

# How Do Learner Autonomy, Self-Efficacy, and Student Preferences for Instructors' Medium of Instruction Influence WTC ?

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# How Do Learner Autonomy, Self-Efficacy, and Student Preferences for Instructors' Medium of Instruction Influence WTC ?

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## Abstract

EFL learners must use their second language (L2) to learn well, but this is challenging. The researchers aimed to clarify the roles that learner autonomy (LA), self-efficacy (SE), and student preferences for teachers' medium of instruction (MOI) play on their WTC in English. We explored this question by fostering LA, SE, and WTC through micro-debates. The three research questions were : (1) Does LA contribute to WTC ? (2) Does SE contribute to WTC ? (3) Do student preferences for their teachers' MOI contribute to WTC ? Participants ( $n = 100$ ) from first and second year EFL university classes in Western Japan completed questionnaires at the beginning, middle, and end of two 15-week terms in one academic year, as well as weekly self-assessment worksheets. Statistically significant positive correlations were found between LA, SE, and WTC. In addition, statistically significant negative correlations between students' MOI preferences in support of emotions and review and WTC vanished by mid-course, suggesting that students adapted to teachers' MOI. Finally, we discuss theoretical and pedagogical implications.

**Keywords :** willingness to communicate, learner autonomy, self-efficacy, medium of instruction, self-assessment

## 1. Introduction

In this study, we discuss the potential for teaching interventions to improve students' willingness to communicate and engage in their learning of English as a foreign language. First, research on willingness to communicate, medium of instruction, self-efficacy, learner autonomy, and self-assessment will be reviewed. The potential for discussion and debate to activate all these constructs will be assessed. Next, the aim and research questions will be outlined. After that, the methodology of the teaching interventions and data acquisition will be explained. Finally, we will report and discuss the findings and implications for theory and pedagogy.

The problem we address is that Japanese EFL students often lack willingness to communicate (WTC) in their second language, or L2 (English). The reason they have this problem is that they tend to have low levels of self-efficacy, or the sense of their competence in the L2. Often, they are unaware of the possibilities of their own learner autonomy to support their self-efficacy. Furthermore, if they do not understand the English, they cannot produce it. As a result, EFL teachers often face classrooms with silent and unmotivated students.

Why is this problem so important? Students need to speak the language to learn it (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). Speaking is both the means and end of FL classes (Stäger, Von Jagemann, Joynes, Kroeh, & Raddatz, 1886). By speaking, learners confirm what they know, can receive feedback on what they do not know and strengthen their ability to make the words accessible later. Being willing to communicate is essential for learning a language (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998). Therefore, we explore the constructs underlying willingness to communicate in a foreign language to elucidate those constructs that have practical application in university students' willingness to speak English in the EFL context in

Japan. If the current research can show evidence that variables contributing to WTC can be manipulated by teachers, then we have found a useful pedagogical tool for teaching English as a foreign language.

### **1.1 Willingness to Communicate**

Research on willingness to communicate in foreign languages was developed by McCroskey and his associates (ex. McCroskey & Baer, 1986) from unwillingness to communicate research. Willingness to communicate in a foreign language has been defined as “a readiness to enter into discourse, at a particular time, with a specific person or persons, using L2” (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547).

The constructs comprising WTC range from stable personality-oriented traits to variable situation-oriented states (MacIntyre, 2007 ; Peng & Woodrow, 2010). The difference is important, because stable trait variables have been associated with typical native-speaker communication while changable state variables have been associated with typical foreign language communication (MacIntyre, 2007) and can be manipulated by teachers in a foreign language classroom using visualization and goal-setting activities together. In fact, evidence has been found that activities developing internal self-regulated learning were more influential at changing WTC than classroom activities aimed specifically to enhance WTC (Munezane, 2015). Matsuoka (2009) found that self-efficacy might be slow to change, while variables relating to language anxiety could be modified by teachers in class. Based on these findings, we surmised that training students to understand the impact of their student autonomy, improvements in self-efficacy, and comprehension support with the strategic use of Japanese might influence students' willingness to communicate (WTC).

## 1.2 Medium of Instruction

The Medium of Instruction, or teachers' selection of the language of instruction used to teach English in class, has been found to be influential on class progress. Carson (2019) found that students with low English proficiency usually prefer the most Japanese support and are usually anxious in English class, which supports similar findings in a variety of contexts (for example, Burden, 2000; Carson & Kashihara, 2012; Prodromou, 2002). The use of targeted L1 support has been found to be helpful for a variety of functions, including lexical acquisition (Tian & Macaro, 2012), grammar (Macaro, 2001), comprehension (Carson & Kashihara, 2012), for developing complex ideas in the L1 in preparation for producing them in the L2 (Swain & Lapkin, 2000), and for supporting students emotionally by relieving their anxiety and supporting their confidence (Carson, 2019). The efficient use of Japanese support as needed might enable students to feel less anxious, more competent, and more willing to communicate in English in class.

## 1.3 Self-Efficacy

Students' self-efficacy beliefs, or the sense that they "can do it," are necessary for language acquisition. Self-efficacy has been defined as, "the belief in the ability to succeed in particular situations or to accomplish a task" (Bandura, 1997, p. 391). He found that students with good academic self-efficacy use good learning strategies, are willing to work harder in class, persist despite obstacles, and can more accurately self-assess their efforts than students with low levels of academic self-efficacy. These concepts have been supported empirically (Yip, 2019). Drawing students' attention to their self-efficacy beliefs using self-assessment reports can help students to assess and modify their beliefs and their language-learning habits (Ochi, 2018). In fact, self-efficacy beliefs are so powerful that they have been found to be better predictors of academic success than students' actual abilities (Bandura,

1997). Self-efficacy can partly depend on autonomous learning, or students' ability to decide what and how they can learn things on their own (Makino, 2014), which led us to add the variable of learner autonomy to our research.

#### **1.4 Learner Autonomy**

Next, we discuss learner autonomy, which is the sense that students can control their own learning. Learner autonomy is a difficult concept to measure since it involves both motivation and the confidence to take responsibility for students' learning choices (Littlewood, 1996). Murase (2015) used factor analysis to quantitatively assess four major constructs, and so clarified LA constructs that matter to EFL students in Japan. Sykes (2011) found that learner autonomy skills can be taught to students in self-access support systems. Often, students are unaware of their ability to assess and change ineffective study patterns. In fact, Benson (2011) found that self-assessment was linked to autonomy, and Dörnyei (2001) found that self-assessment makes students aware of their contribution to the learning process. Ochi (2018) also notes that EFL Japanese students' ability to use autonomous strategies during tasks increases their sense of perceived competence and improved their confidence in class work. In fact, learning strategies such as those that play a part in student autonomy, as well as self-efficacy, have been linked with academic performance (Yip, 2019).

A classroom that raises students' awareness of their learning process helps them participate in the learning process. This helps them to develop learner autonomy and self-efficacy. This ultimately encourages students to be willing to communicate.

We think that students' willingness to communicate in class is influenced by their preferences for Japanese support of comprehension, their self-efficacy in class, and their own learner autonomy outside of class.

### 1.5 Self-Assessment

The area of self-assessment in language learning has been linked to research in learner autonomy in the language-testing field. Benson (2011) points out, from the perspective of autonomy, internal assessment is more constructive than learners' ability to match their self-assessments with external assessments of their proficiency for classroom learning, a concept upheld by research findings (Munezane, 2015). Tassinari (2015) developed a model for dynamic assessment. Tassinari (2018) followed up with research indicating that since autonomy is a complex and changing construct, it is expedient to encourage self-assessment with qualitative and dynamic tools that enable learners to consider their competences and goals, with different focuses, and at different times of the learning process. These observations underscore the need for longitudinal studies. Ochi (2018) found with the Self-Evaluation Worksheet, students' awareness of their own learning increases and a sense of participation in the learning process is enhanced. Additionally, having control over the learning, planning, and monitoring of their tasks can help learners develop autonomy that leads to self-efficacy.

Shelton-Strong (2018) objected that teachers' attempts to measure LA may inadvertently interfere with LA, but noted that self-assessment and reflection can improve learning as well as autonomous action, beliefs, and self-efficacy. It can therefore contribute to regulating and improving their learning process. As the literature review suggests, self-assessment encourages learners to increase their awareness and sense of control over their own learning. In addition, it helps teachers to identify the strengths and weakness of the learner and to pinpoint areas requiring scaffolding support.

### 1.6 Discussion and Debate

One problem in EFL classrooms is that students are often expected to speak on

topics they have studied and about which they may not have enough time to think with a bird's-eye view to develop their critical thinking. However, engaging in academic discussions and debates, in which students explore a topic by building, challenging, and negotiating ideas about current issues in Japan promotes the transfer of learning from an irrelevant externally-oriented task to an internally-relevant issue, fostering critical thinking and understanding of content that may be beyond their current level (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011). Debate motivates students to actively learn content, because they must learn how to use the content to win at debates (Zare & Othman, 2013). Considering the relationship between LA, self-assessment, scaffolded productivity, and self-efficacy, the choice of debate has been supported in other research. Ohara (2019) notes that the students' ability to take charge of their language learning in the classroom becomes visible when we analyze and understand their interpersonal relationships and collaborative interaction during grouped debates. Codreanu (2016) observes that micro-debate is a reliable teaching technique that blurs methodological boundaries and simplifies students' specialized language learning and communicative competence. In fact, debate appears to keep learners motivated to get a clear picture of the issue and is suitable for encouraging WTC. Thus, debate would provide an ideal platform to motivate learner autonomy and enhance students' sense of speaking competence and self-efficacy.

## **1.7 Research Aim and Questions**

The purpose of this research is to study the influence of learners' preferences for Japanese support, learner autonomy, and self-efficacy on learners' WTC.

We consider three research questions : (1) Does Learner Autonomy contribute to WTC ? (2) Does Self-Efficacy contribute to WTC ? And, (3) do students' preference for medium of instruction, that is, the use of Japanese to support English learning (MOI), influence their WTC ?



## 2. Method

In order to study Learner Autonomy and Learner Self-Efficacy and whether it could be manipulated by teachers in class, we had to foster it in class and observe student changes. In addition, we wanted to know the influence that the scaffolding use of teachers' MOI promoting challenging language use might have on WTC. We will describe the interventions we applied in class to research learner autonomy, self-efficacy, and language support and their effects on WTC.

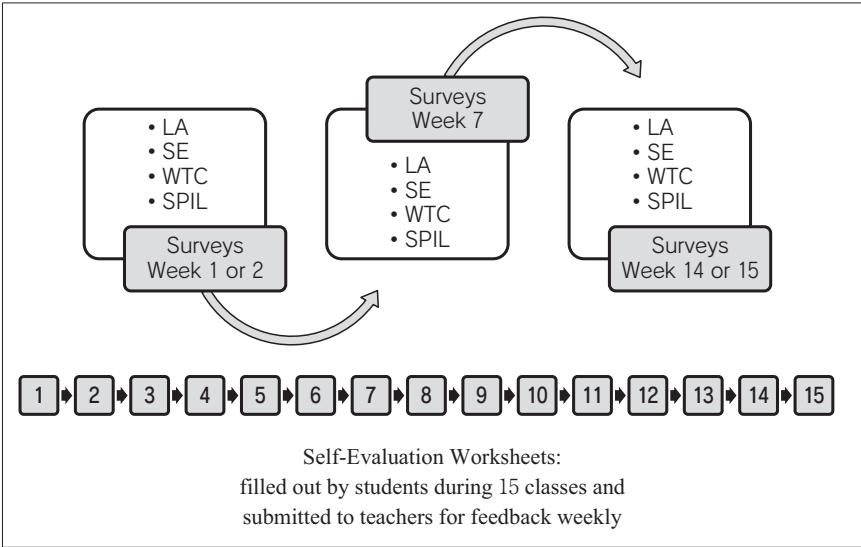
Teachers used identical texts, instruction methods, and assessment procedures to teach debating skills to Japanese EFL participants in four classes. Teachers introduced language learning strategies, autonomous study, and self-efficacy awareness through collaborative homework, in-class exercises, self-assessment, and micro-debates.

### 2.1 Research Design

An exploratory repeated-measures design was chosen to evaluate the effect of training techniques on associations between LA, SE, MOI, and WTC.

Surveys and self-evaluation sheets were chosen to acquire data and promote training of LA and SE in class time. Surveys were chosen to efficiently collect a large amount of data on student attitudes for statistical analyses. Rapid acquisition of attitude data facilitated the study of attitude changes between student LA, SE, MOI preferences, and WTC within a 15-week school term (Dörnyei, & Csizér, 2012), as illustrated in Figure 1. We administered student surveys at three times : First, during the first or second week of the term ; second, during the seventh week of the term, and last, during the fourteenth or fifteenth week of the term.

In addition, students completed Self-Evaluation Worksheets during all classes in their 15-week term as part of the intervention. The Worksheets were used to raise



**Figure 1. Research design for survey data collection points across 15-week courses**

student awareness of their learning autonomy in order to build their sense of self-efficacy.

## 2.2 Analyses

We used correlation tests to investigate the strength and direction of relationships between LA, LE, MOI, and WTC. All tests were bivariate to explore one paired relationship at a time. If the data is normally distributed and there is a linear relationship, then Pearson correlations are indicated, while if the data is not normally distributed then Spearman's correlations are appropriate (Maxwell, Delaney, & Kelley, 2017). Therefore, the results of normality tests determine further assessment.

Next, we chose to run and compare the results of both Pearson and Spearman correlation tests. While the Pearson product-moment correlation tests the strength

and direction of linear relationships, the Spearman rank-order correlations assesses the strength and direction of monotonic relationships (where the rank-order of both variables increase or decrease together). Since the data was mostly non-normally distributed, and an initial comparison of Spearman and Pearson correlation disclosed that results were essentially the same, we decided to report the Pearson correlations (Laerd Statistics, 2018), as they provide more data.

2.3 Participants

The participants were 100 EFL students at a private university in western Japan. They had a JTE or NEST teacher. Participation in this study was voluntary, confidential, and did not affect their grades.

Of the 100 student participants (see Table 1), one-third were taught by the Japanese Teacher of English (JTE) and two-thirds were taught by the Native English-Speaking Teacher (NEST). Gender was almost balanced, with 48 males and 52 females. Students’ general English proficiency level varied from basic to upper-intermediate according to their TOEIC scores.

**Table 1**

Variable	Group	Number
Teacher	Students with JTE	34
	Students with NEST	66
Gender	Male	48
	Female	52
Proficiency	< 299	6
	300 – 399	28
	400 – 539	49
	540 – 739	17
	Total	100

Note. Total *n* = 100, so frequencies are also percent.

## 2.4 Measures

We used items from four surveys to measure student attitudes and track changes in attitudes. The 12 learner autonomy questions were adapted from Murase's MILLA questionnaire (2015). The eight self-efficacy questions were selected from the questionnaire developed by Pintrich and De Groot (1990). The complete 40-item SPIL scale was used to assess student attitudes towards teachers' use of Japanese to help them learn English (Carson, 2014, 2015). Willingness to communicate was measured using the 20-item Willingness to Communicate scale that was developed by McCroskey & Baer, 1985. Participants chose responses to all items in the learner autonomy, self-efficacy, and MOI from a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 meant "strongly disagree" and 5 meant "strongly agree." Items in the WTC scale were responded to in per cent, with 1 meaning "never" and 100 meanings "always." The JTE translated all items to Japanese so the students could easily understand. Responses to all questionnaires at all 3 times were found to be highly reliable, as is reported next.

Assessment of student responses to the four questionnaires indicated that all four scales had high levels of internal consistency, as determined by Cronbach's alpha. Responses to the eight items from the subscale from Measurement in Language Learning Autonomy (MILLA), by Murase (2015) were found to measure the construct of learner autonomy consistently at all three times ( $\alpha = .905$ ;  $.908$ ;  $.903$ ). The 8 items selected from the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) by Pintrich & De Groot (1990), that measured the learner self-efficacy construct were found to elicit responses with high levels of internal consistency at all three data points ( $\alpha = .837$ ,  $.837$ , and  $.863$ ). The 40 items comprising the entire Student Preferences for Instructional Language (SPIL) scale (Carson, 2014; 2015) drew internally consistent responses ( $\alpha = .893$ ;  $.820$ ;  $.885$ ). Finally, the 20 items comprising the complete Willingness to Communicate

(WTC) scale (McCroskey & Baer, 1985 ; McCroskey, 1992 ; McCroskey, no date) also prompted reliable responses with high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .953 ; .856 ; .960$ ).

In addition, students completed Self-Evaluation Worksheets during all classes in their 15-week term. The Worksheets were used to raise student awareness of their learning autonomy in order to build their sense of self-efficacy.

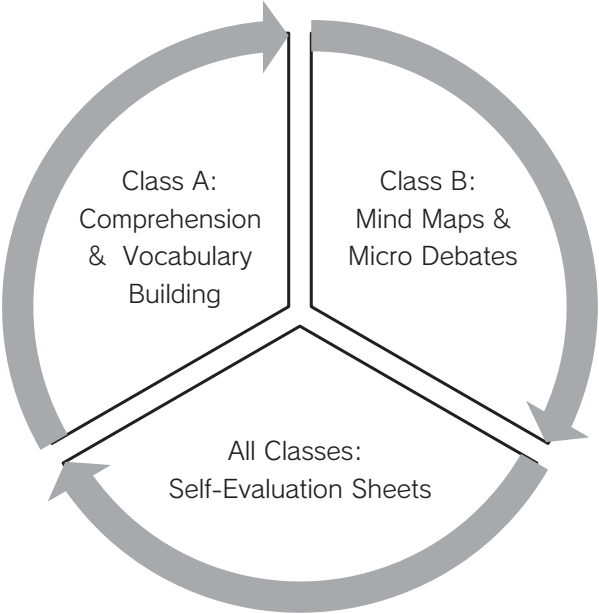
Ochi (2018) developed a Worksheet, inspired by Benson's (2011) record of work form, that students completed in every class. The Worksheet was designed to be a tool to encourage them to set learning goals and stay focused on them, keep students motivated to study, and raise their awareness about their activities. Students were asked to choose their own study material (i. e. not homework, which would be chosen by a teacher), the amount of time they intended to study weekly, and goals for their autonomous study, since having the freedom to choose for themselves rather than being forced to study assigned materials could contribute to motivation (Dörnyei, 2001). To guide students in making good autonomous choices, teachers need to support rather than direct students through the process of analyzing their needs, setting goals, making a study plan, recording their study, measuring their progress, and checking on whether of their study methods are working and making adjustments when they are not effective (Sykes, 2011). The act of setting goals, adjusting, and self-monitoring has been found to positively affect student's views of themselves as learners and decision makers, encouraging students to feel involved in the learning process, leading to a positive effect on self-efficacy (Smolen, Newman, Wathen, & Lee, 1995). To be beneficial, the worksheets must be simple, easy to use, and easy to understand at a glance. In fact, evidence has pointed to the positive influence of similar tracker sheets for improving students' willingness to communicate (Ismail, Rahman, Othman, & Ahmad, 2020).

Ochi's unique contribution to this self-monitoring and self-assessment sheet was to add a component dealing with classwork (Ochi, 2018). In this Worksheet, students record their achievements in debate (1 means did not win and 3 means they won in both debates) and comments about their own involvement in class activities (1 meaning they did not work much and 5 meaning they were working very hard). Teachers can provide encouragement and feedback by responding to student comments about autonomous study and classwork self-assessment to help guide students' awareness and help them to develop their own autonomy. Thus, the worksheet Ochi developed was designed to encourage learners to record what they had learned in classroom activities, the study time for the class, to comment on what they had done and to assess their classroom activities. It is a tool for self-monitoring and self-assessment. Ochi (2018) found evidence for a positive effect of using these Worksheets in improved learner autonomy and self-efficacy scores across a 15-week term.

The qualitative data from these Worksheets will be assessed in a separate article, due to the complexity of the qualitative data and lack of space in the current article.

## **2.5 Procedure**

The classes consist of three main procedures (see Figure 2). Each textbook unit was taught in an A class and B class structure. In A class, we focused on developing comprehension, vocabulary, and bilingual vocabulary building. In B class, students developed their speaking ability and debate strategies with Mind Maps, using what they had learned in A class to help them engage in English-language micro-debates. In every class, at the beginning and the end of classes they completed their self-evaluation worksheet.



**Figure 2. The main intervention activities.**

One important aspect of learner autonomy, self-efficacy, and willingness to communicate is the support provided by both teachers and peers. The perception of teacher support has been found to positively impact student autonomy and willingness to communicate (Joe, Hiver, & Al-Hoorie, 2017 ; Khajavy, Ghonsooly, Hosseini, & Choi, 2016). In fact, the perception of the teacher’s support is more important than its actual presence (Joe et al, 2017 ; Zhang, Beckham & Beckham, 2018). Furthermore, willingness to communicate is positively affected by student cohesiveness and cooperation ; when students help each other and feel supported by their peers, they are more willing to talk (Khajavy et al., 2016). Therefore, although the English text may be challenging and students may feel challenged, their speaking inhibitions can be overcome by the perception of active teacher and

peer support.

The use of complex English language in debates by intermediate-level students was strongly scaffolded so that students could out-perform their perceived limitations. The Micro-debates used high-intermediate English that challenged students. The scaffolding itself consisted of five areas of support. To enable them to produce this advanced English in debate, comprehension was supported at lexical, linguistic, and conceptual levels using five techniques : Mind Maps, to analyze and organize the logical flow and use of supporting evidence in a debate ; language support in the form of paired and group translation of the English debate text, along with identifying key phrases in the English text using their Japanese equivalents as prompts ; instruction regarding linguistic markers (for example : first, next, finally) in the English text ; and instruction on how to use reasoning links (for example, I see your point, but...); and paired practice in its pragmatic use during practice debates and during the group micro-debates themselves. In this way, classroom instruction and teacher support helped bridge the gap between what students thought they could do and what they were able to do in debates, which helped student develop improvements in their sense of self-efficacy.

The micro-debate topics were about practical issues that any student could experience. This overcame the flaw in some debate books, in which students are required to debate on topics of which they might have no practical experience yet, such as travel or sociocultural differences. With the extensive support provided by teachers and their peers, students were able to use more advanced English than they thought they could on issues that were relevant to them.

Self-Evaluation Worksheets were completed by students in every class. The purpose of the worksheet was to encourage learner autonomy and self-efficacy. At the beginning, the learners were told to think about their English-learning goals. They were instructed to set their goals for autonomous study time and debate scores



on the second day. Having chosen their own goals, learners completed their self-evaluation worksheets about their weekly English study at the beginning and end of every class. They specified their study time and chosen material. Additionally, they assessed their classroom activities on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (hardly working) to 5 (working very hard) as a tool for self-monitoring and self-assessment. Ochi (2018) designed the worksheet to encourage learners to record what they had learned in classroom activities, the study time for the class, to comment on what they had done, and on how useful and enjoyable their activities were.

All self-assessment sheets were collected by teachers at the end of every class, so that teachers could give students feedback, encouraging students to continue recording and self-assessing their own learning activities. Teachers distributed the self-evaluation sheets again at the beginning of the following class. Once students participated for a few weeks, they appeared eager to complete these sheets and enjoyed reading the teachers' feedback.

### 3. Results

The data for 106 participants was prepared by locating unlikely or missing values and inputting mistyped data located in the original data sheets. A missing data analysis was conducted, revealing that about 5% were missing. Six participants who had missed two surveys or one survey and had many values outside the normal range were omitted, bringing missing data down to about 2%, and leaving 100 participants. The missing data patterns were reanalyzed, revealing that less than 2% of the data were missing. Specifically, Little's missing completely at random (MCAR) test showed that missing learner autonomy responses were MCAR over all 3 times; responses to self-efficacy items were MCAR over all 3 times; WTC

missing values were found to be MCAR over all 3 times ; and SPIL responses were MCAR at each of 3 times (Little's MCAR test,  $p > .05$  for all tests). The missing data were replaced using expectation maximization (Little & Rubin, 2002). Since most data was found to be nonnormally distributed, we decided to proceed with nonparametric tests in addition to parametric tests and where there is no difference in the results to report the results of the parametric tests. No further data treatment was conducted.

### Changes over time

The main descriptive statistics from the questionnaires at the beginning, middle, and end of a 15-week course showed that students' responses on Autonomy, Self-efficacy, and WTC scales all increased over time (see Table 2).

All responses increased more in the second half of the course, as can be seen in Figure 3. The data from SPIL is more complex and is described in a later section. From here, we will describe the results as they answer the 3 RQs.

**Table 2**

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Learner autonomy at Time1	3.05	0.56
Learner autonomy at Time2	3.11	0.52
Learner autonomy at Time3	3.33	0.57
Self - Efficacy at T1	2.70	0.63
Self - Efficacy at T2	2.79	0.63
Self - Efficacy at T3	2.92	0.64
WTC at T1	40.61	20.85
WTC at T2	41.19	19.55
WTC at T3	42.21	19.86

Note. Total  $n=100$ . Learner autonomy and self-efficacy were measured on a Likert scale (1–5), while WTC was measured in percent (1–100).

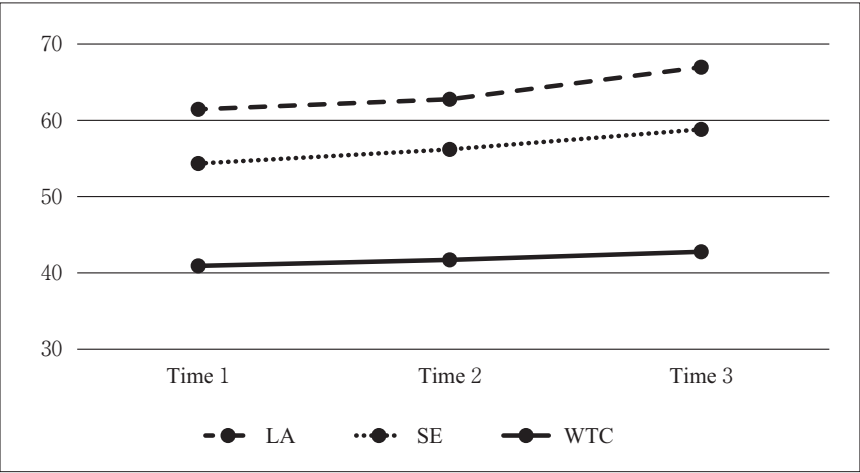


Figure 3. Learner autonomy, self-efficacy and willingness to communicate means at the beginning, middle, and end of 15-week terms. Learner autonomy and self-efficacy data were converted to per cent so that they could be compared with WTC data.

3.1 RQ1 : Does learner autonomy contribute to WTC ?

A review of the scatterplots at Time 1, 2, and 3 revealed a positive linear relationship between LA and WTC responses (Figure 4).

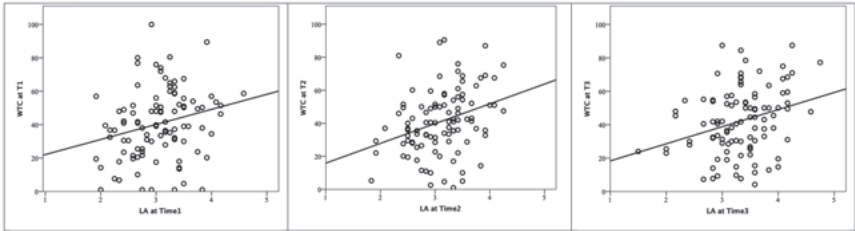


Figure 4. Scatterplots showing a positive linear correlation between learner autonomy (LA) and willingness to communicate (WTC) at the beginning, middle, and end of a 15-week term.

There was a statistically significant, positive correlation between learner autonomy and willingness to communicate at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester ( $p < .05$  at all 3 times), as can be seen in Table 3.

**Table 3. Correlations between LA and WTC at times 1, 2, and 3.**

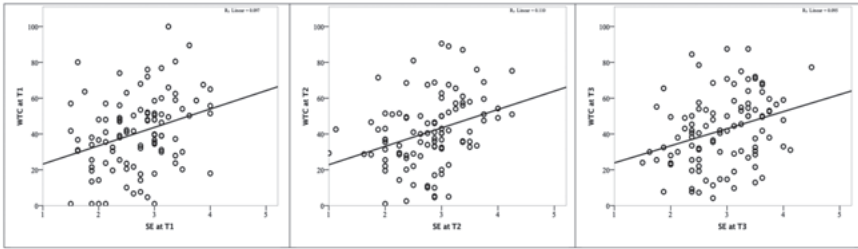
Variable		Willingness to Communicate		
		Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Learner Autonomy	Pearson Correlation	.24*	.32**	.23*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.02	.00	.02

Note. Total  $n = 100$ . \* Correlation is significant at the .05 level and \*\* is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

As learner autonomy increased, so did WTC.

**3.2 RQ2 : Does self-efficacy contribute to WTC ?**

A review of the scatterplots at Time 1, 2, and 3 reveal a positive linear relationship between SE and WTC responses.



**Figure 5. Scatterplots showing a positive linear correlation (similar to Figure 4 beginning line) between self-efficacy (SE) and willingness to communicate (WTC) at the beginning, middle, and end of 15-week courses.**

There was a statistically significant, positive correlation between students' self-efficacy and willingness to communicate at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester ( $p < .01$  at all 3 times).

**Table 4. Correlations between SE and WTC at Times 1, 2, and 3.**

Variable		Willingness to Communicate		
		Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Self-efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.1**	.33**	.31**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	.00

Note. Total  $n = 100$ . \*\* is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

As self-efficacy increased, so did WTC.

**3.3 RQ3 : Do preferences for MOI influence their WTC ?**

Due to the complexity of the scale, MOI correlations from responses to the items in SPIL will only be assessed with WTC. The WTC numbers are higher than those of SPIL because WTC items were responded to using per cent while SPIL items were responded to using a 5-point Likert scale. The SPIL scale is composed of seven factors, of which four relate to learning conditions (F2 Lexico-Grammar ; F4 Instructions for Tests and Assignments ; F5 Review ; and F6 Comprehension) while three relate to other conditions in the classroom (F1 Emotional Issues, F3 Teachers’ use of Japanese ; and F7 Sociocultural issues).

Willingness to communicate appears to increase while MOI preferences tend to vary depending on the factor (See Table 5). Willingness to communicate increased from Time 1 (mean = 40.61) to time 3 (mean = 42.21), while changes in factors followed different trends depending on the factors. The factors for which the students preferred the most Japanese support were for learning factors, F4 Tests and F6 comprehension. These factors decreased by Time 3, with F4 Tests decreasing the least from 4.00 to 3.97 and F6 decreasing from 4.02 to 3.92. They preferred the least Japanese support for F1 Emotions, starting at 2.95 and increasing to 3.06 by the end of the course.

**Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for WTC and MOI Over Time.**

Variables	Time 1		Time 2		Time 3	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
WTC	40.61	20.85	41.19	19.55	42.21	19.86
F1 Emotions	2.95	1.06	3.15	0.80	3.06	0.92
F2 LexicoGrammar	3.70	0.69	3.69	0.62	3.68	0.69
F3 Teacher use of J	3.47	0.78	3.66	0.66	3.61	0.80
F4 Tests	4.00	0.83	4.02	0.77	3.97	0.83
F5 Review	3.23	0.78	3.23	0.78	3.28	0.77
F6 Comprehension	4.02	0.78	3.96	0.67	3.92	0.72
F7 Socioculture	3.07	0.93	3.22	0.73	2.97	0.86

Note. WTC = willingness to communicate, means from per cent (1 – 100) ; F# = factor number in SPIL, means from Likert scale, with 1 is low and 5 is high amounts of Japanese support preferred.

The relationships can be more easily understood by viewing a graph of the means (see Figure 6). The highest means were for F6 Comprehension and F4 Tests, suggesting relatively high participant anxiety and a strong desire for the MOI to include substantial Japanese support. The lowest means were for WTC and the other than learning factors, F1 Emotional support and F7 Sociocultural issues. The means for WTC and F5 Review increased, while means for F4 Tests and F2 Lexicogrammar did not change much, and means for F6 Comprehension decreased from Time 1 to Time 3.

The relationship of the seven factors of SPIL on WTC was assessed using Pearson's correlations tests. Participant responses to teachers' MOI was found to be statistically and negatively correlated with WTC only at Time 1, with Factors 1 Emotional support and F5 for Review (See Table 6).

The higher the preferences for L1 support, the lower the WTC. These significant correlations disappeared over time.

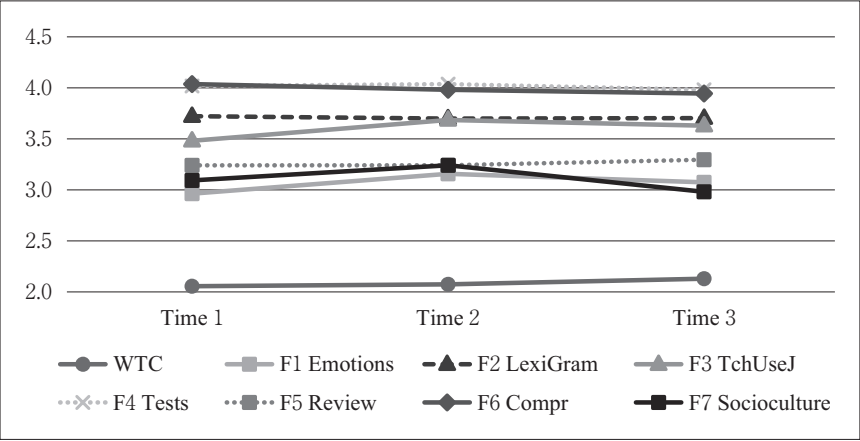


Figure 6. Means of WTC and MOI responses over three times. WTC = willingness to communicate, LexGram = lexicogrammar ; TchUseJ = Teacher’s use of Japanese. Note that WTC was recalculated to Likert scale numbers to enable comparison with MOI scores, with low numbers representing a low preference for teacher’s Japanese use to support English learning in class.

Table 6. Pearson correlations (R) for Seven MOI Factors and WTC at three times.

		Willingness to communicate		
		T1	T2	T3
F1 Emotions	Pearson Correlation	-.29**	-0.11	-0.10
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.26	.33
F2 LexicoGrammar	Pearson Correlation	-0.10	0.18	0.16
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.35	.08	.11
F3 Teacher use of J	Pearson Correlation	-0.14	-0.06	-0.07
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.17	.58	.50
F4 Tests	Pearson Correlation	-0.17	0.01	0.10
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.09	.93	.33
F5 Review	Pearson Correlation	-.30**	-0.16	0.03
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.11	.77
F6 Comprehension	Pearson Correlation	-0.04	0.05	0.16
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.67	.62	.11
F7 Socioculture	Pearson Correlation	-0.17	0.01	-0.06
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.09	.96	.58

Note. Total n = 100. T# means Time 1 (beginning), Time 2 (middle) and Time 3 (end) of the 15-week course. \*\* Correlation is significant at the .01 level.

## **4. Discussion**

The results of each research question will be examined for their contribution to the context of EFL teaching in which this research takes place. Next, we will offer pedagogical and theoretical implications. This will be followed by consideration of limitations and suggestions for future research, before turning to conclusions.

### **4.1 RQ1 : Does learner Autonomy contribute to WTC ?**

The results of statistical analysis indicated that yes, learner autonomy contributes to WTC. Increases in LA were statistically and positively related to increases in WTC over time. These findings support similar findings by Carson (2020). As students learn the benefits of LA even when studying unrelated material, their willingness to speak in class increases.

### **4.2 RQ2 : Does Self-Efficacy contribute to WTC ?**

Statistical analyses of student responses to the SE questionnaire indicated a positive answer to RQ2. Increases in SE were statistically and positively correlated with increases in WTC over time. Interestingly, the current findings are contrary to previous findings (Carson, 2020), because student SE maintained its statistically positive correlation with WTC throughout the course rather than vanishing by the end of the course. In fact, positive findings from both LA and SE responses support Munezani's previous findings (Munezane, 2015) that the two skills used together are effective for improving WTC.

### **4.3 RQ3 : Do preferences for MOI influence their WTC ?**

A Pearson product-moment correlation test was used to determine the strength and direction of a linear relationship between student responses to SPIL about their



preferences for their teacher's use of Japanese to support their English learning and their responses on the WTC scale. Analysis revealed that Japanese for emotional support and review was inversely correlated to an increase in WTC, but the statistical differences between groups vanished by mid-term. In other words, students with high MOI preferences tended to have low WTC while students with low MOI preferences tended to have high WTC, but differences in MOI preferences for emotional support and support of review no longer mattered after the intervention began. These findings suggest that, with sufficient language support of even difficult English that they had to use in debates, student preferences for Japanese support no longer interfered with their WTC. This was a good thing !

### **Theoretical implications**

Micro-debates challenge students to outperform their perceived limitations. Students began the course with the need to use language that was beyond their initial ability, tending to cause some language-learning anxiety, as indicated by the negative relationship between MOI and WTC with the first surveys. However, extensive language scaffolding completed as homework and shared in class tended to reduce anxiety, supporting earlier similar findings (Carson, 2018, 2019). Students were asked to translate their debate text as homework and often did so in pairs or groups, had to share their translation with their partners or the class in the following class, and promptly received a Japanese translation that confirmed their efforts or helped them to understand where they made errors. With repetition, they received understandable private feedback supporting their previous efforts or helping to shape their future efforts. With the sense that their language weaknesses were compensated, students tended to gain confidence, enhancing their sense of language competence and their sense of self-efficacy and learner autonomy, supporting previous findings (Joe, Hiver, & Al-Hoorie, 2017 ; Khajavy, et al., 2016 ; Ochi,

2018 ; Zwiers and Crawford, 2011).

It was revealing that training students' learning autonomy by asking them to study English material unrelated to their homework in any English class had a positive influence on their WTC. Students chose their own goals, set their own standards, and reported their study using the honor system. Despite the fact that what they chose to learn was unrelated to their micro-debate homework, training in LA was correlated with higher WTC scores, supporting similar observations (Benson, 2011). Furthermore, comments indicated that student motivation increased once they had started English study and received some feedback from teachers. Learner autonomy strategies are trainable, and appear to work in concert with strategies to raise self-efficacy (Munezane, 2015 ; Ochi, 2018), and can contribute to WTC.

Improving confidence can be tracked and reinforced with self-assessment sheets. In fact, we found that students' self-assessments were related to improvements in their LA, SE, and WTC, supporting similar findings (Ochi, 2018 ; Tassinari, 2015, 2018). The use of self-assessment could be a valuable addition to teachers' pedagogical toolbox, as we discuss below.

### **Pedagogical suggestions**

The current research has found evidence to support the use of several classroom interventions to get students using their English. In fact, micro-debates are a valuable tool for teaching English. We found that micro-debates are related to increased WTC. Micro-debates work at several levels to promote the use of English in class.

First, the subject matter of micro-debates can be chosen from issues relevant to students' lives. If students can see that English can be useful, there is a reason to try to use it. Learning debate strategies might be associated with English and thus

non-threatening to students' inhibitions rooted in their own Japanese cultural identity.

Secondly, students must use English in debates to get a credit. Micro-debates are one form of active learning that prompts students to learn the necessary vocabulary and debate strategies as well as serve as the occasion for using English. When students use English in debates, they learn how well they actually know the language and can get feedback not only from the teacher but also their partners. In addition, the fact that they are expected to argue both sides of the debate reinforces the notion that these issues do not have a right or wrong answer, and so they are encouraged to take a chance because they will not be wrong. Finally, debates were conducted like a game, with rapid role changes, a point system, and the competition and chance to win. After undergoing a few group debates, student anxiety should be reduced since there is no wrong answer and debates are game-like.

Thirdly, since the micro-debates used some vocabulary that was beyond the students' current abilities, it provided the opportunity for students to become aware that they can develop their abilities by showing them how to develop their LA outside of class and their SE inside of class. Students had to learn difficult vocabulary and concepts. Strategies to learn involved translation as homework and reinforced by being shared in partners or groups in class, the creation of mind maps to help organize the main argument structures and supporting evidence, and the use of phrases and linguistic markers to organize their argument as they spoke in their micro-debate group. Linguistic scaffolding was done as homework and reviewed as pair work, so that even the weakest members of the class could cope with language that they could not puzzle out on their own.

Fourth, the use of self-assessment sheets helped to coordinate learning outside of class as well as inside of class. In fact, the use of self-assessment sheets helped to coordinate and develop LA and SE strategies in class. LA materials that were chosen by students out of class were found to contribute to their SE during in-class

work.

They choose self-study based on their own goals and their own choice of time dedicated to learning their chosen English. It was important that the English study outside of class not be homework, since that material would be chosen by a teacher, while the goal was to bring students to understand the power of their own choice and ability to change unworthy methods. The fact that the teachers read and commented on their self-assessment meant they were accountable to someone, even if there were no marks involved. Just as being accountable for one's actions helps people who are trying to create a useful new habit or destroy a previously harmful habit, knowing that the teachers were interested in their progress could help to motivate them to make progress that they could report. Having a place to see their progress build seemed to encourage students to continue working to improve even though their self-study would not receive a mark. Furthermore, noting their performance in debates and in daily classwork made them aware of how their attention and efforts resulted in a sense of increasing competence. Alternatively, a disinterested attitude could be reflected in lack of progress which the student might otherwise not notice. In fact, the researcher noticed that when she was delayed handing out the self-report sheets, students brought this to her attention because they wanted to know the teacher's comments and wanted to write their own comments. We found that self-assessment sheets support LA and SE, and that LA and SE contribute to WTC and ultimately language learning.

### *Limitation*

The most serious limitation was the small student sample size for both teachers and students. In order to conduct robust statistical analyses, particularly in developing a model to explain the relationships between LA, SE, MOI, and WTC, we needed about 300 participants to attempt to create a statistically valid explanatory

model. However, the data received was valuable because it was enough to indicate directions for future research.

### *Future*

Correlation studies can locate a relationship between paired variables, and longitudinal correlation studies can find evidence that increases in one part of the relationship tends to support similar increases in the other part of the relationship. However, to find the definitive strength and direction of relationships, it is necessary to use structural equation modeling of the data. Structural equation modelling is more reliable since it involves a confirmation factor analysis, assessment of the final constructs that is more rigorous than an exploratory factor analysis, and careful assessment of the direction and power of the relationships. Structural equation modelling can clarify direct and indirect relationships among the data and is essential for the creation of a statistical model that can be tested by other researchers.

Second, qualitative analysis of Self-Evaluation Worksheets to learn why students responded as they did would help to explain responses.

## **5. Conclusions**

An analysis of student responses to the four questionnaires indicated that some, but not all, of the variables of interest were positively correlated with WTC. Learner autonomy positively correlated with WTC. Self-efficacy positively correlated with WTC. However, MOI was negatively correlated with WTC, and its correlation with WTC disappeared by the middle of the course, possibly because student needs for comprehension support were being met. The final outcome of the intervention that teachers observed was a welcome one: Students who were quiet at

the beginning of the course changed to students enjoying noisy and energetic debates by the end of course.

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## Appendix A : Survey on Learner Autonomy and Self-Efficacy of Language Learning

This questionnaire is designed to measure the degree of your autonomy as a learner of English ; in other words, how much control you have over your own learning of English and self-efficacy of language learning. Please read each statement carefully and choose the response that applies to you. Your responses will not affect your course grade.

Never Strongly disagree	Rarely Disagree	Sometimes Neither	Often Agree	Always Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

1	I set long-term goals and plans in learning English.	
2	I set goals and make study plans before I start studying English.	
3	I try to create the conditions under which I can study English best.	
4	If I have a limited amount of time available for study, I decide in what order the things need to be done.	
5	I try to create the conditions under which I can study English best.	
6	I reflect upon what I learned after I finish studying English for the day.	
7	I assess the effectiveness of my English study plans.	
8	I take notes about how much time I spent on my English study.	
9	I am aware of the goals of the English class(es) I am taking.	
10	I sometimes want to ask my teachers and other students for advice about my English learning.	
11	Students can help each other learn English.	
12	If I study English with other students,I also learn from them.	
13	I think I'm a good student.	
14	I'm certain I can understand the ideas taught in this course.	
15	I think I will receive a good grade in this class.	
16	I am sure I can do an excellent job on the problems and tasks assigned for this class.	
17	I expect to do very well in this class.	
18	I think I know a great deal about the subject.	
19	I know that I will be able to learn the material for this class.	
20	My study skills are excellent.	

Note : Autonomy was measured using items 1–12, adapted from Murase's (2015) Measurement in Language Learning Autonomy (MILLA) scale. We adapted Murase's Japanese translation with minor modifications by the second author to suit our students. Items 13–20 were adapted from the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) by Pintrich & De Groot (1990). The second author adapted and translated these questions, and they appeared previously in Ochi (2018). The two subscales were combined on one paper to streamline student responses using similar formats.

**Appendix B : Willingness to Communicate Scale**

Directions : Below are 20 situations in which a person might choose to communicate or not to communicate. Presume you have completely free choice. Indicate the percentage of times you would choose to communicate in each type of situation. Indicate in the space at the left of the item what percent of the time you would choose to communicate.

(0 = Never to 100 = Always)

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Talk with a service station attendant.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Talk with a physician.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Present a talk to a group of strangers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Talk with an acquaintance while standing in line.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Talk with a salesperson in a store.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Talk in a large meeting of friends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Talk with a police officer.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Talk in a small group of strangers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Talk with a friend while standing in line.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Talk with a waiter / waitress in a restaurant.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Talk with a stranger while standing in line.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Talk with a secretary.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Present a talk to a group of friends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Talk in a small group of acquaintances.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. Talk with a garbage collector.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. Talk in a large meeting of strangers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. Talk with a spouse (or girl / boyfriend).
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. Talk in a small group of friends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Present a talk to a group of acquaintances.

Note : The Willingness to Communicate Scale and its Japanese translation were copied from McCroskey, J. C. (nd). <http://www.jamescmccroskey.com/measures/WTC.htm>

On his website, McCroskey included this note : No copyright. Free to use with credit.

**Appendix C : Self-Evaluation Worksheet**

Class (\_\_\_\_)      Student Number (\_\_\_\_\_)      Name (\_\_\_\_\_)

	Date	Study Time (Minutes)	Autonomous Study Time/ Content	Debate Score 3 > 1	Class performance 5 > 1	Reflections/ Questions (Japanese)
Goal Setting						
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						
Average						

Learning Contract

I pledge to study English as an autonomous learner, following the above goals.

Date \_\_\_\_\_      Name \_\_\_\_\_