THE EFFECTS OF MUSIC, RELAXATION AND SUGGESTION ON TERTIARY STUDENTS’ AFFECT AND ACHIEVEMENT IN LEARNING JAPANESE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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This study investigates the effects of the three major factors of Suggestopedia – music, relaxation and suggestion – on the students’ affect and development of communicative competence in tertiary Japanese language classes. A review of literature on Suggestopedia, the original form of Accelerated Learning (AL), shows that its effects are controversial, surrounded by misunderstanding and lack of appropriate evaluation. There is a need to clarify the nature of AL and the effects of its factors. Two existing classes were randomly assigned as a control group ($n = 29$) and an experimental group ($n = 25$). This quasi-experimental study lasted for 12 weeks with 3 stages of 4 weeks each. The results of $t$-tests showed that there existed no major significant differences between the two groups. When differences between each stage were examined carefully, however, it was found that self-concept increased significantly with the introduction of suggestion. The findings did not support the general claims that AL has positive effects on language learning, but it was found that among the three independent variables suggestion influenced students’ affect positively. The finding implies that the teacher’s positive messages are powerful tools to enhance students’ affect in learning a foreign language.

INTRODUCTION

Among various factors that influence individual L2 (second/foreign language) learner differences, affective factors have attracted increasing attention (Arnold et al., 1999; Dörnyei, 2003; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2000; Williams et al., 1997). Research on affective variables appears to offer the promise of enhancing students’ language learning, since they are more malleable than many cognitive variables, and better learning strategies can be developed based on studies of them (Ellis, 1994). However, there has been relatively little research on them in L2 acquisition research. In particular, interventional studies...
on affective factors are scarce, due to the many difficulties associated with such research designs. Such difficulties include various threats to validity and disagreements about the definitions of affective variables and the instruments to measure them (Bailey, 1983; Beretta, 1986; Dörnyei, 1998; Dörnyei, 2001; Long, 1984; Oxford, 1994). Nevertheless, recent research has advanced particularly in the area of motivation, anxiety and self-concept.

Motivation is generally regarded as the most important factor in determining students’ success in L2 learning (Belmechri et al., 1998; Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner et al., 1993; Oxford, 1994; Samimy et al., 1992). The literature review shows that the works by Gardner and his associates have been the most influential since 1960s. In fact, Gardner’s model is still prominent in that it is based on and has been tested by empirical research (Dörnyei, 1998; Gardner et al., 1994a; Gardner et al., 1994b). Although some early studies suggested that the integrative motive is more positively related to L2 achievement than instrumental orientation (Gardner, 1985; Gardner et al., 1959; Gardner et al., 1992), since the early 1990s a focus on learner attitudes towards the target language as the prime source of L2 motivation has been criticised (Dörnyei, 1990; Noëls, 2001b; Noëls et al., 2000; Oxford, 1996). In attempting to redefine and expand L2 motivational constructs, research has shown that L2 motivation is related to relational, social and environmental variables include ethnic or cultural variables (Schmidt et al., 1996; Sung et al., 1998), classroom variables (Bacon et al., 1990; Clément et al., 1994; Dörnyei, 1997; Tremblay et al., 1995) and teacher variables (Menec et al., 1994; Noëls, 2001a; Noëls et al., 1999).

In the research on language anxiety, Horwitz et al. (1986) defined it from a situation-specific perspective and developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Much research thereafter showed that there exists an inverse relationship between anxiety and language learning (Aida, 1994; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre et al., 1991; Phillips, 1992; Saito et al., 1996; Saito et al., 1999; Young, 1986). It also suggested the importance of learning environments, particularly the role teachers play in reducing students’ language anxiety (Horwitz, 2001; Young, 1991; Young, 1999). It is assumed that students learn an L2 more effectively from supportive teachers in stress-free environments.

Self-concept has been studied extensively in the area of educational psychology. Marsh developed influential self-report instruments based on the notion that self-concept is formed through a person’s experience with his/her environment (Marsh and O’Neill. 1984). It is generally agreed that academic self-concept is positively related to academic achievement (Anazonwu, 1995; Hattie, 1992; Marsh, 1987; Purkey et al., 1996). In ad-
dition, research suggests that self-concept is closely related to other affective variables, in particular, motivation (Clément et al., 1994; MacIntyre et al., 1997; Phillips, 1992). Further, it was found that environmental reinforcement and significant others can influence self-concept (Williams et al., 1997).

The review of research on three major affective factors generally suggested that all of these factors are related not only to learning but also to various environmental factors such as teachers’ attitudes and teaching methods. It also showed the importance of motivation in learning. It has become clear that the affective variables are related to each other, but it is beyond the scope of this study to determine the nature of this relationship.

ACCELERATED LEARNING (AL)

Suggestopedia, the original form of Accelerative Learning (AL), claimed to benefit the students in both cognitive and affective aspects of the learning process (Lozanov, 1978). Some research has found a significant positive effect of AL (Caux, 1995; Felix and Lawson 1994; Kaplan, 1981; Schiffler, 1992; Whitacre, 1994), or a positive trend (Garcia 1984). However, despite its high reputation in popular publications, AL has attracted severer criticisms and more restrained recognition in academic fields (Scovel, 1979; Wagner et al., 1983).

Reviewing many different versions of AL, Felix (1992) and Schiffler (1992) concluded that music, relaxation and suggestion were the most important elements of AL.

AL research has generally found that music facilitates recall of newly learned vocabulary (Medina, 1990; Quast, 1999; Schiffler, 1992; Schuster et al., 1982; Stein et al., 1982; Zeiss, 1984) or text (Wallace, 1994).

Although it was suggested that relaxation could help students reduce language anxiety (Young, 1999), research simply does not support such a claim, failing to show a positive effect on memorisation or learning (Alexander, 1982; Kiselica et al., 1994; Render et al., 1984; Schiffler, 1992). While relaxation may create positive psychological effects immediately (Krampen, 1997), it would be necessary to implement more efficient research designs to prove its effect on academic performances.

The research on suggestion is scarce and shows conflicting results within AL studies (Borden et al., 1976; Schuster et al., 1982). However, the definition of suggestion is so comprehensive that some suggestive intervention techniques proved to be effective outside the AL studies. These techniques included the teacher’s mediating roles to help the learners to foster a positive self-image and motivation (Noëls, 2001a; Noëls et al., 1999).
While AL was revealed to have the potential to enhance both affective and cognitive variables in learning, L2 acquisition research using AL has many deficiencies. First, many studies were relatively short-term based in the laboratory rather than the classroom (Alexander, 1982; Baur et al., 1981; Lozanov, 1978; Wagner et al., 1983). Second, very few studies have looked into affective variables. Although some researchers noticed the effect of AL on such variables as group dynamics (Caux, 1995) and self-esteem (Garcia, 1984), they were not evaluated appropriately using objective measurements. Third, many studies have been concerned with only memory and linguistic competence (Borden et al., 1976; Kaplan, 1981; Schuster et al., 1982; Stein et al., 1982; Wagner et al., 1983; Zeiss, 1984). An important exception was a study by Felix and Lawson (1994), who found a significant effect of AL on a narrow aspect of communicative competence. However, their short-term quasi-experimental study with a small group lacked a separate control group, causing its validity to be questioned. Fourth, some components of AL were generally lumped together and very few studies have isolated each variable. As a result, it is difficult to evaluate the effects of AL appropriately and to look into how it works with definitive data. Therefore, a quasi-experimental study, including analysis of one factor alone, and factors in combination, was carried out in order to investigate the effects of AL in facilitating affective factors as well as acquisition of Japanese communicative competence in natural tertiary classrooms for a period of 12 weeks.¹

RESEARCH QUESTION

The main research question is: What effects do Accelerated Learning (AL) techniques have on students’ performance and affect in communication-oriented tertiary language classes in Australia?

THE STUDY

PARTICIPANTS

All students who were enrolled in a subject titled “Japanese B” at a university in Melbourne were asked to participate voluntarily in this study. All participants (n = 54) provided written consent to participate in the study. Japanese B is an elective subject and does not form a major study. It was designed for two types of students. One is those who have completed Japanese A, a 12-week introductory Japanese course (24 hours of lessons in total). Japanese A is only for beginners and excludes students with prior knowledge of Japanese. The other is those who have the equivalent level of Japanese to those who have completed Japanese A. Japanese B is a semester-long course (12 weeks)
and students meet once a week for a two-hour session. The two pre-existing classes were randomly allocated to either an experimental or control group. Distribution figures for gender, average age, non-native English speakers and overseas students are shown in Table 1. One of the overseas students was from a Pacific Island and all the others were from Asian countries. Only 3 students were native English speakers and local students. The majority, 42 students (78%) had completed Japanese A in the previous semester and enrolled in Japanese B to continue their study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>21.1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of students</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas students</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prior knowledge of Japanese (Number of years studied Japanese)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 0.5</td>
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<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 4</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Up to 5</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Over 5</td>
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</table>

Table 1 Breakdown of participants in experimental and control groups
PROCEDURE

The experiment lasted for 1 semester or 3 stages of 4 weeks each. The experimental class was taught using communicative language teaching methods in conjunction with Accelerated Learning (AL) techniques. At stage 1 music was used for the experimental group. At stage 2 a combination of music and relaxation, and at stage 3 music, relaxation and suggestion, were implemented in the experimental group. The control class was taught by communicative language teaching methods with no suggestion, music or relaxation (Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Design of the study</th>
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<tr>
<td>C = Communicative language teaching methods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M = Music</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R = Relaxation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S = Suggestion</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental Group</td>
<td>C +M</td>
<td>C+M+R</td>
<td>C+M+R+S</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three treatments – music, relaxation and suggestion – were defined as follows.

Music: Background music (Baroque music, e.g. Water Music by Handel, G.F.) was added to the communicative approach. The music was played throughout the class at stage 1, 2 and 3 using a tape recorder. The volume was adjusted so as not to be too loud.

Relaxation: Progressive Muscular Relaxation exercises were conducted for 5 minutes at the beginning of each lesson at stage 2 and 3. Due to the short time available, the shorthand procedure suggested by Davis, Eshelman and McKay (1995) was adopted.

Suggestion: Suggestion was added to instructions at stage 3. At least one direct verbal suggestion (e.g. “learning will be easy for you today”, Schuster and Gritton, 1986) was used during each lesson. Also, when introducing a relaxation exercise, the positive effects of the relaxation on learning were mentioned. A checklist revealed that generally suggestion was made at least three times in each class.

INSTRUMENTS

Since many of the instruments adopted in this study investigate students’ present or past learning experiences, it was not appropriate to use them before the experiment started. Lack of a pre-test caused some limitation to the interpretation of the results. However,
an Amotivation, Intrinsic, and Extrinsic Motivation Scale (AIEMS) (Appendix) was used at the beginning of the course to provide supplementary information. AIEMS, adopted from Noëls et al. (1999), assesses Amotivation (3 items; $\alpha = .81$), Intrinsic Motivation (9 items; $\alpha = .82$) and three types of Extrinsic Motivation: External Regulation (3 items; $\alpha = .78$), Introjected Regulation (2 items; $\alpha = .67$) and Identified Regulation (3 items; $\alpha = .79$). Indicated in parentheses are the numbers of items measuring each factor and $\alpha$ obtained by Noëls et al. (1999). AIEMS uses a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from (1) “Does not correspond at all” to (5) “Corresponds completely”. A high score indicates a strong correspondence between the proposed reason and the students’ reason for studying a L2.

At the end of each Stage (4th, 8th and 12th week), the other three instruments, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), The Self Description Questionnaire III (SDQ III), and Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) were used to investigate the effects of independent variables. For all these measurements the suffix 1, 2, or 3 has been added. For example, FLCAS 1 means FLCAS measured at stage 1 (4th week).

FLCAS (Appendix) assesses the degree to which students feel anxious during language class (Horwitz, 1986). It has 33-items and uses a 5-point Likert type scale, ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. Horwitz (1986) reported that Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .93 and test-retest reliability was $r = .83$, $p = .001$. Aida (1994) found that Cronbach’s alpha was .94 and test-retest reliability was $r = .80$, $p < .01$.

The SDQ III (Appendix) uses an 8-point Likert-type scale, ranging from “Definitely False” to “Definitely True” (Marsh and O’Neill, 1984). It contains 136 items to measure 13 factors of self-concept (SC). These factors include one general SC, three academic SCs, and nine non-academic SCs. The subscales relevant to this study are general SC (12 items) and three academic SCs (10 items each). This short form of SDQ III, therefore, has 42 items and consists of General SC, School SC, Verbal SC, and Math SC. Marsh and O’Neill (1984) reported high reliability of the 13 factors (median alpha = .89) and low correlation among the factors (median $r = .009$). Particularly, the general and academic SC facets have been found to be well defined and relatively distinct from each other, with internal consistency reliability coefficients ranging from 0.79 to 0.95 (mean $\alpha = 0.90$) and test-retest reliability coefficients ranging from 0.66 to 0.94 (mean $\gamma = 0.86$) (Byrne, 1988; Byrne et al., 1986; Marsh and O’Neill, 1984; Marsh et al., 1986).

AMTB (Gardner, 1985) (Appendix) consists of three composites measuring Motivation, Integrativeness and Attitudes Toward the Learning Situation. One composite of AMTB measuring Motivation was modified to suit to a Japanese learning situation. It examined the following three components of Motivation, and the number of items...
within each measure is indicated in parentheses: Attitudes toward Learning Japanese (10), Desire to Learn Japanese (10), and Motivation Intensity (10). Attitude toward Learning Japanese is assessed using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from strong disagreement (1) to strong agreement (7). Both Desire to Learn Japanese and Motivational Intensity make use of a multiple choice format and the score ranges between 10 to 30. A high total score of the three measurements indicates a strong motivation. Gardner, Tremblay and Masgoret (1997) found alpha levels of each variable to be .86 (Attitudes toward Learning French), .78 (Desire to Learn French) and .76 (Motivational Intensity).

**LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENTS**

Japanese achievements were measured in the following three types of tests. These tests were determined by the course requirement and designed by the researcher. A Listening Test was held at Week 7 (Stage 2), Written Tests were held four times at Weeks 9, 10, 11 and 12 (Stage 3), and Oral Tests were held twice at Weeks 3 (Stage 1) and 12 (Stage 3). All the tests used criterion-referenced measurements (CRM). Although it has been argued that the use of CRM alone may lack external validity, it can provide internally valid indicators of syllabus-specific learning (Ross, 2003).

The Listening Test consisted of two parts. In part 1, students listened to three short dialogues about three peoples’ trips. The discourses of dialogues were all similar, asking where they went, etc. The students had to answer the questions and translate their answers into English. Therefore, this part tested both listening comprehension and linguistic competence. There were 7 questions with each worth 1 point. In part 2, students had to listen to four short dialogues and identify 4 locations on the map. In each dialogue, one person asked where a specific place was and the other person gave directions. Competence other than listening ability was minimal in answering in this section. Each answer was worth 2 points with total of 8 points. All dialogues were tape recorded and played twice with the necessary pause between them.

For the Written Tests, the suffixes 1, 2, 3 and 4 were added, with Written Test 1 representing the test conducted at week 9. These four versions of the 20-item test were grammar focused, measuring mainly linguistic and discourse competences. They were constructed in the same format, with each test reflecting the contents of different chapters in the textbook. Each test was worth 20 points, consisting of three parts. Part 1, worth 5 points, was a translation from English into Japanese using the alphabet. Part 2 was worth 10 points and was made up of a short dialogue taken from the textbook. The questions included filling in gaps and putting several words in order. This part concerned
knowledge both within and beyond a sentence level grammar (discourse competence). Part 3, worth 5 points, was to check students’ knowledge of Hiragana.

The Oral Tests were conducted in week 3 (Oral Test 1) and week 12 (Oral Test 2). The two tests were one-on-one interactions with a native speaker. In Oral Test 1, the students were required to introduce their family. Compared to Oral Test 2, the interaction between the student and the instructor was rather limited and oral presentation tended to be one-way from the student to the instructor. The focus of the test was linguistic competence and oral skills including pronunciation, intonation and fluency. In Oral Test 2 the students were required to invite the instructor on outings. They had to negotiate with the instructor to find out his likes, a convenient time, etc. To achieve the goal the students had to use communication strategies effectively. The oral interactions were tape recorded and rated by two Japanese teachers. The raters were the native instructor and a non-native Japanese teacher. Their inter-rater reliability for the Oral Test 1 was 0.96 and that for the Oral Test 2 was 0.98. The criteria used for the rating were developed based on the speaking assessment sheet in a Japanese textbook, Obentoo 2 (Fisher et al., 1999). The assessment includes the following four criteria: Pronunciation and Intonation, Fluency, Accuracy and Effectiveness. Each criterion was rated in a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (no attempt to complete task) to 5 (excellent standard). Each score was summed, with the total score ranging from 0 to 20.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

INDEPENDENT SAMPLE T-TEST

An independent sample t-test was chosen to investigate whether a significant difference existed between the control and experimental groups. No significant differences were found in all variables measured with the exception of Introjected Regulation (t = 2.07, p = .043) and Written Tests 1 (t = -3.30, p = .004).

The former finding that there was a significant difference in one scale of a pre-test suggests that there might have been some differences between the two groups from the beginning. Given that the experimental group scored higher in Introjected Regulation, it was thought that this factor might affect other factors. In additional analysis, all the subjects were recoded as being low (less than 3, n = 28) or high (greater than or equal to 3, n = 25) in Introjected Regulation (M = 3.43). The results on the t-test indicate that there was no significant difference between the high and low Introjected Regulation groups. Therefore, the difference detected on Introjected Regulation is thought not to be a confounding problem.
Although the experimental group scored significantly lower in Written Test 1, in the following three Written Tests the differences were not significant. Rather than a temporal negative effect of AL, it is more likely that other factors such as difference in coping with a new test format may have influenced the result. Once the students became familiar with the test format, the differences disappeared.

The fact that there were no significant differences between the two groups in almost all variables suggests that the effects of AL on L2 achievements and self-reported affective learning experiences were negligible in this study.

**PAIRED SAMPLE T-TEST**

Paired sample t-tests were conducted to examine differences at each stage. Table 3 (experimental group) and Table 4 (control group) show only pairs in which significant differences were found at the p < .05 significance level. Among four pairs where a significant difference was found in the experimental group, significant increases in Verbal SC3 and Written Test 3 were also found in the control group. The other two pairs, increase in FLCAS 2 and General SC3, need to be further investigated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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<tr>
<td>FLCAS 1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>87.22</td>
<td>12.262</td>
<td>-8.74</td>
<td>-3.487</td>
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<tr>
<td>FLCAS 2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>96.96</td>
<td>14.552</td>
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<tr>
<td>General SC 2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>64.95</td>
<td>14.274</td>
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<td>Verbal SC 2</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>22.42</td>
<td>9.233</td>
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<td>26.95</td>
<td>8.580</td>
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*Table 3 Paired sample t-test for experimental group*
Table 4  Paired sample t-test for control group

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<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

First, there was an overall pattern that both groups had a more negative learning experience at stage 2 than at stage 1 and 3 in terms of affect. Typically, in the control group, Motivational Intensity and Desire to Learn Japanese significantly decreased at stage 2 and increased at stage 3 (Table 4). In the experimental group independent variables may have functioned to stabilise motivational state. As to the cause of the negative trend at stage 2, it may be due to the contents of the course related to the listening test, although this is not clear from the current data.

Second, significant differences between stage 1 and 2 in FLCAS \( (t = -3.487, p = .002) \) in the experimental group indicate that adding relaxation to the music condition increased students’ classroom anxiety. Given that in the control group FLCAS 2 also increased, but not significantly, the increase of FLCAS 2 in the experimental group may not be totally attributed to the introduction of the relaxation. It is plausible that the negative trend at stage 2 mentioned above might have had a more negative influence on FLCAS in the experimental group than the control group. It has to be noted also that relaxation
during stage 2 was introduced without any verbal suggestion. Therefore, the students might not have found the relaxation exercises relevant to their language learning and consequently might not have really relaxed. If this was the case, it could imply that appropriate guidance or verbal positive suggestion is an essential pre-requisite for relaxation to be effective. Research has also shown that it takes time for the positive effects of relaxation to emerge (Benson et al., 2000). The duration of four weeks might be too short to assess the effects of relaxation appropriately.

Lastly, the most important finding is that General SC 3 increased significantly in the experimental group (t = -2.939, p = .008). Although General SC 3 also increased in the control group, the change was not significant (t = -.35, p = .73). Suggestion seemed to improve General SC. As to the finding that at stage 1 and 2, no major improvements were observed and at stage 3 a positive result emerged, the nature of General SC needs to be considered theoretically. It is hypothesised that self-concept is hierarchically structured and that General SC is relatively stable, but descending self-concepts such as Verbal SC are less stable and become more situation-specific (Byrne et al., 1986; Marsh et al., 1985). In the experimental group, however, not only Verbal SC but also General SC increased significantly in four weeks. Although this finding initially seemed improbable, research has shown that general self-concept can be enhanced over a relatively short period of time (Craven et al., 1991; Marsh et al., 1986).

Next, there is a concern whether the results were biased by a euphoric effect, a momentary feeling of elation as a result of an intervention (Hattie, 1992). However, unlike a study by Hattie (1992), the subjects in this study were not constantly aware of suggestion as the intervention. In addition, since significant increases were found in General SC and Verbal SC that are more relevant to the aim of the intervention, but not in other SDQ III scales in the experimental group at stage 3, it can be concluded that there was no major bias in this study (Marsh et al., 1986).

Lastly, ceiling effect does not seem to be a major concern either in this study. While SDQ III measures General SC with the score range from 12 to 96, the control group changed their scores from 70.19 (SD = 11.3) at stage 2 to 70.88 (SD = 10.8) at stage 3, and the experimental group changed from 64.95 (SD = 14.3) to 70.73 (SD = 14.2). These scores are not necessarily high compared with other studies using the SDQ III. For example, McInman and Berger (1993) reported a change in General SC from 75.12 (SD = 12.87) to 75.84 (SD = 12.37).
CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The goal of this study was to investigate the effects of major factors of Accelerated Learning (AL) – music, relaxation and suggestion – on students’ affect and achievements in L2 learning. It was found that only suggestion had a significantly positive effect on self-concept. The finding gives limited support to the claims that AL can positively influence affective variables (Brändle et al., 1994) but not to the claims that AL can positively influence cognitive variables (Lozanov, 1978). Considering the role of self-concept in learning, however, the implication is important.3

Nevertheless, there are limitations to the generalisability of findings in this study. The participants of this study were tertiary students studying introductory level Japanese as a foreign language. Since over 80 percent of them were overseas students with mostly Asian backgrounds, the conclusions drawn can be generalised only to similar participants. As Salili, Hwang, and Choi (1989) showed, positive feedback as a type of suggestion may be perceived differently by students with different cultural backgrounds.

Further, the results should be interpreted with caution for several reasons. First, there have been several possible threats to the validity in this study due to the fact that this was conducted in the natural classroom environment in which random sampling was not possible. Second, music and relaxation were implemented without any explanations at stage 1 and 2 because such comments can function as suggestion. On the other hand, in other experiments such comments were usually given and they might actually play an important role in producing positive effects. Third, suggestion was not introduced as a single independent variable. Therefore, it is not clear whether suggestion alone produced a positive effect or whether this effect was partly attributed to music and relaxation implemented at previous stages as well as at stage 3. Since no significant positive effects were found at stage 1 and 2, the importance of suggestion is undeniable. However, a different research design would be necessary to determine the exact role of suggestion.

This study indicates that students’ self-concept can be easily affected by the attitude of the teacher. This finding is consistent with a lot of research on reattribution trainings showing short belief-changing interventions to be reasonably effective (Dweck, 2002; Horan, 1996; Wilson et al., 1982; Wilson et al., 1985; Wilson et al., 2002). These studies including the current one seem to emphasise the easiness of changing self-concept. However, a comment by Bandura (1993, p. 145) that self-efficacy beliefs are the product of a complex process, and that simply saying that one is capable is not necessarily self-convincing, should not be ignored, and the same caution should apply to the study of self-concept.
Considering that simple positive teacher’s messages affected student’s self-concept in just four sessions, the important role the teacher plays in the affective aspect of learning needs to be further emphasised. Future research should seek even better information on the types and frequency of messages and the teacher attitudes that improve students’ affect in learning. This would improve learning in general and such research would benefit teacher training programs in particular.

APPENDIX

SAMPLE QUESTIONS OF SOME OF THE TEST INSTRUMENTS

AMOTIVATION, INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION SCALE (AIEMS)

Why are you learning Japanese? Please rate the extent to which the following reasons reflect your reason for learning Japanese.

a. In order to have a better salary later on.
   1: Does not correspond at all
   2: Corresponds only a little
   3: Corresponds moderately
   4: Corresponds quite well
   5: Corresponds completely

b. Honestly, I don’t know. I truly have the impression of wasting my time in studying Japanese.
   1: Does not correspond at all
   2: Corresponds only a little
   3: Corresponds moderately
   4: Corresponds quite well
   5: Corresponds completely

FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ANXIETY SCALE (FLCAS)

1. I tremble when I know that I’m going to be called in my Japanese class.
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Neither agree or disagree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree
2. When I’m on my way to Japanese class, I feel very sure and relaxed.
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Neither agree or disagree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree

THE SELF DESCRIPTION QUESTIONNAIRE III (SDQ III)

I find many mathematical problems interesting and challenging.
   Definitely False
   False
   Mostly False
   More False than True
   More True than False
   Mostly True
   True
   Definitely True

Overall, I have a lot of respect for myself.
   Definitely False
   False
   Mostly False
   More False than True
   More True than False
   Mostly True
   True
   Definitely True

ATTITUDE/MOTIVATION TEST BATTERY (AMTB)

Learning Japanese is really great.
   Strongly disagree
   Moderately disagree
   Slightly disagree
   Neutral
   Slightly agree
   Moderately agree
   Strongly agree
I think learning Japanese is dull.

Strongly disagree
Moderately disagree
Slightly disagree
Neutral
Slightly agree
Moderately agree
Strongly agree

ENDNOTES

1 The original study, the author’s PhD thesis, combined quantitative research and qualitative research so that the results of the former can be further explained by the latter. It was also intended to develop a core model for the relationships between various affective and environmental factors using structural equation modelling. However, this paper deals with only the results of quantitative studies. The author is grateful to his supervisors, Dr Anthony Owens and Dr Ian Newbegins at RMIT University.

2 The results of interview confirmed the students did not notice any change in the teacher’s attitude at stage 3.

3 While the score decreased from Oral Test 1 (M = 13.03) to Oral Test 2 (M = 12.60) in the control group (t = 1.10, p = .28), it increased from Oral Test 1 (M = 12.17) to Oral Test 2 (M = 12.74) in the experimental group (t = -.87, p = .39). This positive trend may be related to the positive results in affective factors, in particular the significant increase of self-concept. If the experiment continued, a significant increase in language performance might have been observed in the experimental group.

REFERENCES


