants indicated that they liked English at the beginning of the study while in the online follow-up survey 8/10 respondents indicated they liked English. While the ratio of respondents who state that they like English increased, since the number of respondents actually decreased there is some question as to how representative this result is of the entire population of participants. In addition, 10/18 respondents indicated in the exit survey that their interest in English had increased while none indicated that their interest in English had decreased. These results are positive but should not be overstated.

Some participants expressed a dislike for English in the entrance survey. Among responses from the entrance survey about the participants' first feelings toward English study, 53.8% (n=14) indicated that they disliked English study their first time, for example in elementary or junior high school. Of the 14 participants who stated that they did not like English on their first occasion studying it, six respondents indicated that they still disliked English at the start of this study. It was also noteworthy that 12 respondents indicated that

they liked English their first time and two of those respondents indicated that they disliked English at the time of the entrance survey so presumably they had a bad experience with English prior to starting this course.

According to results from the exit survey, the BL intervention positively influenced some of the participants who had previously disliked English. More than half of the respondents (n=14) indicated in the entrance survey that they did not like English on their first experience studying it. Of those, six still disliked English at the start of this study according to their entrance survey responses. An additional two respondents who originally liked English indicated on the entrance survey that they disliked the language at the start of this study (see Table 4.10). Of these eight respondents, no one indicated that their interest had increased at the completion of the study and two indicated that they would like to try BL again. None of these eight completed the online follow up survey. These results suggest that among those who expressed a dislike of their first experience of English study or at the beginning of this study, the BL intervention had little impact in terms of making them change their stance towards English.

Table 4.10 Tracking stance of participants who disliked English

Participant #	First English experience Liked or Disliked	Entrance survey Do you like English?	Exit survey	
			Interest up?	Want to try again?
73	Disliked (High school)			
75	Disliked (High school)			
76	Disliked (Jr. high school)	No	NA	NA
78	Disliked (High school)	No	NA	No
80	Disliked (Jr. high school)	No	NA	NA
82	Disliked (High school)			
83	Disliked (Jr. high school)			
84	Liked (Jr. high school)	No	No change	No
85	Disliked (Jr. high school)			
86	Disliked (Jr. high school)	No	NA	Yes
89	Disliked (High school)			
93	Liked (Elem. school)	No	No change	No
95	Disliked (High school)	No	No change	No
96	Disliked (High school)			
97	Disliked (High school)	No	No change	Yes
99	Disliked (High school)			

NA: indicates that no data was available

4.5.2 Satisfaction with the BL environment

After witnessing some participants struggle with IT skills during the pilot study, a method to query the participants' satisfaction with the various components of the BL environment, including their feelings toward computers, was included in the follow-up online survey. Satisfaction with the BL environment was measured in five areas: *computer*, *classroom*, *classmates*, *content*, and *classroom atmosphere*. Respondents in the exit survey (n=21) were most satisfied with, in order of preference, *classmates* (4.8), the *atmosphere* (4.7), the *classroom* (4.6), and *content* (4.3) out of a possible highest score of five. The respondents were least satisfied with *computer*, for which the average score was 4.1 and which was the only category in which respondents gave scores of 1, indicating a strong dislike on the part of some respondents in the category of *computer*.

4.5.3 Instructor feedback

Students expressed satisfaction with feedback from, and interaction with, the instructor in the BL environment. One form of instructor feedback included a weekly handout for reviewing learning points, usually through modified student quotes, from the online forums which was delivered anonymously as worksheets at the beginning of class the following week. Other feedback included the instructor's substantive comments which were written on each of the online pair assignments and which were handed back to students directly during the following class. Data from the exit survey shows that *instructor feedback* (4.26), *instructor communication - online* (4.47) and *instructor communication - in class* (4.50) were the areas where respondents reported their highest satisfaction.

4.5.4 Online login data

An investigation of login times and locations indicated that participants primarily interacted with the online activities immediately after the scheduled weekly class using the computers located in the classroom. Since the IP addresses of the computers in the class were known, it was possible to identify if the location of student logins was from a campus-based computer and from which classroom.

Participants (n=26) completed the majority of solo (98.5%) and pair activities (98.5%) during scheduled class time since those activities were designed to be completed with the teacher present. However, the weekly discussion was designed to provide an opportunity for students to engage outside of the scheduled class to nurture autonomy and to allow students to reflect on their learning (Huang, 2016), a benefit of BL discussed in Chapter 2.

Engagement with each of the activities can be found in Figure 4.11.

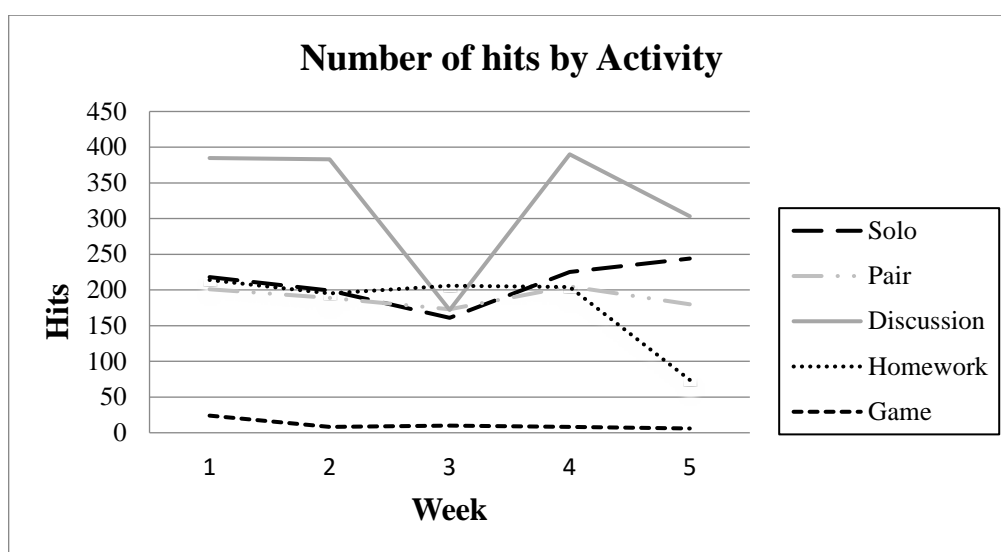


Figure 4.11 Online hits by activity by week (from website data)

It is noteworthy that in Week 3 seven students were away on a school activity. There was a decrease in both discussion and homework hits in Week 5 as well as a very low number of hits for games in each of the five weeks.

4.5.5 Findings regarding the participants' perceptions of the consent forms

When some students immediately signed and returned the consent form, there was some question as to whether they had actually read and understood their rights as well as the responsibilities of the institutions and the researcher and that they had joined the research willingly. In order to investigate this phenomenon, five multiple-choice questions were added to the online follow-up survey.

Eight of the respondents included their research number, seven of whom were female. The five questions queried why they had chosen to join the research, how they felt about the surveys, why they signed the forms, how much they had read, and if they understood the contents of the forms. The questions were put into three blocks containing similar themes, including their reasons to join (Block 1), their feelings about the surveys (Block 2), and their understanding of the forms (Block 3) (Table 4.12).

In Block 1, six respondents indicated that they joined because the instructor recommended that they do so. This was double the number of those who indicated that they chose to do so ($n=3$). In addition, four respondents indicated that they signed the form because people around them were doing so, again, double those who indicated that they chose to do so. Block 2 was designed to query whether the participants found the surveys long and tedious, a comment overheard during the study. Eight respondents indicated that they found the surveys interesting. Block 3 targeted the respondents' familiarity with the forms. Most respondents indicated that they read most or all of the forms and understood most of what they read.

Table 4.12 Participant responses to consent forms (follow-up online survey)

Block	Survey question	#1 response	#2 response	#3 response
1	Why did you join the research?	recommended by the instructor = 6	my choice = 3	other = 1
	Why did you sign the consent forms?	people around me were doing it = 4	my choice = 2	recommended by the instructor = 2
2	How did you feel about the surveys?	interesting = 8	didn't understand = 2	
3	How much of the forms did you read?	mostly/completely = 6	a little = 4	
	How much of the forms did you understand?	mostly/completely = 7	half = 2	

4.6 Presentation of qualitative findings

4.6.1 Introduction

Qualitative data consisted of written comments from respondents on the surveys as well as contemporaneous notes recorded in the reflective research log over the course of the study. The coding of this data as well as an analysis of the data in the same three themes introduced at the beginning of this section will be discussed below.

4.6.2 Coding of survey comments

Coding is the process of organizing data whereby the underlying meanings become clear to the researcher (Smith & Davies, 2010). Soldana (2015) contends that coding can be used to ensure “a rigorous and evocative analysis” (p. 9) by collating similar ideas into larger and more meaningful groups or themes. To examine the complete range of available data, all comments from entrance and exit surveys (translated into English when necessary) were placed in a spreadsheet. Then, within the spreadsheet, similar comments were arranged and rearranged to reveal patterns and threads in cycles of in vivo coding where emphasis is placed on the participants’ own words and perspectives (Soldana, 2015). Given the socio-cultural factors underlying the study, the coding process was critical to identifying patterns and themes within large chunks of data. Coding cycles were repeated until themes emerged.

These themes were then further distilled (Soldana, 2015) until richer and more focused themes were identified (Figure 4.13).

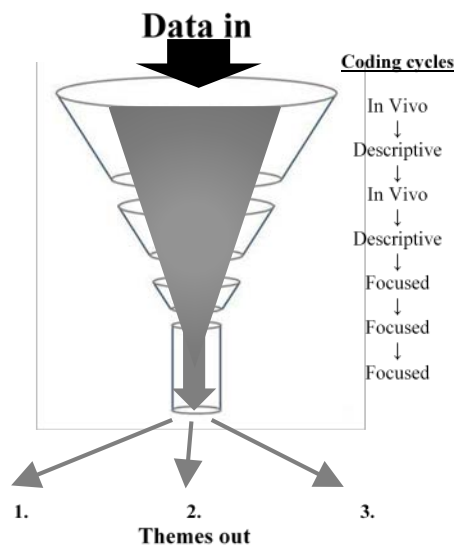


Figure 4.13 Coding cycles (adapted from Soldana, 2015)

Using the coding and analysis process, survey comments were analysed and comments with similar characteristics were grouped together as themes (Appendix 13). From the entrance survey, two main categories emerged, namely internal and external factors, as well as five subcategories: *future*, *teacher*, *enjoyment*, *personal development*, and *difficulty*. These subcategory headings were derived as themes after several coding cycles and they were carefully worded in order to reflect the essence of the participants' comments on the entrance survey. Exit survey comments were similarly grouped into six categories: *enjoyment*, *ease*, *appropriate difficulty*, *benefit*, *skill*, and *interaction*.

In each case, themes were named in an effort to capture overarching ideas or groupings of ideas that would encompass the majority of the comments available in the most transparent way in an effort to accurately reflect the findings. Oliver (2010) states that ethical issues can be a concern when interpreting meaning from research data and claims that

“researchers not only may [utilize] a different coding system, but also interpret the same linguistic features in different ways” (p. 63). It is with this in mind that the researcher assigned names and groupings to most accurately convey the students’ meanings.

Given that the research goal was to determine the effectiveness of the BL intervention, only comments from the exit survey were used in a quantitative comparison of the strength of the six categories. Since the comments were not extensive or overly voluminous, the researcher decided to employ a simple scoring system from -2 (strongly negative feeling) to +2 (strongly positive) for each exit survey comment. A comparison of the six categories compiled from comments in the exit survey including mean score and percentage of total comments can be found in Table 4.14. *Benefit*, *skill* and *interaction* had the highest mean scores indicating that respondents considered these be positive experiences. *Enjoyment* and *benefit* were the most frequent comments. Taking into account that the data source was limited and the scoring system rudimentary, the analysis nevertheless indicates that participants enjoyed the BL intervention and felt that the experience was beneficial.

Table 4.14 Exit survey quantitative analysis

Category	Mean score	Frequency
enjoyment	0.8	38.7%
benefit	1.1	22.6%
appropriate difficulty	0.0	12.9%
skill	1.1	12.9%
interaction	1.0	8.1%
ease	0.7	4.8%
		Total: 100%

The most challenging issue concerned participants’ interpretation of what is meant by ‘difficult’ in the choices for Q5 of the Exit survey, namely “How did you feel about the online homework?” It became clear when analysing the data that there was not a clear understanding of what was meant by the term *difficult*. The question was originally intended

to assess the level of challenge participants experienced in completing the online homework based on the assumption that greater difficulty carried a negative connotation.

However, some respondents indicated that *difficult* was understood by them to mean challenging in a positive way, for example

The homework was difficult but good for me (Participant 93)

A little more difficult questions would be good (Participant 75)

This interpretation is indicative of the attitudes of some of those belonging to a culture that values hard work and the importance of enduring or overcoming obstacles (Jones, 2015). In this study, participants may have interpreted difficulty as beneficial, in other words that they can benefit from overcoming difficult situations or homework while considering that doing so may benefit them by helping them to improve their skills. It would not be uncommon, therefore, for students, particularly freshman in the first weeks of their university careers, to consider difficulty in using computers as a hardship to be endured, an experience which is potentially beneficial. It is also significant that the respondents' acknowledgement of the importance of these skills to their futures may represent an internalised motivational influence.

4.6.3 Analysis of survey comments and reflective log book entries

Overall, there was a surprising amount of qualitative data generated from comment boxes in the entrance and exit surveys. In the entrance survey, 20 respondents provided an average of 8.25 words (when translated) in the comment box following the question "Do you like English? Why or why not?" while in the exit survey, 19 respondents made 45 comments averaging more than 11 words each (when translated). These survey comment boxes provide a rich source of qualitative data that was then coded into the following categories.

Increased skills

Several respondents commented on improvements in their skills and indicated that this is important to them:

If I learn more English words I can understand more and it makes me happy.

(Respondent 64)

I understand more now than when I started English (Respondent 45)

One participant directly addressed the issue of motivation and the importance of having a chance to try the activities in this comment from the exit survey:

My English experience became wider and I can use more English now (Respond. 75)

They added an additional comment in the follow-up online survey:

Through repeated online discussion my motivation has increased. (Respondent 75)

Participant enjoyment and interest

Participant comments indicate that they enjoyed the pair and group activities more than those they were required to undertake alone:

I enjoyed doing the Pair Activities because we could think of the answers together

(Respondent 85)

I think solo activity is boring a little (Respondent 73)

It was suggested that some participants preferred completing activities with friends/partners:

In the discussion I enjoyed the posting and replying with friends (Respondent 73).

In addition, some comments suggest a preference for online activities over a traditional textbook:

Online is more enjoyable than the textbook. (Respondent 90)

Google maps were very fun. (Respondent 5)

I enjoyed learning about business email and other online activities in English.

(Respondent 75)

Others indicated the following about the online activities:

I enjoyed it. (Respondent 93)

It was very interesting. I want to do it again. (Respondent 94)

This was first time to try this and I enjoyed it. (Respondent 82)

Some participants did not like the activities:

I'm not interested in this. (Respondent 93)

This may have been the case because the online navigation was perceived as “*troublesome*” (Respondent 93). As discussed earlier, the participants’ perception of difficulty was sometimes negative, such as Participant 95 who commented that

This was difficult for me.

Other participants indicated in their comments that a certain level of difficulty is beneficial.

Participant 75 stated that

A little more difficult questions would be good.

Participant 73 wrote

I think homework is not need because I can finish in class time.

The reflective research log indicates that participants seemed particularly interested when, after completing the online solo activities, the class scores were immediately shown to the class using the projector. The online solo activity, unlike the textbook task, was designed as a quiz so the website was able to instantly return scores to each participant and the instructor. The activities were designed so that score would be high in the first activity of the class (average 83.6%) and the log book records that students seemed pleased with the immediate, positive feedback: “*The students really like to see the class scores in the solo activity*” and “*students stopped working and were chatting and laughing and seemed to be really interested when they saw the average quiz scores (solo activity) on the projector.*”

(May 20, p. 31). Observations recorded by the researcher in the research log indicate that students enjoyed the positive feedback.

In addition, starting in Week 2, an error correction sheet was handed out to be completed in pairs or small groups consisting of errors from the previous week's online discussion. Errors were highlighted if they specifically related to the teaching point or if they appeared repeatedly. Ten sentences or fragments were chosen and, in the event of errors, the error was modified so that the author could not be identified. Two or three of the sentences were examples of perfect or exemplary work. Comments from the log book indicate that participants seemed to enjoy the activity: "*Students are really enjoying the pairwork. They are really talkative!*" (May 27, p. 35) and "*There were more volunteers than expected when I asked for answers to the worksheet*" (June 3, p. 38). (For a sample page from the research log, see Appendix #14)

One final area where comments were positive related to the social aspect of the study as indicated by comments in the exit survey. Feedback from the participants included the following comments:

I enjoyed the posting and replying with friends. (Participant 75)

I enjoyed doing the Pair Activities because we could think of the answers together.
(Participant 85)

I enjoyed working in a pair. (Participant 81)

Using Email we can connect to others. (Participant 96)

I could easily see everyone's opinion in the discussion. (Participant 81)

Comments in the research log suggest a similar pattern: "*The students have sat in the same seats every week, among the same group of friends*" (June 11, p. 48) and "*An analysis of the Discussion postings shows that, I suppose not surprisingly, students responded online to their friends' posts almost exclusively and vice versa, they did this every week, and very*

few ever posted outside of these same virtual groups which almost exactly reflected the physical groups in the class” (June 24, p. 55).

With respect to the role of the instructor, in the optional comment box in the exit survey there was one comment with respect to interaction with the teacher:

It was difficult to use the PC but I could get help from [the teacher] or my friends so I could relax. (Participant 90)

One final area that should be not understated was the positive effect on interest as a result of the online learning component of the solo activities. Students completed a short grammar-based activity in their workbook and were then instructed to go online and complete the online solo activity each week. This activity was identical in nature to the workbook (the same length, number of questions and grammar point) but differed in that questions in the online activity were changed and re-worded. Each week the style of answering the online solo activity differed. One week, students were required to drag and drop answers, in another week they dragged words around using the mouse to make complete sentences. The learning point was the same as the weekly workbook activity but the style changed and students found this very interesting. In addition, the activities were designed so that they could be automatically marked by the computer immediately, resulting in instant feedback which was purposefully designed to be positive (since the activities and teaching point were the same as the workbook, naturally scores were high). According to comments recorded in the research log, during the solo activity there was always a positive atmosphere and students were very engaged. The researcher made several comments about how students were interested in receiving their individual scores as well as seeing the class scores (averages) which were immediately displayed on the overhead projector and continually updated as more and more students completed the activity. In one comment, the researcher witnessed members of the class “high-fiving” (May 27, p. 35) when the cumulative class score was approaching 100%.

Without exception, the immediate feedback available both individually and as a class as a result of the design and functionality of the online solo activity resulted in a positive atmosphere and clear indications of interest in the activity among students in the class.

Challenges related to IT proficiency

Several of the participants in the pilot study and the main study struggled with fundamental use of the PC and the internet as well as the handling and input of usernames and passwords: *“At the orientation session for the other class, the students couldn’t turn on the PC and confused the password for the website with their password to be able to use the university PC”* (Oct 22, p. 12). Other issues arose in relation to technical difficulties for the volunteer instructor who helped in the pilot study: *“At our meeting last night, Instructor X said that he misplaced his username and cannot remember the website address. This will need to be simplified”* (Oct 19, p. 9).

Some participants in the main study also found it challenging. An investigation of survey comments suggests that the participants felt that in the BL environment they were faced with a double challenge: learning about English and doing so using computers. In the results, respondents differentiated between the two aspects. Some respondents felt that they had improved in both areas:

I could increase my English skill and my computer skill. In the class, I learned English and PC so it was good. (Participant 96)

I don’t have so much computer skill but it was probably not bad to study PC in class only. (Participant 77).

Observations from the research log indicated that, like the pilot study, some participants had difficulty operating the PCs and performing basic computer tasks despite recent university-wide orientation for all first-year students: *“Some students could not turn on the PC and a*

surprising number did not know how to open the browser and navigate to the website address” (May 16, page 20).

4.7 Additional findings (quantitative and qualitative combined phenomena)

Three clear phenomena emerged when seemingly unrelated qualitative and quantitative outliers were overlaid. First, games were scored high in terms of satisfaction but were the lowest in terms of online hits. Secondly, an examination of the timing and location of online hits for the discussion and homework activities indicated that the majority of these activities, originally designed to be completed in a series of posts during the week, were completed immediately after, and sometimes before, the scheduled class. When combined with comments in the research log about the peculiarity of students staying late after the completion of the class on Friday afternoon, this appeared a noteworthy phenomenon. Finally, participants scored teacher communication – both online and in the class – with the highest scores for satisfaction recorded in the survey. However, the data indicated that there were actually very few online interactions with the instructor.

4.7.1 Games received the highest satisfaction score but the lowest “hits”

Games had significantly fewer website hits than other activities each week but received the highest satisfaction average score in the exit survey (4.05) as well as positive written comments from the exit survey:

It was good to have a game every week. (Participant 75)

Games were interesting. (Participant 82)

However, after a closer investigation, Participant 75 accessed the weekly game only once, in Week 3, and Participant 82 accessed it only once in Weeks 3 and 4. In most weeks, only a few participants attempted the games and two did not attempt any game during the study.

Two male participants accessed games in four of the five weeks and indicated a satisfaction score for games of 3.0 (average satisfaction) on the exit survey. Seven participants accessed games in three of the five weeks of whom four completed the Exit Survey resulting in a satisfaction score of 4.25. The two participants who did not access any games, both female, submitted an average satisfaction score for games on the exit survey of 4.5.

4.7.2 Participants did not engage asynchronously as anticipated

The majority of online access took place immediately before, during, or immediately after the scheduled class periods (Figure 4.15). In Week 4, participants were given the most challenging and longest solo activity and quiz and a lengthy pair activity and were therefore left with little time for their own initial discussion post to be completed during the class. Despite this, more that 60% of the online activities were completed during or immediately after the class while in Week 5 more than 90% of the web hits occurred within one hour of the completion of the scheduled class.

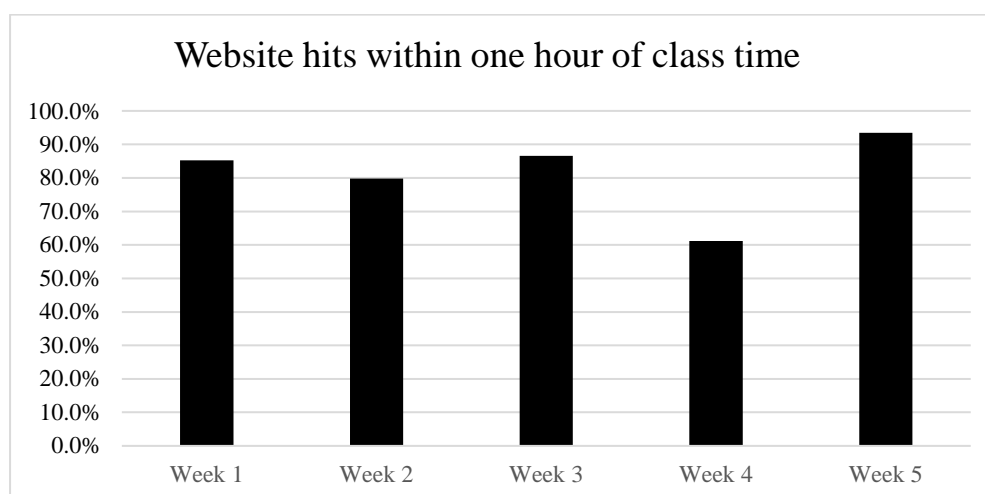


Figure 4.15 Website activity within one hour of the scheduled class (by week)

When the research's reflective log was examined, there were two comments indicating surprise at the students' reluctance to leave the classroom despite the class being

finished and it being the final period on Friday afternoon. Comments included: *“I was surprised to see that few students bolted after class. Many stayed and chatted and seemed to be working on the activities, some connecting with friends on their phones but they didn’t seem in a hurry to leave”* (May 20, p. 22), and, after the study was completed: *“These students seemed to really like each other. They stayed after class every Friday and everyone seemed to be chatting together. I was surprised that nobody was in a hurry to leave, that there was a core group of males and females, around 20 or so [students], who showed no intention of shutting down the computers and heading home right away”* (July 1, p. 60).

This was a noteworthy phenomenon since, in most cases in the researcher’s experience, students are quick to pack up their belongings and leave at the completion of the class while most of them value being let go early as a reward for working hard that day. After an analysis of website hits, location and times, it was clear that many of the students were completing the online discussion and homework activity – designed to be completed individually over the course of the week – immediately after class in a large group.

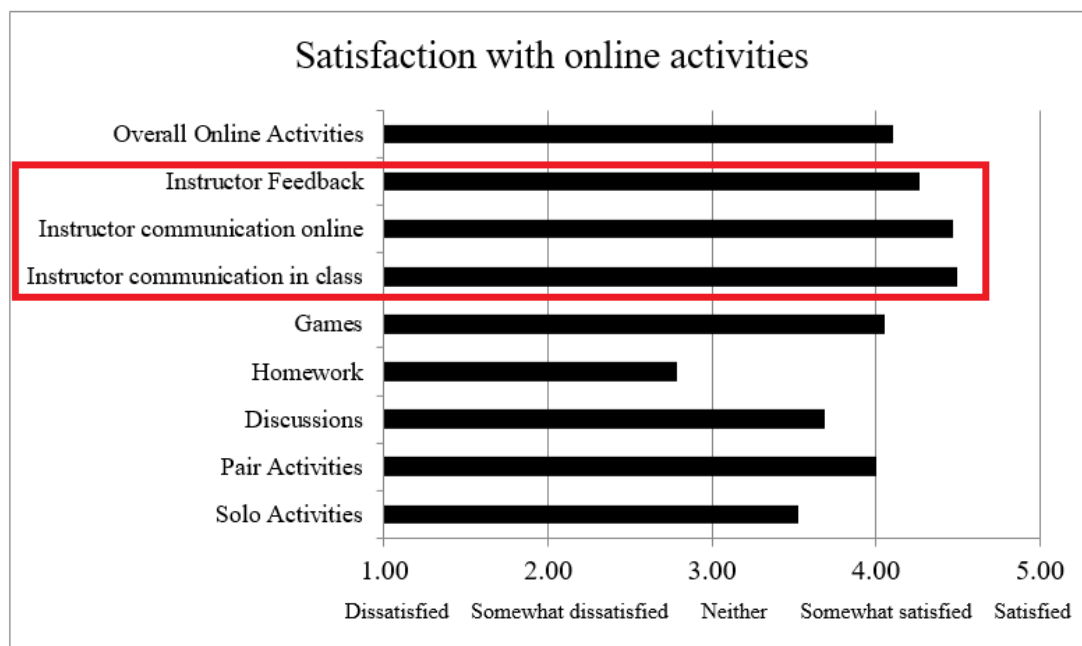
4.7.3 Contact with instructor

Results from the exit survey indicate that instructor communication in class (4.5) and instructor communication online (4.45) were the highest scored components on the survey (Table 4.16). However, when actual online communication with the instructor was calculated, there were few instances of ongoing, rich interaction. The instructor posted an original post and a reply to each student’s post every week in an effort to engage students and to demonstrate how to post with links to other webpages and YouTube videos. However, in only six cases did any participant reply to the instructor’s post, making a total of only four participants. It is confusing as to why instructor communication was considered satisfactory

when there were no substantive online dialogues between the instructor and students.

Reasons for this finding will be examined in the Discussion.

Table 4.16 Satisfaction scores (exit survey)



4.8 Summary

Most participants appeared to like the BL intervention, felt that they improved their English skills over the course of the activities, and responded positively to feedback with respect to the BL environment. Many liked the activities and enjoyed the online environment. Utilizing the necessary IT skills was a challenge for some, which may have contributed to negative feelings about the English language component of the BL intervention. Social groups formed early in the course and were maintained over the course of the study in both the physical classroom and online sessions. Students were particularly motivated by seeing immediate personal feedback on their screens as well as class results on the classroom projector. Respondents were also repeatedly positive about the instructor in terms of online and classroom presence, although sometimes the reasons for such comments are unclear.

4.9 Themes for discussion

Motivation to study English for participants in this study seems driven largely by *interest* on the part of participants. *Interest* acted as catalyst, leading to output in the form of *why*, *how long* and *how hard* one chooses to pursue an activity, in this case related to English language study. In an effort to gauge the effectiveness of the BL intervention, a thematic analysis was performed on the entire body of qualitative and quantitative data in an effort to isolate elements of *why*, *how long* and *how hard* the participants engaged.

When the data was sorted into themes after a holistic examination of all data and sources (Braun & Clarke, 2006), they fit into three subcategories entitled: *reducing anxiety*, *increasing enjoyment*, and *easing access* (Table 4.17). After closer examination and by reflecting on the literature review, the subthemes most closely aligned with *how hard* one studies, and not as directly with *why* or *how long* one does so. *Reducing anxiety* made it easier for participants to engage in the class; the collegial atmosphere and the close proximity to friends made participants feel more comfortable. *Increasing enjoyment* resulted from the opportunity to work with self-selected social networks and completing interesting activities. *Easing access* occurred when participants could easily receive help when completing activities, using PC functions or when accessing the online activities. This phenomenon will be further examined in Chapter 5.

Table 4.17 Overarching themes and subthemes affecting *how hard*

	<i>Reducing anxiety</i>	<i>Increasing enjoyment</i>	<i>Easing access</i>
Quantitative - FLCASD - surveys - online data	- anxiety main scores decreased - anxiety subscale scores slightly improved - five largest changes all indicate a decrease in anxiety	- more respondents like English better - for those who do not enjoy English, this stance was unchanged - classmates, atmosphere and classroom were well liked - contact with the instructor was positive	- contact with the instructor was positive
Qualitative - surveys - reflective log book - online data	- improved skills made it easier - working in pairs made it easier - sitting in the same seat/posting to the same friends - IT was challenging	- comments indicate enjoyment and benefit were important for respondents - improved skills - pair activities popular - enjoyed seeing scores - enjoyed posting with friends - sitting in the same seat - most of the activity occurred in the physical classroom	- participants improved computer and English skills which made it easier - working in pairs was better - enjoyed the pair feedback activity - activities needed to be easy to access

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a discussion focusing on the way in which the *how hard* element of the definition of motivation appeared to be a key finding resulting from the BL intervention. Next, three standalone phenomena will be investigated with a discussion as to why they may have occurred, followed by an exploration of IT proficiency in this context. Then, the applicability of SDT will be discussed, after which two additional theories, Gardner's (2007) theory of classroom motivation and COPs, particularly communities of inquiry (COIs) will be re-examined and their applicability discussed. Next, there will be a short discussion highlighting the importance of the instructor, which represents important findings from the study. Following that, there will be a reflection on the suitability of the three learning theories that were selected and utilised in this study. The chapter closes by outlining answers to the research questions, implications for further research and a short summary.

5.2 Factors affecting 'how hard'

In revisiting the definition of motivation for this study, according to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), motivation is made up of three components; *why*, *how long* and *how hard*. After a thematic analysis of the findings, it may be that *why* and *how long* are perhaps difficult to affect given the nature of this study. In terms of *why* participants are studying English, this was certainly reinforced in the study, for example where business email was introduced as an important business skill, and students indicated in comments that they understand that computer skills are necessary for their futures. However, *why* they need English is clear to these students. English is mandated by the government, mandatory in schools, socially valuable and important. Students enrolled in mandatory English classes in

university are well aware of *why* they are studying English, so there is some question as to how much an instructor can reasonably impact the *why* component of motivation.

Secondly, it is important to remember that they are university students making new relationships and experiencing things for the first time. They have many distractions from their studies, particularly from homework related to mandatory English courses. In terms of impacting the *how long* component of motivation, results suggest that there is little that can be done by an instructor to impact how much time students spend on course subject matter outside of class, even inside of class in some cases. In a study of first-year university students in the United States, Stewart, Doo Hun and JoHyun, (2015) found two important factors which they believe affect a key predictor of performance and persistence. They suggest that students placed in remedial courses have low persistence and that indicators from high school are positive predictors of performance in university. In terms of remedial courses, students in this course were streamed into the lower third of nine classes of a department that is ranked low at a middling university. As stated, students are well aware of their rank, that of their programme and their university. It may be that some of these students felt that they were in a low-ranked English class, covering much of the same content and language points that they had seen in previous courses. This feeling of being relegated to a low level, almost remedial English class may have affected how much effort and persistence they exhibited for the class. Secondly, given the importance of rank and the public fascination with national school rankings from day care to university, for students coming from low-ranked high schools, many of whom would not have been able to attend their first choice universities and programmes, they may feel as though their high school level may limit them in their future opportunities to excel, thereby making them question how much time they are prepared to invest in a mandatory English class. In fact, when Japan's rigid hierarchy is taken into consideration, where the students' postgraduate options are already set and quite limited, and

given the sceptical view of many about the “farce” being played out in Japanese HEIs, (Gattig, 2012, para. 5) these may be real factors affecting the amount of effort students are prepared to invest in their courses.

An investigation of the results indicates that participants did not generally participate over additional instances during the week but rather mostly in one large group immediately following the scheduled class. Given that students are required to spend at least 90 minutes on homework for the equivalent class time, this 90 minutes was approached but there is little evidence of participants being sufficiently engaged to go beyond this minimum. The findings in this research include no evidence that the BL activities positively impacted the *how long* component of the motivational equation.

That leaves the main area of impact, the *how hard* component of motivation, which, according to results, includes many of the elements of the lesson and the BL environment that respondents indicated they enjoyed; the implementation of rich, engaging content and working in social groups and pairs. From the thematic analysis, *reducing anxiety*, *increasing enjoyment* and *easing access* all appear to lead to directly enhancing *how hard* the students are prepared to engage with English by creating and fostering a positive environment with low anxiety, by employing fun, engaging activities in social groups and by reducing barriers to make it easy for students to more deeply engage. Several suggestions to put these findings into practice will be introduced in Chapter 6.

5.3 Investigating the three stand-alone phenomena

5.3.1 Games received the highest satisfaction score but lowest “hits”

Participants indicated that they liked the games and that a game should be included every week but online statistical data indicate that few participants actually played the games. The games were not connected to the teaching point and were intended to simply introduce

students to optional games, which could be played in English if they had time or an opportunity to do so and it seems that this simplicity may have actually been detrimental to enhancing student interest and motivation. In comparison to the kinds of games that are available to these students even on their smartphones, the games provided – such as a concentration game where users click on matching vocabulary words or pictures – may have seemed juvenile or childish. In addition, the participants can and do engage with others online and perhaps this would have made these games more attractive but that kind of functionality was beyond the scope of this thesis.

In terms of SCT, the importance of engaging with friends for social enjoyment as well as group and peer learning are borne out by these findings. It may be that participants chose to delay their return home on Friday nights as this was the last class of the day, in order to spend more time with friends in this classroom. In terms of explaining why games were considered positive but underutilised, perhaps games with more social contact – namely pair or groups games – would have been better utilised but that was beyond the scope of the study and the abilities of the researcher to implement.

Recent research suggests that online gaming is becoming more prominent in the EFL classroom. Bawa, Lee Watson and Watson (2018) suggest that Massive Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs) are motivating for students and there is a wide range of game types and content, which the authors indicate is an important factor in the participants' decision to play. There are concerns in terms of complexity given the some of the technical challenges faced by some in this study. However, this stemmed largely from using desktop PCs so if the game can be accessed from a smartphone, that may help to alleviate the concern. Perhaps in the future there will be more opportunity to examine this as a possibility.

5.3.2 Participants did not engage asynchronously.

In considering another, seemingly unrelated and unexplained finding, students stayed after class and came early to complete homework, thereby strengthening this study's findings that the social aspect which existed in the physical classroom is important and may not have been sufficiently present in the study's online activities. Many of the findings suggest that this behaviour on the part of participants suggests a preference for working with friends and peers, a social aspect which is stronger in the classroom than if they were using their PCs at home.

One alternative conclusion could be that students simply wished to complete the homework immediately in order to enjoy the weekend or to be sure not to forget to complete it later. An additional consideration would be that students do not possess a PC or tablet at home but results from the pilot study indicated that more than 95% of respondents indicated they had a modern computer or tablet and high-speed internet access at home. However, given the social bonds that seemed to exist with this group of students, and comments stated repeatedly that participants liked working with friends, it seems likely that the majority of participants stayed to complete the activities together, enjoying the help offered by peers and friends and to enjoy the camaraderie.

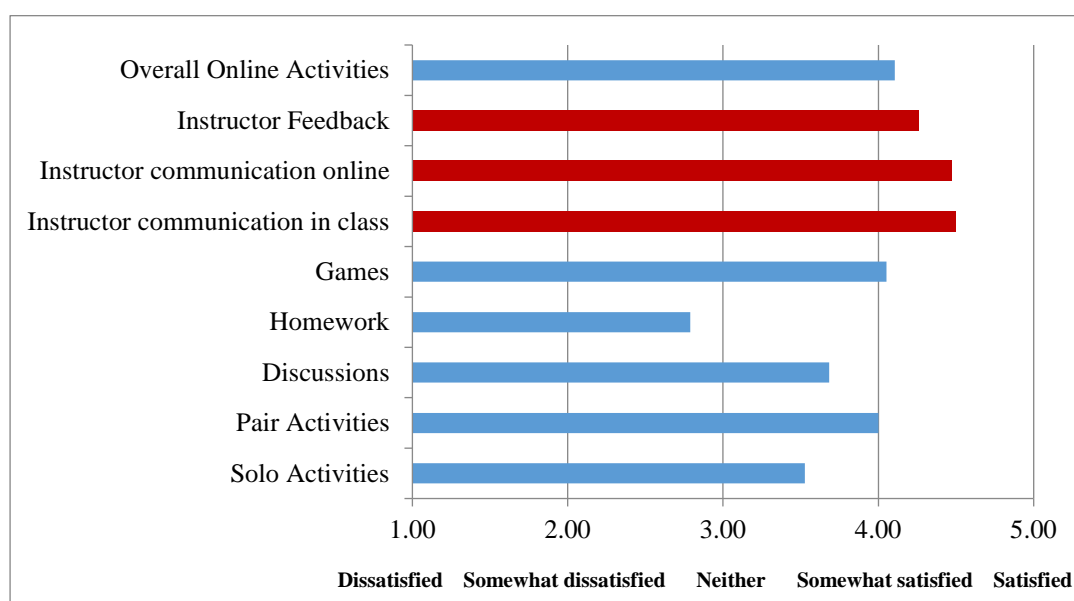
Furthermore, from the perspective of connectivism and SCT, mobile devices allowed participants the freedom to engage with homework activities remotely, but they chose not to do so. This may be partially explained by the nature of the online activities, which required opening a browser, logging in to the website, and sometimes working with small text in activities such as drag-and-drop. This would have made using mobile phones challenging, and perhaps in this case, less desirable compared to sitting with friends just before or after class to complete the activities together.

5.3.3 Contact with the instructor was positive but online engagement was low

Participants scored instructor communication the highest of all survey scores. The instructor was active in the classroom and, due to the BL environment, it was easy to move around and provide feedback individually or in small groups when necessary, which respondents noted they liked. This was generally the extent of the teacher contact during the in-class session, but participants indicated they found it beneficial with the highest scores of all categories (Table 5.1).

However, as mentioned earlier, the instructor tried repeatedly over the five weeks to engage all participants in a rich dialogue in the online session but few responded to the instructor's posts or replies to their posts. It appears that the online environment was not conducive to engaging discussion but the respondents still scored this contact high for instructor satisfaction. It is possible that participants may have appreciated that the instructor responded to their post even though they did not reply or that they had a positive feeling about the instructor which carried over from the classroom portion but it seems confusing that the scores for online interaction were high when actual contact was very low.

Table 5.1 Satisfaction scores from the exit survey



5.4 What constitutes low IT proficiency?

Connectivism takes into consideration the importance of being connected to the world. Since every student carries with them a smartphone every day, being connected to the world and each other is simple, ubiquitous and commonplace. Upon reflection, it is not surprising that the dislike of *computers* among participants which was observed and noted in the research log, as well as in the exit survey, reflects a strong dislike of desktop computers specifically, but not a dislike of all modern IT devices. These modern students in this context are untethered and able to be connected wirelessly wherever they are during the day or night with instantaneous updates and alerts sent directly to their phones (McCarty, Sato, & Obari, 2017). Having to go to a computer room, sit down, log in and navigate a website to post on a discussion board might seem tedious and time consuming. There seems to be an important participant distinction made between their smartphones and traditional PCs which affected many aspects of this study.

Computer training is mandatory in high school in Japan and has been for more than ten years according to MEXT guidelines. However, although some participants indicated experience with computers on surveys and demonstrated familiarity with MS Word and other IT skills, a large number of participants in this study were unfamiliar with the basics of turning on the computer, how and where to access a USB drive, opening a browser and many facets of the Microsoft Office Suite programmes.

Although entrance survey data indicated that 96% (n=25) of respondents use blogs, LINE, Twitter, or Facebook, it would have been more helpful to be able to differentiate whether students were engaging in these particular activities exclusively with mobile devices or through the use of a PC. While Twitter and Facebook sites are accessible using a smartphone or desktop computer, LINE is not, so there is no way to conclude from the survey question if respondents meant they were using mobile devices with blogs, LINE, Twitter or

Facebook and not desktops. Research from Mehran, Alizadeh, Koguchi and Takemura (2017) as discussed in Chapter 2, corroborates the popularity of modern smartphones among university students in Japan and states that IT competency is low but that interconnectivity using Web 2.0 tools like LINE, Twitter and Facebook, is high and that most Japanese university students are ubiquitous users. Upon reflection, it would have been more effective to provide the weekly discussion in a more accessible and relevant way for participants.

In terms of rethinking web activities for this context, it would be helpful if designers of educational materials consider ways to make activities equally accessible and easy to use through mobile devices as well as desktops. This is particularly relevant to the design of discussion boards, where participants are encouraged to engage in on-going conversations and where response time was important. Participants in this course were all active with their smartphones before, during and after class. The instructor stated at the beginning of the course that smartphones were allowed for English translation and dictionary functions and that they could be used at any time to access English content relevant to the class. Participants created a class group in the LINE app in the first week, including the teacher, where they could instantly share data for the course, screenshot notes on the board and homework assignments.

Therefore, grafting the weekly discussions onto more familiar and accessible platforms, perhaps using mobile applications like LINE, may result in more interesting, timely, relevant and engaging activities for students and a more successful overall discussion activity from the instructor's perspective. Activities should be easily and equally accessible on mobile devices in order to overcome barriers such as slow loading and difficulties in reading and/or entering text (Lau, Chiu, Ho, Lo, & See-To, 2017). Activities can be made more inclusive by reducing the size of video files, providing more drop down menus to ease concerns about having to enter text, and increasing font size to make it easier for the student

to engage with mobile devices. Instructors should be more welcoming and inclusive of students engaging using mobile devices, even during class.

The reasons for the participants' reluctance and low IT proficiency are impacted by their daily lives in modern Japanese society. Every student has a smartphone capable of accessing the internet that supports young people's interest in Facebook, Twitter and – particularly in Japan – LINE. Some of these students are comfortable computer users but many are more familiar with tablets and smartphones which operate untethered and where input is done via touch or voice. Given this familiarity, it is understandable that many are more likely to prefer mobile devices to desktops. In addition, mobile devices give them instantaneous alerts of posts or messages from friends or those they follow on mobile apps. In comparison, having to go to a PC room, log in and use an unfamiliar keyboard in order to check to see if anyone has responded to their post must have seemed tedious.

In future, locating an appropriate LMS or app that can provide sufficient data and control for administrators may represent a challenge. The ethical guidelines of this study underscored the importance of protecting participants' identity. There was no way to do this through the use of smartphone apps, specifically the LINE app which is so ubiquitous in Japan. Participants would have had to display their usernames and share these among others in the group since there is no way to have multiple accounts and usernames for the LINE app. In addition, the instructor would have had to monitor several groups that would have been challenging. Finally, analytical data such as login times, locations and the frequency of engagement would not have been available to the instructor and this data provided valuable insight trends among participants, which helped to explain some of the phenomena observed in this study.

In a recent study conducted in Japan, Hulse (2018) found that when participants used smartphones, they enjoyed the class, time passed more quickly, they improved their English

skills, and they felt that the “distance between students and teachers” (p. 120) was reduced. Interestingly, the participants commented that they would have benefited from more face-to-face communication. It may be that a given smartphone activity, such as the discussion in this study, carried out on smartphones but blended with in-class face-to-face activities may be a more effective approach, although there remains the issue of what mobile app would be appropriate for the purpose. However, a BL approach may offer the opportunity to address issues from participants while still benefiting from interesting, engaging and timely communication on mobile devices.

One consideration in building more support for mobile devices is that since the phones and tablets generally belong to the participants – in this case they all did – consideration should be made with respect to requiring extensive data for students’ up- or downloading since they are often on limited monthly data plans. If WiFi connections are available on campus – although in this study there was no WiFi in the classroom – then it may be reasonable to encourage participants to use their mobile devices but this should be taken into consideration in the study design.

From the perspective of connectivism and the importance it places on using technology to access and enhance learning, the necessity of using desktop computers to access videos and interactive web content has been made unnecessary by the proliferation of almost equally powerful and portable smartphones and tablets (Churchill, Pegrum, & Churchill, 2018). This aligns with Mendoza (2014) who, in a similar comparative study among Japanese students, found that the faster response time through the use of mobile phone applications enhanced communication activities while having to access online forums was slow and resulted in fewer postings. Students no longer need to be tethered to a desk to be connected and, in cases where they are forced to engage using a desktop, they are reluctant and may struggle with how to do so since they are more used to navigating a touchscreen or

voice recognition. The importance of portability and connectedness may represent a key learning point from this study about how students want to connect to online activities and to access information. This blended learning package was designed to take place partially in the classroom, on computers provided by the university, with additional online activities to be completed outside of the classroom where students could select from computer classrooms, a traditional desktop computer at home or a mobile device. It was believed that the advantage of learning IT skills, such as logging in at university, using Microsoft Word and Excel, writing email and using blogs and online chats could best be done using traditional desktop computers. However, the findings suggest that students can and do engage from anywhere at any time but that they may prefer engaging while physically connected to friends and peers who are physically present nearby, thereby benefitting not only from connectedness but also from the social aspect of learning.

In terms of social constructivism and socio-cultural theory, Japan is a country of peer and near-peer learning. As discussed earlier in this thesis, Japanese first year university students are lowest on the hierarchal ladder and therefore expected to serve as ball retrievers and equipment carriers for more senior students in clubs and circles. This strict hierarchal team and group structure is part of Japanese culture with which students are intimately familiar; new members are deemed to have little knowledge to add to the collective. However, in this study, where participants were given a choice of seating and groupings, they appeared to connect deeply and quickly with partners and groups. Data shows that the working groups in this study were static and consistent between the physical classroom and the virtual one in online discussions. Since part of this study was focused on reducing anxiety, participants were allowed to sit where they wished each week to ensure their own comfort and they chose not only the same area but usually the same seat and computer. Data suggest that this self-seating choice proved advantageous in terms of contributing to lower

anxiety, evident after the completion of the study and a sense of confidence due to interacting in tight social groups. However, in future participants would benefit from activities that gradually push them to engage with other students in the same class and even outsiders if the environment is sufficiently structured and scaffolded.

In summary, these four phenomena are difficult to explain given the tools available. However, they will be re-examined below from a different perspective in an effort to better understand the reasons why they occurred in this study.

5.5 The applicability of self-determination theory (SDT) in this context

The motivational subscales devised by Noels, Pelletier, Clement and Vallarand (2000) used to assess motivation before and after the BL intervention in this study appear to be unable to explain where changes in the motivational orientation of participants were manifested. Results from the FLCASD subscales indicated, not surprisingly, that the majority of respondents were primarily externally motivated. After the BL intervention, findings indicate that participants enjoyed the activities, the BL environment and social interaction, and suggest that they developed a more positive outlook toward EFL study, and more *interest* and more *motivation* towards EFL by the conclusion of the study.

However, despite a 10% decrease on average in the FLCASD score in the main survey, these findings are not borne out by comparable movement along the continuum toward more beneficial, internalised motivation (superimposed in Figure 5.2). There was no discernible positive movement on the continuum, which should have been evidenced by changes in scores in the neighbouring category toward intrinsic motivation, introjected regulation. However, there is no evidence of any change (Figure 5.3).

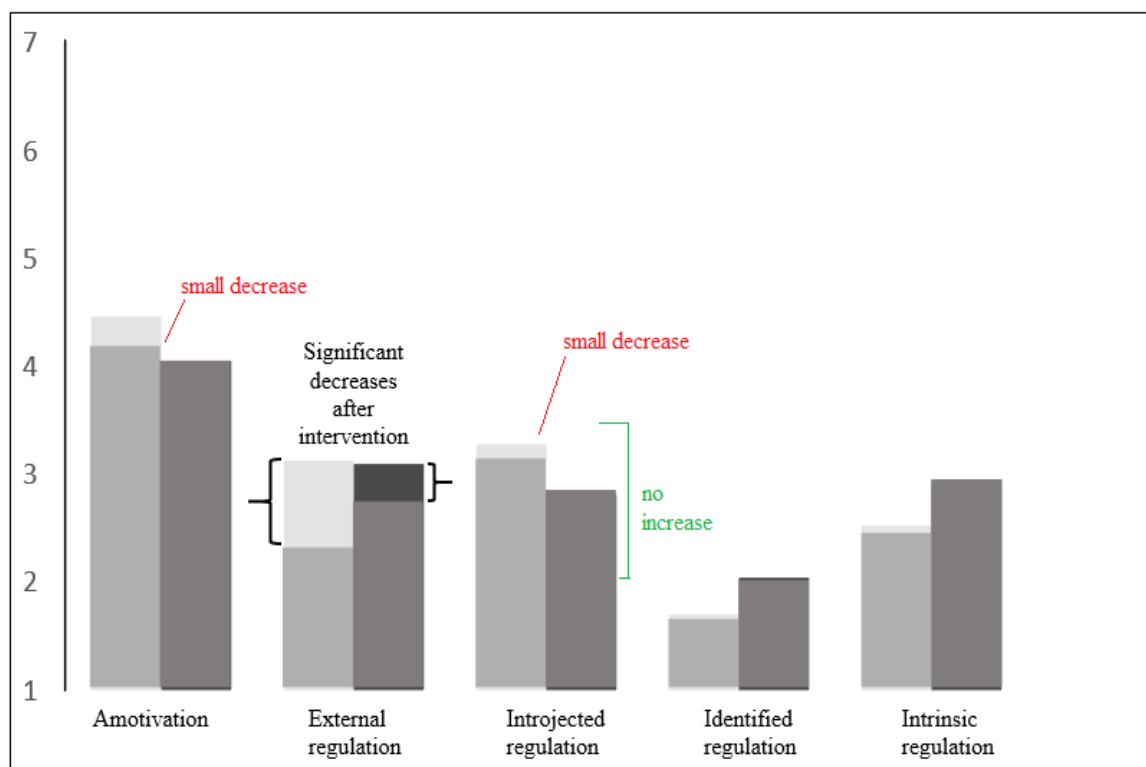


Figure 5.2 FLCASD subscales (entrance/exit surveys superimposed)

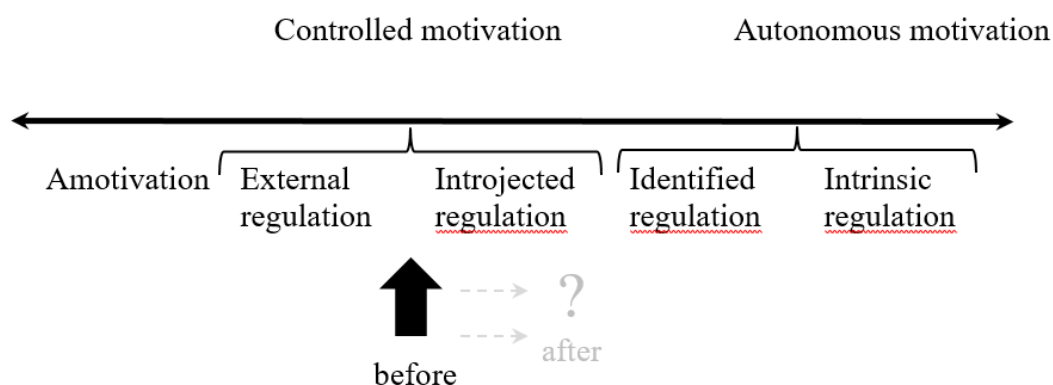


Figure 5.3 Self-determination continuum (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 237)

There are some possible explanations as to why there was no movement in the results of the SDT subscales, in contrast to other findings. The participants in this study were in the first weeks of their first year of university and some had recently relocated far from home. They found themselves in an EFL class focusing on communication but, for many, their most

recent experience was years of rote memorisation of vocabulary and grammar patterns for high stakes entrance exams in a Japanese classroom with a Japanese teacher. When placed in a class conducted in English and led by a foreign instructor asking them to become active participants, other factors may have affected the participants' stance towards this class. Additionally, there is some question as to the relevance and applicability of the questions on the subscales specifically in this context. Kawashima (2009), in a critique of the assumptions upon which the scales are based, argues that some questions may not be applicable to the experiences of Japanese students. Questions on the survey about fear of speaking in front of others (some students may have never spoken English aloud) and being nervous when they do not understand what the teacher is saying in class (most high school English classes are conducted in Japanese) may be beyond the understanding and experience of some respondents in this study. As a result, the applicability and relevance of the questions and the respondents' lack of experience with the feelings the subscales purport to measure may also have contributed to the subscales simply being ineffective in measuring their anxiety and, as a result, not aligning with findings from other data sources.

Additional questions of applicability concern the inability of SDT to measure or explain the three anomalies in the results, first, that the participants were interested in and enjoyed the activities (suggesting higher motivation) while failing to access many of the online activities outside of the class. Second, that when participants did engage outside of class time, they did so within one hour of the scheduled class (either immediately before or immediately after the weekly meeting). Third, although respondents rated online contact with the instructor as highly satisfactory, they failed to engage in online discussions with the instructor despite many opportunities to do so. SDT does not account for these phenomena nor does it offer insight into the reasons why they may have occurred. Perhaps there is another theory that can better explain these findings.

Given these concerns, there is some question as to whether the FLCAS subscales are capable of separating motivational orientation specific to FL learning from many other feelings, anxieties and emotions affecting the participants in this study. This phenomenon and its implications for this study and others will be discussed in Chapter 6.

5.6 Better models to explain the phenomena?

5.6.1 Revisiting Gardner's (2007) theory of classroom motivation

Gardner's (2007) theory of classroom motivation was introduced in Chapter 2 but it did not provide a quantitative data collection method to measure changes in anxiety so it was rejected for use in this study. In review, Gardner (2007) contends that there are two motivational constructs of foreign language motivation: language learning motivation and classroom learning motivation. Language learning motivation is a person's inherent interest in learning a foreign language, "not a trait, as some individuals contend, but it is a general characteristic of the individual that applies to any opportunity to learn the language" (p. 11). Regardless of one's schooling or cultural value system, there are people who enjoy studying languages as a result of their personal interest in languages. In the context of this study, it is important to reiterate that language learning motivation for these participants may be quite low due to their largely pre-determined future according to cultural norms and, by extension, they may not see themselves as requiring English in any meaningful way in their future career trajectories. As a result, it can be interpreted that the participants in this study were generally not internally motivated to develop extensive English language skills at the beginning of the course.

With respect to classroom learning motivation, Gardner (2007) comments that one's motivation toward learning a FL is impacted by "the classroom situation, or in any specific situation (where) the focus is on the individuals' perception of the task at hand ... (and this

motivation) is largely state oriented” (p. 11). This consideration recognizes the importance of a student’s interest level in that class, that course, at that time, with that teacher, in that environment. This study’s findings indicate that respondents expressed their enjoyment of the pair activities, the classroom atmosphere, classmates and classroom and were positive about communication with the teacher. Survey comments examined together with classroom observations and online data indicate that the factors they valued took place largely in the physical classroom environment and therefore their motivation orientation may align with Gardner’s classroom motivation theory, namely that it is more of a temporary state subject to the atmosphere in the classroom, largely affected by social factors and the instructor.

The role of the instructor was also important according to the findings. Participants commented that they valued contact with the instructor and, despite any substantive online discussions involving the instructor, remarked that the online contact was positive. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the instructor enthusiastically replied to every student-generated post with lengthy, detailed responses, often including a link to a YouTube video. Presumably, respondents appreciated the instructor’s efforts. Other decisions made by the instructor in the classroom – such as allowing students to sit where they wished and moving around and engaging with pairs and small groups – may have been seen as positive by students. Once again, for most of these participants, in their most recent experience the teacher was usually unapproachable and the centre of learning, often leading boring English classes focusing on direct translations and rote memorization.

The satisfaction with the instructor in this study may have contributed to a positive classroom atmosphere and students’ positive classroom motivation. This serves to underscore the importance and role that instructors can and should play in helping students to be interested and engaged. The challenge, it seems, is that this impact does not translate to online learning environments in the same way.

5.6.2 Introducing Communities of Inquiry (COIs).

Originally, communities of practice (COPs) appeared at odds with the context of this study (See Chapter 2 for details on COPs). For instance, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) underscore the importance of a shared competence within the domain among participants and that members voluntarily join the community, which did not apply within the context of this study. However, further research on COPs uncovered a connection to communities of inquiry (COIs), which may explain the importance of the social community and the setting's relevance to learning tasks as well as the participants' lack of online engagement.

COIs is a framework consisting of three constructs; social presence (SP), cognitive presence (CP) and teacher presence (TP) (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000), which function as interdependent parts of an online learning environment (see Figure 5.4). SP represents the way participants see themselves, socially and emotionally, in the online environment. CP is concerned with the learner's ability to make meaning in the environment while TP represents the role and responsibilities of the teacher in learning and meaning making (Kilis & Yildirim, 2018). The three presences are interrelated and can, therefore, influence each other either positively or negatively. COIs operate under the premise that, with sufficient intellectual and social support, and supported by a skilled instructor, participants can engage in meaningful learning (Rourke & Kanuka, 2009).

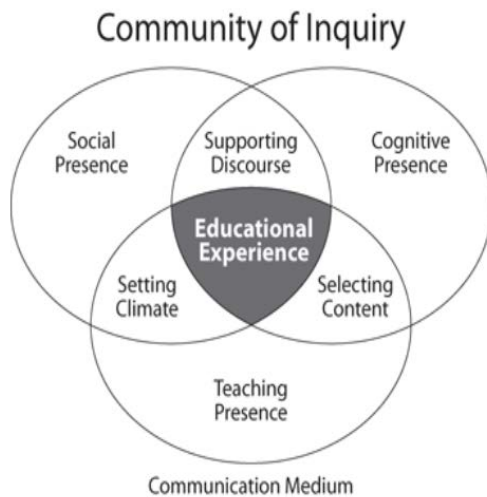


Figure 5.4 Communities of Inquiry (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000)

COIs differ from COPs in several ways, characteristics which align better with this study's findings. COIs are specifically designed to illuminate learning in online environments (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2010) and the participants in COIs are often assigned to a group as part of a course or other online learning initiative, as in this study. In fact, critics of COIs posit that since participants are not volunteers, they should not be labelled as a community (Jézégou, 2010). Additionally, the presence of a teacher (TP) in the group makes the group behave differently compared to COPs (Rourke & Kanuka, 2009). This is a significant departure from COPs which do not include an identified instructor, although there are other members who may act as primary sources of knowledge. The teacher played a central role in attempting to engage participants, particularly in the online discussions, although these attempts were generally unsuccessful.

An examination of the characteristics of a robust and successful online learning environment, according to COIs, may help to illuminate why the online environment was less successful than anticipated. Since the three presences of COIs are interrelated, if two of the presences – in this case the SP and CP – appear adversely affected, this may have led to a lack of engagement in the online discussions specifically. From the CP perspective, the

online discussions were designed to create further opportunities for students to engage outside of class time, but they were not linked to a specific English language learning point, for instance a grammar point or phrase. Perhaps one reason these discussions were not more robust was that participants were unclear of their purpose and/or felt that they benefited little from the activity since there was no specific language point, leading to a negative impact on their CP. Further, their SP may not have been engaged outside of the classroom. Students were required to log in with usernames and passwords in order to access the discussion boards and check if others had posted a reply to their conversation. It is unlikely that any participants registered to receive instant alerts of activity on the discussion boards like they receive from the LINE app. In the world in which they operate on a daily basis, with endless real-time updates on their mobile devices, upon reflection participants might have been unaware of any replies to their postings. In the event anyone had replied, it may have been several days since the post and perhaps the opportunity for a response and participation in an interesting conversation had passed. Despite what the data suggests was a positive experience with TP, this may not have been enough to offset the negative experiences with respect to SP and CP.

Returning to Chapter 2, transactional distance may have also played a role where participants were separated by space and time which might have affected both TP and SP. In this study, the instructor tried to overcome the negative effects of transactional distance by engaging with participants extensively in the classroom session but that may not have been sufficient to sustain interest and engagement in the online environment. The instructor replied to the posts from every participant, usually within 12-24 hours but this delay and the fact that there was no physical presence on the discussion boards might have increased transactional distance.

Finally, the cognitive presence in COIs, due to the nature of the online environment, requires strong learner autonomy (Lan, 2018). However, research in Japan offers important insight into the phenomenon of self-regulation and autonomy in the Japanese context. Agawa and Takeuchi (2016) undertook a study to validate SDT in the Japanese context among 317 Japanese university students in a range of majors. The research provides a clear rationale for the chosen sample size which was queried using a modified, validated questionnaire (Cronbach's Alpha=.74-.89). Data cleaning was performed, 15 responses were removed for perceived insincerity, followed by an exhaustive explanation and analysis. According to findings, Japanese students are low in learner autonomy, particularly on entering university. Agawa and Takeuchi (2016) concluded that university freshmen may be unfamiliar with taking the initiative in their own learning and may actually benefit, and be more motivated, when instructors are more directive: "the freedom of choice would not necessarily motivate Japanese EFL learners" (p. 28). This is a direct contradiction to the value placed on learner autonomy in Western HE and the assumption that autonomy positively affects motivation. In Japan, many university first-year students are unfamiliar with autonomy and may struggle if they are suddenly expected to take a more active role in their own learning.

The implications for this research relate to the application of COIs in the Japanese context. Instead of Japanese learners taking the initiative in online discussions, these participants failed to engage independently although the survey responses indicate that online communication with the instructor was positive. This may suggest that students in this context rely heavily on the instructor for leadership and guidance and that simply instructing them to post a lengthy response in a timely manner was not a clear enough instruction regarding what was required of them.

When considering the COI framework and the context of this study, there appear to be several issues which may have contributed to the lack of engagement in online discussions

including a lack of very focused and clear goals for participants which may have adversely affected their cognitive presence – including the limitations of the platform in informing participants of replies to their posts in a timely manner – thereby impacting on their social presence, which combined may have led to the failure of the online discussions.

5.7 The importance of the instructor

The study's results underscore the importance of the instructor in language learning in general and in this context specifically. The instructor sets the mood and nurtures the atmosphere, particularly in Japan where students are, according to culture, respectful of the instructor as the centre of learning. Japanese learners place more importance on what the instructor does and says as standards that guide their behaviour. Teachers who are transparent, open and enthusiastic about English, can expect the same from students. Teachers who set clear goals and communicate these to their classes are more likely to make students feel comfortable.

Smith (2018) suggests four ways to create a positive community and classroom culture that align closely with these findings. Instructors should encourage “mutual respect and connectedness” (p. 2) among students and between students and the instructor. Instructors should make content relevant to learners, which enhances interest. In order to enhance personal buy-in for students, teachers much incorporate and pitch content with careful consideration to participants' level while aiming for the “sweet spot” (p. 3) where learning materials are challenging but not overwhelming. Finally, instructors should continuously point out the relevance of learning points to students and invest time in reflecting on what was learned so that students have a sense of accomplishment. These findings align closely with what was learned in this study, namely that the instructor's actions have a significant impact at every stage of the lesson.

5.8 The applicability and overlap of the theoretical frameworks

In terms of selecting a lens through which to interpret the findings, connectivism played a major role in this context given the connectedness of university students in modern Japan, and was helpful in better understanding the phenomena uncovered. In reflecting on Siemens (2005), the author posited that it is less important to have knowledge than it is to know where to go to find things. In assessing the applicability of connectivism to this study, there is no doubt that the relevance of technology was central to the learning that took place in this study. Participants engaged online and were quick to access nodes to find information when it was necessary. What was unexpected was that some of these nodes were actually the participants themselves and others were quick to access these nodes if they could provide knowledge. The instructor inadvertently added to this phenomenon; when students asked how to complete an activity, the instructor told only a few students and then instructed them to help their neighbours. This created temporary nodes of information which, as Siemens (2005) has posited, had a very short half-life – once the location was found or the skill was learned, there was no need to visit that node again immediately. Although Siemens (2005) alludes to technology as the hubs and nodes of information, there were many examples where participants acted as nodes.

Furthermore, with mobile technology and the proliferation of instant chat apps, these human-staffed nodes are even more accessible than the internet. Students in this study had the LINE app open and alerts chiming almost endlessly during the class. It was easier in some cases for students to ask this networked group of nodes a question than to go to the internet and laboriously input the search criteria. As an example, a comment in the research log mentions the way students who were absent were informed of the homework activities through the LINE app, often by attendees simply taking a picture of the notes on the board

and posting it to everyone. This highlights the interplay between the social, technological and cultural aspects of intra and extra-classroom relationships, leading back to SCT.

Reflecting on the study, social constructivism appears to have been too limited to the physical classroom and lacked the element of cultural interaction underlying this study. There are very few instances in this study where, at an important moment, social constructivism was not affected by the relationship between peers in the classroom or impacted by how the students interacted with the instructor in a cultural context. More importantly, there is a culture unique to each classroom that is developed over time between students and between students and teachers, which is like a living creature growing and changing over time. It seems impossible to examine any part of this study without being conscious of how cultural, social and – in the modern Japanese university classroom – technological factors, can be separated and viewed independently. This is just one of the key learning outcomes of this study.

5.9 Answering the research questions

Research Question 1: *How does implementing a BL program in a first-year non-English major EFL classroom affect students' interest in EFL?*

Positively. Results show that participants were interested and engaged and their anxiety decreased by the end of the study. As a note of caution, some participants were not interested and said so and this did not change over the course of the study. In addition, there were factors which could have contributed to the participants stating they liked the activities and the class. Literature indicates that there are significant differences in teaching style between most Japanese high schools (grammar focused, rote practice, boring) and those of university classes taught by foreign instructors (conversational, fun) which may have resulted in positive feelings about the class regardless of the teacher and the implementation of a BL

intervention. In addition, the respondents indicated positive feelings about the instructor but it is difficult to separate positivity regarding the instructor from any specific positivity that respondents felt towards the BL environment.

Research Question 2: *How does interest affect student motivation towards EFL?*

Research indicates that participants were interested in the environment and some of the activities and that, in most cases, this led to decreases in overall anxiety toward EFL, which is considered to enhance motivation. Importantly, this study recognises that interest exists in relation to a task (classroom and online activities), course (a mandatory, first-year English course) and domain level (English). While the study uncovered evidence of interest in some of the classroom components, particularly the social aspects of studying with friends, peers and the teacher, there is evidence that the interest was not sustained beyond the physical classroom. In addition, participants indicated that they enjoyed the course but there is some question as to what extent the course content played a role. There are survey comments that suggest that participants would like to continue studying English but there was no opportunity to investigate if this occurred or has continued since the completion of the course. As a reminder, the literature states that interest wanes as input lessens so it may be that without further English courses, the students could lose interest in English altogether.

Research Question 3: *What social and cultural factors affect student interest toward EFL study?*

While observing the online interaction between participants, the researcher noted interesting links between the social aspects of the physical classroom and those of the virtual world. In the physical classroom, students made groups early and these groups remained largely intact and static both in the class and in the virtual online discussion. Groupings were maintained

online as 83% of participants interacted in the same online groups and with the same online members each week.

The participants completed activities almost exclusively while in the physical classroom despite online homework being assigned each week, which, it was assumed, would be done outside of the regularly scheduled class. However, it was noted in the research log that it was not uncommon to see the students stay in the classroom after class and work together in groups to complete the required activities while online data indicates that there were a few online hits on other days, at other times, and from outside of the university.

Group members did not seem to be concerned about remaining anonymous. Given their proximity, it may have been that participants were aware of the online identity of the students around them despite efforts to keep that information secret on the part of the instructor. However, since participants sat in the same seats and interacted in the same online virtual groups, it also seems that anonymity was not important within the confines of these groups. In future, participants should always be allowed to make this choice themselves, although ethical guidelines set by the institution must also be taken into consideration in terms of ensuring anonymity.

Findings indicate that the participants understand the value of English and PC skills for their futures but there is some conflict about the strength of those convictions given the rigid hierarchy of Japanese culture, driven by nationally published university rankings and the students' self-image of how they see their future jobs and careers. Students are aware that they need computer skills in the future, but they may be less sure whether they will ever have a chance to use English in their future careers.

Research Question 4: *What BL activities do students find interesting and why?*

The data indicates that paired activities and games were what students enjoyed the most with an average score of 4.0/5.0) with 75% of respondents (n=15) indicating that they would like to try the online learning activities again. After coding of survey comments, the most frequent theme was *enjoyment* (38.7%) and the second most common theme was *beneficial*. Comments associated with improvement in proficiency, *skill improvement* (12.9% with a mean of 1.1) were the third most common theme.

A further investigation of differences by gender was undertaken, by examining hits for the online discussion on a week-by-week basis. After analysis, it was determined that there was no significant difference between genders (<5%) in the number of online visits by males and females. Although, in four of the five weeks, males accessed the online discussions more frequently, the difference between genders in this area was insignificant.

5.10 Implications for future research

Areas for future research may include developing a better understanding of the importance of the classroom environment. Classroom motivation theory suggests that a switch may exist which can be turned on once learners are inside a classroom. The classroom environment can greatly impact the outlook of students because many of these elements are under the instructor's direct control. Gardner's (2007) theory underscores the importance placed on the instructor and the class atmosphere and their relationship to the social, cognitive and teacher presences of COIs. This may help to explain why participants commented that they liked the classroom activities but did not engage outside of the classroom component, except immediately before and after the class, due to arousal in the physical classroom but not in the virtual online environment.

The students' attitude toward course content may also be affected by both classroom motivation and COIs. If the participants enjoy the instructor, the classroom, their proximity to friends and the way the class is conducted, they may be more willing to study anything. Perhaps by cultivating a positive atmosphere, with an engaging instructor and interesting and challenging content, the actual course of study may be less significant. Furthermore, a well-designed EFL initiative could lead to engagement over an entire semester or longer if the variables that support an interesting and engaging classroom and social environment can be maintained week to week. The component that changed week to week in this study was the language learning point but it would be useful to investigate if a group of students could become interested in a different area of English study such as reading or listening, or even a different course like social studies, if the other classroom components – namely the teacher and classmates – remained the same.

This raises several questions for further research:

- i) Given that material/content is only one component of classroom motivation, can learners be sufficiently aroused and motivated in a classroom whereby they are prepared to study any topic? If so, does this place even greater importance on the role of the instructor?
- ii) How many components of classroom motivation have to be present, and in what strength, in order for classroom motivation to occur successfully?
- iii) Do some components have a stronger presence or effect than others? If so, which ones and why?

5.11 Summary

This chapter began by suggesting that, in the context of this study, of the elements of motivation, this study most strongly influenced *how hard* participants engaged with English.

The discussion then explored some possible reasons for three outlying phenomenon, including that a clear understanding of IT proficiency is important for the design of future studies with an online component and that positive learning environments need to include strong social ties between all participants. SDT was critiqued and questioned as an effective way to explain motivations in this context, although classroom motivation and COIs may better apply in this case, partly related to the actions of the instructor. Finally, the research questions were answered based on a holistic view of the study's findings. The next chapter will outline the study's final conclusions, limitations and recommendations.

Chapter 6: Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

There were several factors that became evident after the completion of this study:

- i.) Participants preferred pair and group activities to solo activities as they considered solo activities boring while working in pairs and groups of their choosing were more interesting and more beneficial for language learning in this context. This aligns with the learning theories (social constructivism and SCT) underpinning this study. There were also important social relationships that developed between participants and the instructor, although these occurred almost exclusively in the physical classroom;
- ii.) Self-determination theory, particularly results from the FLCASD subscales which purport to be able to indicate a respondent's position on a motivational continuum, did not appear to accurately reflect the study's findings. The FLCASD subscales may have been unable to differentiate between FL anxiety and other kinds of anxiety impacting the participants in this study, such as stress related to orienting themselves in the first weeks of university study and being faced with a foreign instructor in an English class, some for the first time. Further research related to determining the appropriate timing and format of the administration of the FLCAS subscales may merit consideration. For instance, there is a question regarding whether some of the FLCAS questions are applicable to recent high school graduates who may have never spoken English previously and given that the first survey question asks about their fear of speaking English in front of others. Perhaps the survey could be further modified depending on whether respondents are just beginning university classes or at the end of their first year.

iii.) IT proficiency was an ongoing factor in this study, although it appears to be specifically related to accessing and completing activities using a traditional desktop PC. Some participants were not proficient in utilising a traditional desktop PC, like those used in the classroom component of this study. However, these same students are skilled and frequent users of smartphones so the incorporation of smartphones into activities in a BL environment like this study is now an area of great interest and relevance;

iv.) There were valuable findings in this study that reinforce concerns relating to autonomy among Japanese learners. Findings related to participants in this study, and other research among Japanese learners, have suggested that Japanese learners do not understand, react well to, or benefit from being given the kind of autonomy associated with learning in Western culture. While autonomy is a valued trait nurtured from an early age in Western culture, it is not equally important in Japan and, therefore, instructors and course designers should take this cultural nuance into account at every stage of lesson design, execution and assessment. For instance, in this study participants were reluctant and slow to engage in online discussions. Given that many had never experienced one before, upon reflection they were understandably reluctant. Further, they must have seen their role to post their thoughts on a topic for all to see as rather daunting and, quite importantly, as a culturally unfamiliar behaviour. The teacher continues to play a much more prominent role in the classroom in Japan, lecturing more like the ‘sage on the stage’ than the ‘guide on the side’, despite calls for increases in learner autonomy from MEXT. Japanese learners should be more carefully evaluated and encouraged to take on increasing roles of responsibility as a way to build their confidence and familiarity in the event they are asked to post their thoughts about a topic in a forum, which requires a certain amount of autonomy. A learner’s reluctance does not necessarily mean that they do not understand the instructions or that they do not want to

participate, simply that they are unaware of the *kata*, the way of doing something, a commitment to form that is deeply rooted in Japanese culture. With more careful planning, detailed explanations and the setting of clear goals, Japanese learners can probably engage in any activity but there is a need to carefully scrutinize the concept of autonomy, the way it is valued in Japanese society, and how to overcome this issue for informed teachers with the plans and patience to implement any proposed remedy.

6.2 Limitations of this study

There are several limitations to be taken into consideration in this thesis:

- i) An important tool for comparison throughout this study was the Yashima et al. (2009) study. Although the Yashima study also involved Japanese university students with similar majors, the FLCAS was administered at the end of the respondents' first year, in contrast to this study where the FLCASD and subscales were administered early in the participants' first year. The difference in maturity, confidence and accompanying anxiety in the timing of the Yashima study and this one merit consideration. The Yashima study took place over a semester and so the results appear valid for this point in time but it is a very different time in the life of these students and students in general, namely at the beginning or the end of their first year at university;
- ii) The withdrawal of the second instructor in the pilot study resulted in both benefits and limitations. The withdrawal highlighted some of the logistical challenges in terms of time commitment and technical proficiency necessary to manage the website, overcome login problems and assist students with completing the online activities. It was helpful to have seen the challenges for other instructors in even implementing a BL programme, let alone the design and construction of one. It is a challenge to find volunteer instructors to participate in the depth required for a study such as this. Native English-speaking instructors at most

universities in Japan already teach eight classes per week so asking for more time commitment was almost impossible but it would have been invaluable to have another perspective to add to and interpret the findings in this study.

iii) This study took place in one class at a mid-sized university in Japan over a period of ten weeks. The applicability of findings to larger populations and different institutions is an issue. However, procedures, results and rationale have been recorded as faithfully and transparently as possible in the hope that some of the learning points that took place in this study could be trialled in other situations.

iv) This study utilized a mixed-methods approach but would have benefited from more qualitative data. Upon reflection, the effectiveness of the FLCASD in uncovering anxiety and stress related to second language study, one of the main sources of quantitative data, is questionable at best and its contribution to elucidating the effect on student interest of the BL environment is questionable. In contrast, the opportunity to interview participants would have been a particularly valuable addition to qualitative data used in this study. Many of the respondents in this study continually surprised the researcher with their surprisingly forthright, frank and detailed responses to the limited qualitative components of the survey questions so there appears to have been much more to uncover. It would have been beneficial to have had a chance to interview some of the participants in order to inquire in more detail about, for example, their history with English and English study, how they see their future careers and the importance of English in their future and any differences they felt about this approach to English study compared to their previous experiences. This would have added another rich layer of data for examination but pragmatic considerations made interviewing too challenging to undertake.

6.3 Recommendations

6.3.1 Improvements to the BL model

As a direct result of what was learned over the course of this thesis, there are several ways in which this BL intervention, in a similar context, could be more effectively implemented in the future. These recommendations represent a synthesis of every area of investigation and outcome and are presented according to the timing of when they could be implemented, namely pre-course, during the intervention, or after the course has been completed.

Pre-course

Findings from this study indicate that participants require extensive orientation to the format, layout and requirements of both the BL environment and each of the activities. The orientation should cover the expectations of each activity, for instance, asking students to engage in an online discussion is not clear enough. Students must be given step-by-step instructions such as: greet the poster (or thank them if it is a reply to their post), recap their opinion, agree with one of their points, and state a further point. This would not only align with the Japanese trait of *kata* (how to do things) but could also help in addressing low learner autonomy in the early stages of a BL programme. Posts should also include a link to some outside source of material such as a webpage, picture or YouTube video. Participants should also be required to check every day (this can be checked by accessing website analytics data) and discussions may even be condensed into three or four days if that helps all participants to become more focused for a shorter period. Alternatively, using an app available on the participants' smartphones for some components would allow several benefits including ease of access and instantaneous alerts, which may help to drive more robust discussions.

There should be more examples of exemplary work available for participants to access with clear indicators of how frequently to engage and, particularly related to online discussions, how many words are necessary for participants to receive each grade, namely A, B, C and so on. These should not be left open to the students' interpretations which are deeply affected by cultural factors and may differ greatly from those of the instructor. In this study, participants seemed unclear as to what extent and how frequently they were expected to participate in, for example, the online discussion. Examples of excellence could be linked online so they are easily accessible. Participants should also be given clear instructions, not only how to access the samples but how to appropriately complete all of the activities. By setting clear instructions, ideally in the form of detailed task sheets or interactive check boxes, participants will not have to interpret what the instructor considers to be reasonable amounts of engagement.

Designers should offer a range of topics to broadly target interest among all participants and activities should encourage participants to work together. Participants in this study scored environment and the social interaction of learning as very important. In addition, designers may consider incorporating various difficulty levels (high, medium and low) which would allow participants to self-select a level of study at which they feel most comfortable. This may help to nurture cognitive presence (CP), a key component when developing a robust and engaging online environment according to COIs. Instructors should monitor the groups that participants self-select and offer encouragement and challenge them whenever possible. In the first weeks, participants can be made comfortable by engaging in groups of their own choosing. However, these groups are likely to remain static. Instructors should encourage learners to engage with new members each week. Anonymity should be encouraged depending on the needs of the participants with the understanding that they are

likely to identify themselves to close friends but may wish to remain anonymous in early forays outside of their comfort zone.

Games can be included but there should be a range from which students can choose and they should be sufficiently challenging and based on the content of the lesson in order to be relevant to learners. Games for the sake of games may not provide satisfactory cognitive presence (CP) if participants cannot see their benefit. While respondents in this study indicated that they found games interesting, there is some question as to how many respondents actually tried any of the games themselves.

The kinds of activities, such as an online discussion, should be carefully considered. The benefits of using a well-known app, such as LINE, are clear but there are also logistical challenges where – since there is no administrator – there is also no easy access to word counts, frequency and content. Perhaps participants themselves could be put in charge of monitoring their own LINE discussions with each reporting statistics at the end of the session to the instructor. Two further considerations should be kept in mind if employing a LINE type activity; participants are only allowed one account per device so they are unlikely to be able to remain anonymous and since these accounts are known to friends and family, it may be difficult for people to change accounts if they have bad experiences during the activities. Instructors should ensure that these requirements meet any ethical guidelines set by the relevant institution. Secondly, students depend greatly on their smartphones every day. In the event they are required to exceed or approach their monthly contractual data limit or if they cannot find WiFi access, participants could be unwilling to engage in activities required for school at their own expense. These factors should be taken into careful consideration in the design of the online activities.

The role of the instructor is an important one, and from the design of the activities to leading the orientation session, the instructor should make every effort to gently guide

students through the logistics of what is required for them to engage. Instructions should be clear and, for lower level students, instructions may need to be given in the participants' native language, as well as in English, to ensure understanding.

During the course

During the course, instructors should feel free to modify topics in order to ensure that all participants are engaged to the fullest extent possible. Nurturing cognitive presence (CP) is important so participants should be made aware of the learning point and why it is important to their studies. Instructors should make themselves available by setting tasks and then moving around the class to offer help to individuals or small groups as necessary to ensure that no participant struggles in silence to access or complete the activities. This will help to nurture a strong bond and trust with students that is important in addressing issues of transactional distance which can adversely affect online learning.

Instructors must be model participants, active and timely in responses, and engaging in content. In addition, instructors should also be encouraging when giving feedback, both in class and in online formats since participants are likely to respond well to positive feedback. Participants in this study rated contact with the instructor as among the highest score for satisfaction. Since autonomy may be low, instructors should keep close track of the number and frequency of responses; those who are doing well should be praised and those who are not meeting expectations should encouraged to do so. Instructors should also be active in the classroom, enthusiastic and positive while demonstrating their confidence that the students can complete the activities.

Participants should be given sufficient time to engage during class. This allows valuable time for the instructor to help participants, which is important to them and for the participants to learn how to engage. As the course progresses, instructors may choose to

reduce the amount of time given in class but an investment in time at the beginning of the course, in order to build confidence and address logistical concerns, will lead to better results in the end.

Post-course

Each week the instructor should offer some variety of a fun feedback activity to address errors and to recap learning points from the previous week. This activity should anonymise error corrections but – where possible – encourage and identify exemplary work. In this study, participants working in pairs or small groups enjoyed finding errors in a printout of comments taken directly from their discussions. Instructors should prepare these kind of activities to provide reinforcement and praise as tools to enhance motivation. Successful activities and those which participants found difficult or uninteresting, as well as techniques to overcome these issues, should be noted and made available to subsequent instructors.

6.3.2 Organisational recommendations

Ensure the hiring of skilled, professional, enthusiastic teachers

This study's findings suggest that significant components of the lesson under the instructor's control positively impacted students. Respondents commented that they liked the atmosphere, felt that the activities were helpful and fun and that they improved their English skills. Other findings underscore the importance of the instructor's enthusiasm and encouragement of students that they could achieve the tasks. Based on these findings, there should be a focus on hiring high quality EFL instructors in universities in Japan. The instructor can deeply and directly impact student motivation in the EFL classroom, which highlights the importance of effective institutional hiring policies.

Like many Western institutions, there are extensive and quite rigid qualifications required for employment in HE in Japan. Unfortunately, these rigid qualifications do not ensure the hiring of effective classroom instructors. Requirements for jobs in HE in Japan are strict and particularly academic but the hiring reality is often shockingly different. A local university recently advertised for six tenured positions requiring candidates with a PhD, level 1 Japanese (the highest national test rank level) and more than ten years of teaching experience. However, the hiring committee received only a handful of applications and interviewed only eight candidates. Most of the eventual hires did not possess any of the three qualifications. Instead of recasting for a second round of interviews, the university hired from the original candidates even though not one met all and most met none of the original published requirements. This anecdote speaks to hiring practices in Japan, which are, not surprisingly, strictly regimented according to established *kata* or the way of doing things.

The process is almost engineered toward making hiring mistakes. Traditionally in Japan, new hiring committee members are assigned each academic year and have no choice but to serve – many clearly disliking the responsibility and time commitment. Committees are headed by the senior member based on years of service and members change every year. This leads to a lack of institutional memory and a committee which often has members with no special training in assessing submissions, selecting candidates and conducting effective interviews.

Universities in Japan should establish a consistent hiring committee of permanent or semi-permanent members with human resource (HR) training and knowledge of teaching to ensure that new hires, particularly in EFL teaching positions, are capable and dynamic teachers. In the long term, outside HR specialists should be integrated into hiring committees or contracted to take responsibility for the entire process. In the event that no desirable candidates submit applications, the hiring process should be restarted in order to ensure that

suitable candidates are selected and hired, particularly in order to fill permanent tenured positions.

6.3.3 Recommendations for practice

Teachers should be prepared to speak Japanese in class

There are many teaching approaches which suggest that the students' native language (L1) and the language of study (L2) should be kept separate to assist with language acquisition and proficiency (Lasagabaster, 2017). The researcher followed this approach early in his career, refusing to demonstrate an ability to communicate in Japanese believing that it would encourage students to use Japanese during class as well. However, this research undertaking made him reflect on the drawbacks of forcing English on students of lower abilities. In fact, the orientation session for this dissertation included a mandatory explanation by a Japanese staff member from the English Education section. This underscores the importance considered by the institution of ensuring that participants are aware of every facet of a research undertaking in their first language.

Instead of pretending not to speak Japanese, instructors should make it known in the first class that they can understand and speak Japanese, particularly with low-level classes. In the event the instructor does not speak Japanese, the university may consider Japanese language proficiency a consideration upon hiring for the purpose of being able to communicate clearly with students. An additional consideration in demonstrating a knowledge of language and culture on the part of the instructor is to lessen the already vast gap which exists between students and their instructors in Japan, given the hierarchal nature of Japanese culture and the social power often afforded foreign teachers in Japan. Instructors who can enhance and deepen their relationship with students have a better chance to lessen the transactional distance and develop trust with students.

In contrast, if instructors show no indication of understanding Japanese despite having lived in Japan for many years, there is a question as to whether students interpret this as instructors having no interest in Japan or the Japanese language. It may make Japan and the Japanese language appear beneath the interest or everyday needs of the foreign instructor which may widen the gap between students and foreign instructors and only add to the anxiety already being felt by first-year students early in their university careers.

Foreign instructors should receive Japanese language and cultural sensitivity training

Instructors who do not speak Japanese should be given basic Japanese language classes and undergo regular training in techniques that can ease intercultural tensions. Intercultural sensitivity to the needs of students, for instance allowing students to speak Japanese in class, seems a fundamental necessity for the average EFL classroom in universities in Japan. Japanese is often not allowed by instructors but this restriction was not placed on the participants in this study. Students often spoke with their partners and neighbours in Japanese in this study and this was allowed for the express purpose of making the students feel as comfortable as possible. The instructor monitored these conversations and interjected or echoed in English as much as possible. Students indicated repeatedly that they liked the atmosphere of the class and the interaction with other students and with the instructor so allowing students to use Japanese may have contributed to this.

Instructors should expect students to struggle with understanding the course layout, the grading system and teacher expectations and should also anticipate a need to spend time ensuring that students understand this and other critical course information. The majority of freshman students have little or no speaking English language experience and sensitivity on

the part of the instructor is one way to lessen anxiety for students, thereby strengthening the bond between students and teachers early in the students' university career.

This training should cover, for example, the students' EFL experience prior to enrolling in university and the impact of high stakes testing on their motivation leading up to their first-year of university. Additionally, there should be cultural awareness components such as the role of silence in Japan, the social position of the instructor in Japanese culture as well as concepts such as the social standing granted to foreigners and other nuances that could affect understanding between instructors and their students. This would assist instructors in managing expectations in the early days of new classes and in developing positive and trusting classroom environments.

Instructors should anticipate that students are likely to follow, at least in the first days of classes, established Japanese cultural norms in line with their rank in society, based on age and the status of their course and institution. Students are well aware of the reputation of their institution and their programme within the institution; these rankings are well publicised and students apply for programmes based largely on the comparison of their high school programme and rank matched with those of the university. These known characteristics would help instructors to understand their students more deeply.

This can be a challenge for Western instructors from cultures that generally value equally graduation from all higher education institutions, all but for perhaps the most famous schools. University graduates in Western culture are generally treated equally in terms of educational background whereby in qualification assessment the focus is on merit, personality traits and leadership potential. This is not the case for Japanese students where the ranking of their programme and institution play a formative role in their futures, particularly with respect to future employment. For students who are not accepted into their first choice institution, they may be understandably uninterested and reluctant to engage in subsequent

university classes, which may be a contributing factor in the gap between the expectations of foreign teachers and those of their students in EFL classes in Japan.

Instructors with deeper cultural sensitivity in terms of what their students are expecting of their EFL programme could approach their classes with more understanding of students' position. Instructors should focus, in the lowest levels certainly, on making English fun and interesting in order to reduce anxiety and develop fledgling motivation, particularly in the early days of EFL classes. Instead of undermining the integrity of EFL programmes in HE, it may lead to benefits for students, instructors and institutions in the long run.

Instructors must be prepared to do what is necessary to motivate their students

Instructors should do everything possible to ensure that content is relevant and interesting to students. BL allows instructors the flexibility to make changes almost instantaneously, such as grafting breaking news or popular topics into class content, unlike in the use of traditional textbooks where content is often comically dated. This class atmosphere included modern, popular music playing in the background throughout the class and activities and discussions were selected based on the instructor's long experience in ESL, to ensure that students were provided with interesting content. The content, discussion topics and the choice of music were not necessarily ones that the instructor preferred, but they were selected to make the class environment as positive as possible.

In addition, as Gardner (2007) and others have found, the instructor's role in the classroom is significant in terms of leadership in establishing a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to learning. This study's findings suggest that the effort made by the instructor was understood and appreciated by students. The instructor affects the classroom environment in terms of content, contact, attitude and effort. While there is no perfect formula, a trained and informed instructor can come prepared with a sense of what to expect from students and the

tools at hand, such as BL, to make modifications as required. A prepared instructor enjoys a greater opportunity to meet students in a more comfortable place from which to start learning.

6.4 Final comments

Bentz and Shapiro (1998) list three functions of scholarly inquiry: personal transformation; improvement in professional practice; and the generation of knowledge. Hostetler (2005) points out that for research to be considered strong, researchers must be able to make a connection between their work and the well-being of others.

This research has made every effort to satisfy these criteria. The personal transformation of the researcher is profound. The process of undertaking the extensive literature review and the introduction of new ideas and theories about learning, Japan and Western culture prompted him to move his family to Canada in order to reengage with Western culture for the benefit of his children. Straddling two cultures is a challenge with both good and bad cultural traits in play. Having been required to engage deeply with educational, cultural social issues, the researcher felt it imperative that his children be exposed to the benefits and challenges of both Western and Japanese cultures. Japan certainly has many merits in terms of respect for others and what constitutes good behaviour but Western culture also offers other benefits, particularly educationally and socially. This thesis was only the beginning of a deep and significant impact on his life and the life of his family.

In terms of the impact on practice, it has been weighed equally. The researcher has been exposed to a wide range of techniques and theories with respect to learners and learning and these have made their way into his classroom approaches. The extensive reading and research required has necessitated him critiquing many of his old practices while identifying weaknesses or short-sightedness in his approach to teaching. As a long term instructor, he has always felt that his own development has come in stages, some significant, but he has come to appreciate that there is always more to learn.

This research has generated valuable knowledge, albeit within a focused context. The study was necessarily narrow but it is hoped that the findings, some aligning closely with current research, can be made available for others to replicate, critique and, in the case of the BL environment, to engage deeply with a group of interested learners.

Finally, every effort was made to focus this research on the needs of learners. The initial impetus of this thesis was to find and test a way to better engage with what sometimes appeared to be uninterested and reluctant learners in mandatory English classes. It is hoped that this thesis elucidates a much deeper understanding of the social and cultural factors affecting students in contexts like this while promoting the understanding that, in reality, there is much that still needs to be done to better understand and meet the needs of all learners.

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Appendix 1: Sample English teaching job in Japan

Associate Professor
Graduate School of Humanities,
Nagoya University, Japan

The Graduate School of Humanities, Nagoya University, Japan is pleased to announce a job opening for an Associate Professor starting from April 1, 2019. This position entails instruction at both the graduate and the undergraduate levels.

1. Position title: Associate Professor.
2. Number of positions: 1.
3. Affiliation: The Faculty of Humanities, the Graduate School of Humanities.
4. Starting date: April 1, 2019

5. Terms of Employment: Five years, renewable once subject to teaching and academic evaluation.

6. Primary responsibilities:

- (1) To teach graduate and undergraduate courses in English linguistics (including “English Linguistics” and “Theoretical English Linguistics”) in the Department of English Linguistics in the Graduate School of Humanities.
- (2) To teach graduate courses in English linguistics in the Global 30 Linguistics and Cultural Studies Program in the Graduate School of Humanities.
- (3) To teach undergraduate academic English courses.
- (4) To contribute to the research and educational projects of Nagoya University.
- (5) To do other duties including administrative work.

* Note: The teaching load will be approximately eight 90-minute classes per week. The classes will include academic English courses in reading, writing, presentation and communication for undergraduate students of various faculties; English linguistics courses for undergraduate and graduate students in the Department of English Linguistics; and English linguistics courses for graduate international students in the Global 30 Linguistics and Cultural Studies Program. The

position also involves participation in making and marking the Foreign Language (English) component of the entrance examination for Nagoya University (undergraduate programs), and student selection for the Global 30 Linguistics and Cultural Studies Program.

7. Application requirements:

- (1) To have a doctoral degree.
- (2) To have a specialization in English linguistics (e.g., syntax, semantics, morphology, or phonetics/phonology).
- (3) To have experience of teaching English as a Foreign Language at the tertiary level for at least a year. (Experience of working as a teaching assistant can be included.)
- (4) To be able to teach courses in English linguistics.
- (5) To be a native-speaker of English or to have a native-speaker level of proficiency in English (both spoken and written).

8. Application documents:

* The following documents must be submitted both on paper and in PDF format. The PDF files should be saved on a flash drive or a CD.

- (1) Curriculum vitae (with a passport-size photo, phone number and e-mail address).
- (2) List of publications (lists of conference presentations and guest lectures and of competitive research funds received should be included).
- (3) List of educational achievements (a list of course titles with brief descriptions -- both specialized subjects and EFL -- and an additional list of educational achievements if any.)
- (4) Photocopy of diploma (highest and/or last degree earned).
- (5) Three published works and their abstracts (offprints and photocopies are acceptable; abstracts of journal articles and book chapters should be approximately 100 words in English; those of books and dissertations should be approximately 200 words in English; each abstract should be written on a separate sheet of A4 paper).
- (6) Statement of Intent (A) concerning graduate education (approximately 500 words in English).
- (7) Statement of Intent (B) concerning university-level English as a Foreign Language education (approximately 500 words in English).
- (8) Statement of Intent (C) concerning your research plan (approximately 500 words in English).

(9) One letter of recommendation, and the name, affiliation, position and contact details of one other recommender.

9. Remuneration: Approximately four to nine million yen per annum (including bonuses) before tax depending on age, qualifications and experience. If the selected applicant is from overseas, the cost of his/her airfare to Japan will be reimbursed by the university (following the Nagoya University Travel Allowance Rules).

10. Working hours and holidays:

Working hours: Monday to Friday: 8:30-17:15 *Discretionary working-hour system applicable.

Holidays: Saturdays, Sundays, national holidays, six days from December 29 to January 3, and two days in August (paid leave). In addition, faculty members are also entitled to 20 days of paid leave per calendar year.

* Note: All matters concerning employment by Nagoya University will be subject to the Nagoya University Employee Working Rules:

<http://www.nagoya-u.ac.jp/extra/kisoku/act/frame/frame110000115.htm> (Japanese only)

11. Insurance and pension:

Full-time faculty members will be required to participate in the National Public Service Employee Mutual Aid Association's health insurance and pension plan, as well as employment insurance and workers' accident compensation insurance.

12. Application deadline:

All application documents must arrive no later than Friday, September 21, 2018.

13. Applicants are requested to send the documents to:

Professor Jun'ichi Sakuma

Dean, the Graduate School of Humanities, Nagoya University

B4-5 (700), Furo-cho, Chikusa-ku, Nagoya 464-8601, Japan

*Note: The application documents must be sent by registered post with the words, "Associate

Appendix 2: Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) and Common European Framework (CEFR) *comparison (from English Testing Service ETS)*

Correlation Table					
TOEIC® Listening and Reading Test Scores and the CEFR levels*					
<div>1 Identify the TOTAL minimum score nearest to the achieved score</div> <div>2 Translate the achieved score into the corresponding CEFR level*</div> <div>3 Find the general description related to the achieved score</div>					
TOTAL minimum scores (10 to 990 pts)	TOEIC Listening minimum score	TOEIC Reading minimum score	CEFR levels		CEFR General Description
945 pts	490	455	Proficient user - Effective Operational Proficiency	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
785 pts	400	385	Independent user - Vantage	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
550 pts	275	275	Independent user - Threshold	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
225 pts	110	115	Basic user - Waystage	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
120 pts	60	60	Basic user - Breakthrough	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Total minimum score frequently required by higher education and companies

Appendix 3: Ethics approval local institution**University Ethics Approval Translation**

Ethical Research Application Results

2015 September 17

Chapman, Jim

Ethics Review Committee
Committee Chair (no stamp)

Application #: 15-040

Research Title: A research proposal for a study of the effectiveness of blending online ESL activities into regular EFL classes for Japanese university students


Researcher: CHAPMAN, Jim
University of Liverpool Thesis Supervisor Dr. Anthony Edwards

Principal Researcher: CHAPMAN, Jim

The following notification was determined after deliberation by the University Ethics Committee on September 15, 2015.

Determination	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approval (Approval number: 15-40) <input type="checkbox"/> Approval with conditions (Approval number: -) <input type="checkbox"/> Reapplication <input type="checkbox"/> Not approved <input type="checkbox"/> on hold
Remarks	At the conclusion of the research, please submit a copy of the agreement to the ethics committee (education and research support office).

Appendix 4: VPREC Approval (University of Liverpool)

 UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL		ONLINE PROGRAMMES	
Dear Jim Chapman			
I am pleased to inform you that the EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below.			
Sub-Committee:		EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)	
Review type:		Expedited	
PI:			
School:		Lifelong Learning	
Title:		An exploration of the effectiveness of blended online activities in EFL education: a case study class in a Japanese University context	
First Reviewer:		Dr. Lucilla Crosta	
Second Reviewer:		Dr. Michael Watts	
Other members of the Committee		Dr. Anthony Edwards, Dr. Martin Gough, Dr. Ewan Dow, Dr. Marco Ferreira, Dr. Janis McIntyre, Dr. Janet Hanson.	
Date of Approval:		26/10/2015	
The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:			
Conditions			
1	Mandatory	M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD Thesis Primary Supervisor.	

Appendix 5: Personal Information Sheet (PIS)

(Translated, page 1 only.)



An exploration of the effectiveness of blended online activities in EFL education: a case study class in a Japanese university context.

2016, May 10 Version 1.6

1. イントロダクション Introduction

リサーチに参加したいか否かが判断していただきます。なぜ私がこの研究を行いリサーチするのか、そして行って頂く事をまず初めにご理解いただきたいと思います。以下の情報をよく読んで内容をご理解いただき、ご不明な点は必ず質問などを行ってください。参加するか否かを決定する際には、友達、家族、他の先生などと相談していただいても結構です。あなたの参加は強制ではなく、参加したい場合に限り同意して下さるようお願いしたいことを強調したいと思います。

この資料をお読みいただきありがとうございます。

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before deciding whether to participate, it is important you understand why the research is being done and what is involved. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. Please also feel free to discuss this with your friends, relatives and teachers if you wish. We would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

Thank you for reading this.

2. リサーチ研究の目的は何ですか？ What is the purpose of the study?

このリサーチによって、英語の授業で使うオンラインラーニングについて、学生が好むアクティビティや嫌うアクティビティは何なのかについて知りたいと思っています。それらを知ることで、私がより良い教師になることに役立ちます。どのようなアクティビティを使うべきか、そしていつ、どのように授業の中でオンラインラーニングを使えば、より効果的であるのかについて皆さんから学びたいと思っています。これによって、私の授業から皆さんが得るものも増え、皆さんにとって私の授業計画がより有意義で興味深いものになることを願います。

Through this research, I hope to learn more about what students like and dislike about using online activities to support learning in the English classroom. Things that I learn will help me to be a more effective teacher. I hope to learn from you what kinds of activities to use and when as well as how to blend classroom and online activities more effectively. In this way, I hope that you will benefit more from my class and the lessons I plan will be more meaningful and interesting for you.

授業でオンラインアクティビティを使うことについての調査への協力をお願いします。5週間にわたって、個人、ペア、グループで行なう様々なオンラインアクティビティがあります。私は、コースが始まるにあたって提出する開始アンケート、オンラインデータ、コース終了時に提出する終了アンケートという3種類のデータを収集します。アンケートは簡単なもので、記入後に私に提出してもらいます。家に持ち帰って記入し、次の授業の最後に私に提出してください。アンケートは、10～15分程度で行なえます。オンラインデータは、あなたのブログ/チャットデータ、ログインの時刻、ログイン時間、ログイン回数、最も時間を費やしたアクティビティの形で集められます。いかなる場合も、個人名や個人情報は必要ありません。

Appendix 6: Participant Consent Form



同意書 PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

研究名 Title of Research Project: An exploration of the effectiveness of blended online activities in EFL education: a case study class in a Japanese university context.



研究者 Researcher(s): Jim Chapman

**承諾欄
Initial**

- 私は、上記の研究のための 2015 年 10 月 28 日付けの要項を読み、理解しました。要項について検討したり、必要に応じて質問する機会があり、納得のいく回答を得ました。I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet [dated October 28th, 2015] for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and, where necessary, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
- 私の参加は自由意志によるものであり、いつでも、理由を告げること無く、自由に参加を取り止めることができ、それによって不利益を被ることはないと理解しています。加えて、もしも回答したくない質問がある場合は、回答を辞退することができます。I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.
- 連合王国データ保護法のもと、私はいつでも私が提供する情報にアクセスすることを求める法的権利を有し、且つ、私が望む場合は、その情報の破棄を要請することができると理解しています。I understand that, under the United Kingdom Data Protection Act, I have the legal right to, at any time, ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.

上記を全て読んで理解し、参加に同意致します。

Having read and considered points 1, 2 and 3, I agree to take part in the above study.



参加者名 Participant Name

日にち Date

サイン Signature

研究者 Researcher

日にち Date

サイン Signature

研究者 Principal Investigator:

Name: Jim Chapman

Work Address

Work Phone: 8

Work Email: jim.chapman@online.liverpool.ac.uk

JAPAN

Appendix 7: Further details regarding the pilot study

After completing the pilot study, several changes were made to the surveys and a follow-up online survey was added following the pilot study. For example, one question on the entrance survey in the pilot study asked if the respondent had a smartphone. All respondents answered 'yes', therefore this question was removed from the final entrance survey. In the original survey, respondents were asked to select from the list of activities which they liked best. While this data identified the most popular activity, it did not provide insight into the participants' feelings towards other activities and components which are important to help answer the fourth research question and to inform future practice. Therefore, the revised survey incorporated a Likert scale to ascertain the respondents' feelings toward all of the activities. The Likert scale was already in use in the FLCAS, so it was felt that it could also be used for other survey questions. Likert scales are commonly used in educational research (Joshi, Kale, Chandel, & Pal, 2015), including in assessments of university courses in Japan. Some respondents also commented that the surveys were too time consuming, so the decision was made to shorten the survey, reduce the number of open questions and add the FLCAS. Although the FLCAS is lengthy, it can be completed quickly since it is scored on a Likert scale while it provided a helpful source of quantitative data related to motivation towards EFL study. A Japanese version of the FLCAS was taken from Yashima et al. (2009) although some minor changes were made to the wording and layout after a discussion with the Dean of the Faculty where this study was based.

The Dean is Japanese but bilingual and provided valuable assistance with respect to surveys, such as the design of the surveys and the accuracy of the language used in order to ensure cultural sensitivity, transparency and to overcome challenges in designing a survey in a two-language environment. For example, although the survey questions were printed in Japanese, the Dean agreed that it would be more inclusive to allow respondents to respond to

open-ended questions in Japanese or English as they felt most comfortable. The Dean also assisted with checking the accuracy of translations in the design of the draft survey and in the translation of the survey results. It was important to accurately convey the meaning of comments from respondents, which can be challenging when they convey feelings toward the study using words such as *like*, *dislike* and *feel*. The Dean was a valuable resource to confirm that translations conveyed the participants' meanings and intentions as accurately as possible.

The redesigned surveys were then further piloted with a group of first-year student volunteers, chosen for their similarity to the target group (Rowley, 2014). This helped to evaluate the question order and appropriateness as well as checking grammar and the accuracy of *kanji* (Japanese characters). It was important to gauge the students' impressions of the questions to gain a perspective on the social context of this study (Dawson, 2016). The group of volunteers who agreed to test the surveys was kept consistent for the purpose of continuity. Given that they provided lengthy comments, this helped in identifying errors and suggested possible changes in terms of layout and question formulation, thus ensuring that the survey's meaning was as consistent as possible for all respondents (Kelley, Clark, Brown, & Sitzia, 2003) and that the issues under investigation were being polled properly.

Entrance Survey

1. Please complete.

Age : _____ Sex: M F (Please circle)

2. Please complete.

When did you first start English?

Before elementary school	Elementary school	JR High school	High School	University
--------------------------	-------------------	----------------	-------------	------------

3. How did you feel about English the first time?

Liked	disliked
-------	----------

4. Please complete.

Have you ever studied computers before?	Yes	No
-----------------------------------------	-----	----

If “Yes”, where?

5. Please complete.

Have you ever studied online before?	Yes	No
--------------------------------------	-----	----

If “Yes”,

What? _____

When? _____

How long? _____

6. Please complete.

Do you use blogs, Line, Twitter, Facebook?	Yes	No
Do you play online games	Yes	No
Do you use email?	Yes	No

Research number (optional)

7. Outside of this class, how many hours do you use a computer per week? (Please circle)。

0-1 hours	1-3 hours	3-5 hours	5 hours +
-----------	-----------	-----------	-----------

8. How many hours do you spend on Twitter, blogs, Line and Facebook per week?

0-1 hours	1-3 hours	3-5 hours	5 hours +
-----------	-----------	-----------	-----------

9. How do you feel about English right now?

Like	Dislike
------	---------

Reason?

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Survey (FLCAS)

1: Strongly Agree 5: Strongly Disagree

1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.	1	2	3	4	5
4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.	1	2	3	4	5
5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.	1	2	3	4	5
6. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.	1	2	3	4	5
12. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	1	2	3	4	5
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I often feel like not going to my language class.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.	1	2	3	4	5
21. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.	1	2	3	4	5
23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.	1	2	3	4	5
24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.	1	2	3	4	5
26. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.	1	2	3	4	5
27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	1	2	3	4	5
28. When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.	1	2	3	4	5
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.	1	2	3	4	5
30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.	1	2	3	4	5

31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.	1	2	3	4	5
32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.	1	2	3	4	5
33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	1	2	3	4	5

1. I cannot come to see why I study a second language, and frankly, I don't give a damn	1	2	3	4	5
2. Honestly, I don't know; I truly have the impression of wasting my time in studying a second language	1	2	3	4	5
3. I don't know; I can't come to understand what I am doing studying a second language.	1	2	3	4	5

B

1. I study English because I am interested in the world around me.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I study English in order to get a more prestigious job later on.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I study English in order to have a better salary later on.	1	2	3	4	5

C

1. I study English because I would feel ashamed if I couldn't speak to my foreign friends from the second language community in English.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I study English because I would feel guilty if I didn't know a second language.	1	2	3	4	5

D

1. I study English because I would like to become a person who can speak a foreign language	1	2	3	4	5
2. I study English because it helps in my personal development and growth.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I study English because I would like to be the kind of person who can speak English.	1	2	3	4	5

E

1. I study English for the pleasure that I experience in knowing more about foreign literature.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I study English for the satisfied feeling I get in finding out new things.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I study English because I enjoy the feeling of acquiring knowledge about the second language community and their way of life.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I study English for the pleasure I experience when surpassing myself in my second language studies	1	2	3	4	5
5. I study English for the enjoyment I experience when I grasp a difficult construct in the second language.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I study English for the satisfaction I feel when I am in the process of accomplishing difficult exercises in the second language.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I study English for the excitement hearing English.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I study English for the excitement chances to speak English.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I study English for the enjoyment of hearing native speakers speak English.	1	2	3	4	5

Exit Survey

1. How did you feel about the activities below?

	Really disliked	disliked	no feeling	liked	really liked
Solo Activities	1	2	3	4	5
Pair Activities	1	2	3	4	5
Discussions	1	2	3	4	5
Homework	1	2	3	4	5
Games	1	2	3	4	5

2. How did you feel about communication with the instructor?

During the lesson	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	No impression	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
While online	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	No impression	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Feedback	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	No impression	Satisfied	Very Satisfied

1. Please circle your answer below.

Has your interest in English changed?	No	No change	Yes
How was the ease of access for the activities?	Difficult	Soso	Easy
How was the understandability of the activities?	Difficult	Soso	Easy
How were the online activities to complete?	Difficult	Soso	Easy

2. Would you like to try online learning again ?

Yes

No

Reason: _____

Do you have any final comments about your online learning experience? _____

(Pages 2 and 3 of this survey contain the FLCASD as above in Appendix #9)

Research number
(optional)

3. How satisfied were you with the online activities?

Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	No impression	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
-------------------	--------------	---------------	-----------	----------------

Comment _____

4. How many hours did you spend on activities for this class
(outside of class time)? _____ hours

5. How did you feel about the online homework?

Comment _____

Very little	Little	Average	Much	Very much
Very difficult	Difficult	Appropriate	Easy	Very easy

Comment?

Appendix 10: Online follow up survey (administered in Japanese)

1. Please enter your research number.
2. Why did you join the study?
 - a. I chose to volunteer
 - b. It was recommended by the teacher
 - c. I do not know
 - d. Other – with comment
3. Why did you sign the consent form?
 - a. I chose to sign
 - b. Everyone around me was signing so I did too
 - c. The teacher recommended it
 - d. I don't know why
 - e. Other – with comment
4. How did you feel about the previous surveys?
 - a. Interesting
 - b. I had to do them
 - c. They were difficult
 - d. I don't know
 - e. Other – with comment
5. How much of the consent forms did you read?
 - a. Completely
 - b. Mostly
 - c. Half
 - d. A little
 - e. None

Comment box

6. Does your motivation change in different English classes?

a. Yes

b. No

Comment box – If you answered yes, please write the reason below.

7. Do you want to study English?

a. Yes

b. No

Comment box

8. Did you understand the contents of the Consent Forms?

a. Completely

b. Mostly

c. Half

d. Didn't really understand

e. Not at all

Comment box

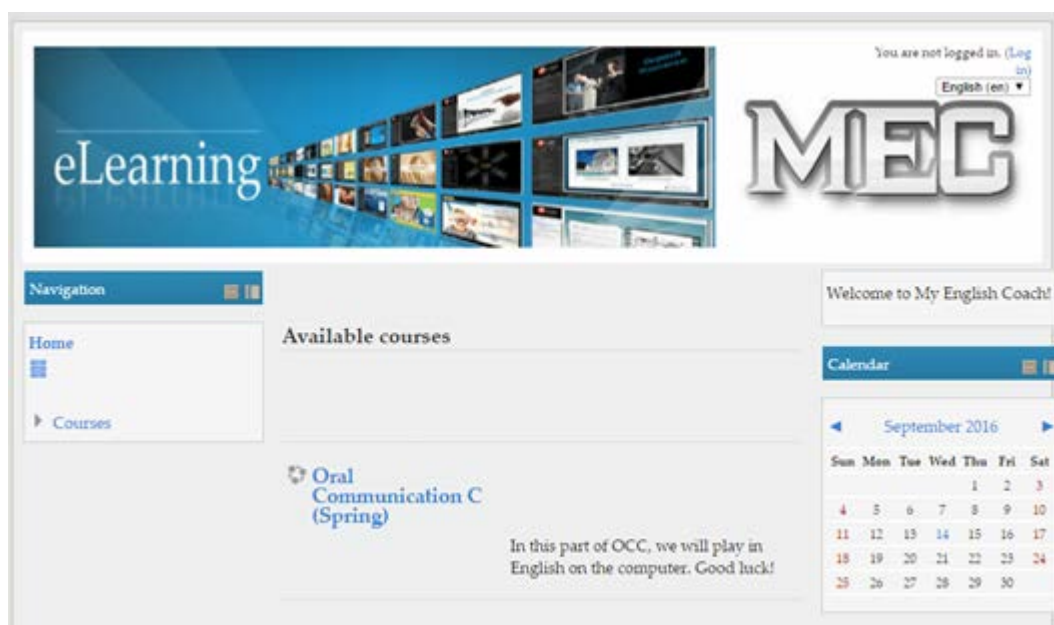
9. How did you feel about the following during the study?

	Really disliked	disliked	no feeling	liked	really liked
a. Atmosphere					
b. Content					
c. Classmates					
d. Classroom					
e. Computer					

10. Final comments

Appendix 11: The website (main and login pages)

Main Page



Login page (available in English or Japanese)



Appendix 12: Weekly Blended Learning Activities

The BL environment was designed to reflect, as closely as possible, activities from a textbook (selected by the university) grafted onto an online format. Each week a different unit was covered in the textbook so the teaching point and theme changed in every class. Activities built in complexity starting with basic sentence structure and grammar based activities (solo activities) to short conversations based around those structures (pair activities) and finally to class and online discussions combining all of the learning points and themes. The online site also included links to optional games and follow-up (grammar/mechanical practice) homework activities which were also included in the workbook. This progression in difficulty and complexity over the course of each class was a conscious decision on the part of the instructor in the design of the lesson and of the structure of BL environment.

The BL environment was designed to operate like a more interactive and interesting textbook with comparatively more real-world applications (online discussions) than the traditional textbook. The BL environment was also enhanced at every opportunity by including links to interesting content such as videos and pictures to make discussions more engaging. For instance, when the topic was good places to go with friends, the instructor posted a personal picture at the location so the lesson and teaching point was customized, to the extent possible to that class and those students at that moment in time. BL allows that kind of customized and flexible content.

Solo activities

The first designated task each week was a solo textbook activity, usually consisting of a simple grammar activity such as a fill-in-the-blanks or matching exercise. This served to introduce the teaching point so that students could build confidence with the material before moving on to a collaborative activity. After completing this activity, students were instructed

to access and complete the online solo activity. Instead of writing the answer as they had in the workbook, students were required to choose the correct answer from a dropdown menu, by dragging and dropping or by typing data into a small text box. The online solo activity was automatically marked by the site and the score was immediately shown to the student. The instructor displayed class results on the projector in real time, including maximums, minimums and averages, since scores were designed to be high, thereby helped to build student confidence with the material.

Pair Activities

After finishing the solo activities, participants were instructed to complete the paired activities which consisted of an email activity based on the same language patterns as the solo activity. The pair activity in the textbook first required the students to mechanically assemble several questions in the textbook in order to construct a practice email. Students then went online and worked together to complete the online pair activity with each student required to submit an individual email through the site. These were graded by the teacher asynchronously and returned to the students with feedback the following week. Repeated or common errors in the design of the email or grammar patterns were used for review purposes at the beginning of the following class in a group activity often consisting of identifying errors in sample sentences. Participants were allowed to choose their own partner, or group of three, and were allowed to sit where they wished in order to make them feel as comfortable as possible. The purpose of working with a partner was for the participants to engage socially since, according to SCT tenets, learning occurs “in social and cultural contexts that nurture individual development” (Marginson & Dang, 2017, p.120). Email activities were chosen for this activity since email is a commonly accepted and authentic business skill which students can be expected to have mastered in their future jobs. In this way, the activities were made

relevant to students by incorporating activities that they can expect to encounter in a future career involving English (Kiefer, Alley, & Ellerbrock, 2015).

Online Discussion

The discussion focused on a question complementary to the themes developed in the solo and pair activities. For instance, one week the textbook theme was an overseas homestay, so the online discussion was themed around good countries to visit for a homestay. There was no textbook activity therefore, after completing the pair activities, students were instructed to go online and submit an initial post to the online discussion consisting of at least 50 words in English. Participants were then instructed to post at least one reply of at least 25 words to another student's post during the week in an effort to engage with others in online discussions using multiple posts, thereby facilitating social learning where participants generate content relevant to their own lives (Beetham & Sharpe, 2013). Each week the instructor provided the initial post and students were encouraged to use this as an example and to respond to it if they wished. Whenever a student responded to the teacher's post, the teacher replied to that student with rich online content such as links to YouTube videos and photos in an effort to stimulate discussion.

Homework

Each week students were assigned a homework task in the textbook with an accompanying online homework activity which was introduced at the end of class. Students who had completed the solo, pair and discussion activities were asked to assist friends and neighbours and to check their work with their partners. When the entire class was judged to be ready, the link was activated and the activity was shown and explained to students who were instructed to complete both the textbook and online homework before the next class.

Game

An optional online game was provided every week, although it was not necessarily connected to the weekly teaching theme. Sometimes the game consisted of an online word search or a listening activity using textbook-derived English vocabulary, but the focus was on student enjoyment since games can add interest and fun to online activities (Robson, Plangger, Kietzmann, McCarthy, & Pitt, 2016); indeed, this thesis investigates the role of interest as it relates to motivation. Although the gain in English competency from the online games was expected to be minor, the literature shows that providing optional activities can enhance motivation by providing the students with the autonomy to choose their own activities (Wang, Huang, & Hsu, 2015). Gamification, including adding elements of game playing such as competition and point scoring to online learning, have been shown to increase enthusiasm and engagement among users (Adams Becker, Rodriguez, Estrada, & Davis, 2016). The games were chosen for their brevity and ease of play with students receiving a score or time which they could use to compare or challenge partners or friends if they felt inclined to do so. Some students invariably finished activities at a different pace while small self-contained BL components, such as games and optional grammar activities, gave the instructor the flexibility

to instantly expand or add activities for those students who finished early, while ensuring that all students were engaged with an activity related to the class teaching point.

Appendix 13: Survey coding themes

Two main categories, external influence and internal influence, were uncovered as were several additional sub-categories after an analysis of comments from the entrance survey.

category	sub	criteria	2	1	0	-1	-2
external	future	the importance of English to their future	strong	recognize	neither	do not recognize	strongly do not
ex. In the future I may need English							
	teacher	feelings towards the teacher	really like	like	neither	dislike	hate
ex. Teacher is enjoyable							
internal	enjoyment	students indicate that some part of their life is more enjoyable if they can speak English	strongly agree	agree	neither	do not agree	strongly disagree
ex. It's enjoyable if you can speak English (1), I hated English one time so now I can't do it (-2)							
	personal development	students indicate a wish to improve their skills	strongly agree	agree	neither	do not agree	strongly disagree
ex. If I learn more English words I can understand more, I want to watch a movie in English without subtitles							
	difficulty	Students feelings toward the difficulty of English study	very positively difficult	positively difficult	neither	negatively difficult	very negatively difficult
ex. I don't know about English words, I can't do it							

Six categories were found among comments from the exit survey.

category	characteristics	2	1	0	-1	-2
enjoyment	any comment related to enjoyment the students felt with the activities or the environment.	strongly enjoyed	enjoyed	neither	did not enjoy	strongly disliked the activities
ex. I enjoyed the posting and replying with friends, It was good because study felt like a game.						
ease	the ease with which the students felt they were able to complete the activities (within the BL environment)	very easy to complete	easy to complete	neither	difficult	very difficult
ex. It was easy to access						
appropriate difficulty	the difficulty level of the activities (English level required of the activities as perceived by the students)	very positively difficult	positively difficult	neither	negatively difficult (too easy)	very negatively difficult (much too easy)
ex. It was difficult to talk about my opinion in English (-1), A little more difficult questions would be good (-1)						
benefit	students considered the activities of recognizable benefit	very beneficial	beneficial	neither	useless	very useless
ex. My English experience became wider and I can use more English now, very useful knowledge						
skill	the students recognize the activity as leading to increased proficiency in English	very positive skill improvement	positive skill improvement	neither	negative skill improvement	very negative skill improvement
ex. I learned how to make email, I think I increased my skill						
interaction	impression of contact with other students in the online activities	strongly positive	positive	neither	negative	strongly negative
Ex. We could think of the answers together, I enjoyed working in a pair						

Appendix #14: Sample page from the researcher log book

May 27/2016 (35)

No. _____
Date _____

- talked with [REDACTED] this morning. He mentioned that changes to the ethics (paperwork) had been approved. (lengthening the study for the Online follow-up survey)

In class.

- almost everyone was here today
- the classroom was particularly hot but S's did not seem to mind.
- the feedback sheet was popular again. Students are really enjoying the pairwork. They are really talkative.
- the Solo activity was a bit of a challenge but when they went online it was great!
- I even saw [REDACTED] high fiving and others smiling when the class was close to scoring 100%
- maybe I need to make the activities harder... but would I lose the fun?