Promoting Positive Attitude Change: Interactive Learner Journals

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Abstract

This case study invited English Education students at a National University in Korea to investigate their beliefs and attitudes regarding language learning. It was hypothesized that increased awareness of these factors would promote informed modification, leading to improved self-esteem, extrinsic motivation and more positive attitudes to learning. The research was carried out over four semesters, using an interactive/reflective learning journal to promote group discussion of relevant issues (in class) followed by individual personal reflection (out of class). At the end of each of the four semesters during which the study was conducted, students were asked to report their perceptions regarding: i) affective factors (confidence, motivation, anxiety); ii) classroom-based assessment (self/peer-assessment, portfolios); and iii) attitudinal modifications. These reports, along with analysis of the language used in them, provided a basis for the identification of attitude change. Results showed growing awareness of the role of attitudes in learning, along with increased confidence and motivation, and improved writing skills, while the language used to report these changes became more positive. The conclusion drawn from this study is that negative, self-confirming beliefs commonly held by Korean students can be positively modified through the use of an interactive learning journal in a non-threatening, student-centered learning environment.

I. INTRODUCTION

Attitudes to learning and the perceptions and beliefs which determine them, have "a profound influence on ... learning behaviour" (Cotterall, 1995, p. 195) and on learning outcomes, since successful learners develop insightful beliefs about language learning processes, their own abilities and the use of effective learning strategies, which in total have a facilitative effect on learning. These students tend to develop a more active and autonomous attitude that allows them to take charge of their learning. Mistaken or uninformed beliefs about language learning, on the other hand, may lead to dependence on less effective strategies, resulting in indifference toward learning, poor cognitive performance, classroom anxiety and a negative

attitude to autonomy (Victori & Lockhart, 1995, p. 225). Teachers therefore need to acknowledge and respect students' attitudes, beliefs, and expectations and help them overcome any harmful perceptions and blocks (Mantle-Bromley 1995, p. 383), as well as enhancing students' awareness of their personal weaknesses and strengths and of their task/strategic knowledge, since beliefs differing from those of the teacher can lead to frustration, dissatisfaction with the course, unwillingness to perform communicative activities, and lack of confidence in the teacher (Mantle-Bromley 1995, pp. 381-383; Peacock, 1998, p. 125).

Adults and children form "self-schemata" concerning capabilities and limitations, degree of personal control over academic achievement, reasons for success and failure at different tasks, and expectancies for the future (Wenden, 1991, pp. 12-13). These schemata and other beliefs about language learning have various origins: i) the mother culture; ii) the family; iii) classroom/social peers; iv) repetitive experiences; and v) self-fulfilling (often negative) prophecies. Although usually related to past experiences, such schemata also contribute to future behaviour, supportive beliefs helping to overcome problems and thus sustaining motivation, and negative beliefs (including negative teacher beliefs) leading to decreased motivation. Students are also directly influenced by their perception of success in learning and by their levels of expectancy, realistically high levels helping to build confidence, and low (or unrealistically high) expectations helping to build incompetence (Puchta, 1999, p. 257).

In view of these findings, along with the lack of confidence, unrealistic learning expectations and debilitating attitudes to learning often exhibited by Korean students at tertiary level, this study set out to investigate the perceptions of a sample of English Education students, regarding their language-learning skills, their affect and their attitudes to learning. Whereas previous studies had been set in ESL environments (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the U.K. and the U.S.A.), this study aimed to examine the beliefs and attitudes of EFL learners in Korea, with a view to modifying these positively and realistically, hence helping the students to become more successful learners in the short term, and more effective teachers in the long term.

II. ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

1 Definitions

Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary (1913) defines *attitude* as "a complex mental orientation involving beliefs and feelings and values and dispositions to act in certain ways."

Psychological theories on attitudes refer to an evaluative, emotional reaction (i.e. the degree of like or dislike associated with the attitudinal object) comprising three components: *affect, cognition*, and *behaviour* (Zimbardo & Lieppe, 1991). These components undergo change when there is "dissonance" or disagreement between them (Mantle-Bromley, 1995, p. 373). Beliefs have been defined as "mental constructions of experience" (Sigel, 1985, p. 351) that are held to be true and that guide behaviour (White, 1999, p. 443). Beliefs about language learning (metacognitive knowledge) consist of "general assumptions that students hold about themselves as learners, about factors influencing language learning and about the nature of language learning and teaching" (Victori & Lockhart, 1995, p. 224), and reflection on these beliefs has been termed *metacognition* by cognitive psychologists, though the definition of this concept is still disputed.

2 History of Research

Early research on the relationship between attitudes and second language achievement was carried out by Gardner & Lambert in the 1950s, and later by Schumann (1975), who found that language stress (shame and loss of self-esteem resulting from a perceived deficiency in language) and anxiety (due to the infantile persona necessarily projected by the language learner) were strong contributory factors. Sauvignon (1976) pointed out that teachers also have attitudes and beliefs about language learning, and that these affect their teaching:

> Not until we have taken a hard critical look at the attitudes and motivation of teachers, both individually and as a profession, will we be ready to determine what obstacles lie in the way of creating the kinds of learning environments which would be most helpful to our students. (Sauvignon, 1976, p. 296)

Although Bassano (1986, pp. 13-15.) found that students have different needs, preferences, beliefs, learning styles, and educational backgrounds and that imposition of change upon these factors can lead to negative reactions, the importance of student awareness of (and reflection on) language learning beliefs (metacognitive knowledge), learning styles, learning preferences and expectations was only beginning to receive attention in second language research at this time, and Wenden (1987, p. 103) pointed out that research on the beliefs and perceptions underlying the choice of learning strategies was mostly limited to identification of those beliefs. One such research item was the *Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory* (*BALLI*), developed by Horwitz, to assess teacher and student opinions on a variety of issues related to language learning (Horwitz, 1985, p. 383). This was used in three quite large-scale American studies (Horwitz, 1988; Kern, 1995; Mantle-Bromley, 1995), with similar results,

and Horwitz proposed that gaps between teacher and learner beliefs probably result in "negative [language-learning] outcomes" (Horwitz, 1988, p. 292; cf. Mantle-Bromley, 1995, pp. 380-381). Kern concluded that learner beliefs are "quite well entrenched" (Kern, 1995, p. 76) and do not automatically change when learners are merely exposed to new methods, while Mantle-Bromley found that learners with realistic and informed beliefs are more likely to behave productively in class, work harder outside class, and persist longer with study (1995, pp. 373-375). Further research using the *BALLI* was carried out by Peacock (1998), who reported similar results, and whose findings provided evidence to support Horwitz's, Kern's and Mantle-Bromley's suggestions that incorrect beliefs are detrimental to language learning. Peacock also described how mistaken beliefs can result in a lack of student confidence, through lack of success being attributed to lack of aptitude (Peacock, 1998, pp. 152-153). He concluded that teachers should work on and with students' *representations* in the classroom, and that methodological advances in learning can only be limited without a change in conceptualization (Peacock, 1998, p. 151; cf. Gremmo, 1995, p. 158).

Horowitz performed a review of *BALLI* studies in 1999, including the findings of Park (1995) and Truitt (1995) on Korean students studying English in Korea. Results from these two studies showed differences of up to 39% in the responses (Horwitz, 1999, p. 568), which Horwitz found surprising, given the shared culture and foreign language curriculum of the two groups, and which she attributed to individual or "current situational differences" (Horwitz, 1999, p. 573), concluding that "there is not strong evidence for a conclusion of cultural differences in learner beliefs" (1999, p. 576). It might be, however, that the authors of instruments such as the *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL;* Oxford, 1989) and the *BALLI* need to acknowledge that "behaviour found in experimental conditions is neither constant nor controllable because it is an instantiation of activity" (Coughlan & Duff, 1994, p. 175).

Research on self-esteem has demonstrated a clear link between individual perception of competence and actual language performance, though Cotterall (1999, p. 510) sees a need for further research into learner beliefs about ability, self-efficacy and self-esteem. Wenden (1991, pp. 12-13) calls for attention to be given to *person variables* such as intentions, attributions, expectancies, perceptions and beliefs about learning abilities, which learners bring to the classroom (cf. Littlewood *et al.* 1996, p. 70), along with "a clear understanding of attitudes and attitude-change theory in order to address these issues" (Mantle-Bromley 1995, p. 373). Mantle-Bromley strongly recommends that "teachers design and implement lessons on the language-learning process that incorporate attitude-change methods. Research then needs to be conducted to determine if such lessons can indeed alter students' beliefs" (1995, p. 383).
In view of these findings and suggestions, this study aimed to build a focus on attitude change

into selected university credit courses, and to monitor student perceptions of affect and attitudes in those courses. This was achieved through using a learner journal (Finch, 2004a) as an integral part of a number of credit courses (Table 2). A number of relevant research instruments were adapted from the ELT literature and incorporated into this learning journal. Their purpose in this context was to stimulate discussion by presenting the issues involved. It was also stressed that there were no correct or incorrect answers, and that the process of exploring issues, ideas and preconceptions was most important. The original instruments are listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Research Instruments Used in the Learning Journal

Title	Author(s)
A Measure of Autonomy and Self-Direction	Dickinson, 1978, p. 26
Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory BALLI	Horwitz, 1988, p.292
Classroom Environment Questionnaire Actual CEQ	Fraser, 1986
Classroom Environment Questionnaire Preferred	Fraser, 1986
Classroom Environment Scale CES	Fraser, 1986
Classroom Learning Environment CLE	Pine & Boy, 1977
Deficiency Analysis	Finch & Hyun, 2000b, p. 19
Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale FLCAS	Horwitz *et al.* 1986, p. 130
Language Learning Ideas	Hahn *et al.* 1989, p. 250
Language Skills Self-assessment	Finch & Hyun, 2000b, p. 16
Learning Contract	Finch & Hyun, 2000b, p. 18
Learning Preferences	Finch & Hyun, 2000b, p. 19
Learning Style Inventory LSI	Martinez, 1997, p. 178
Multiple Intelligences Survey MIS	McKenzie, 1999
Self-assessment	Oscarsson, 1980
Strategy Inventory for Language Learning SILL	Oxford, 1989, pp. 242-245
Student Perceptions About Language Learning	Willing, 1988, pp. 106-107
Students' Needs	Hills, 1976, pp. 31-32
Study Styles	Finch & Hyun, 2000a, 22-23
Teachers' Needs	Hills, 1976, pp. 29-30

III. METHOD

The study took place in a university in the Republic of Korea, during the three academic semesters from March 2002 to June 2003. Participating students (n = 224 over 3 semesters)

who ranged from Sophomores (2nd year students) to Seniors (4th year students) were mainly from the Department of English Education, aged between 22 and 24, and studying to be secondary teachers of English. The research was conducted in two or three credit courses each semester (Table 2), using learning journals and pre/post-course questionnaires. Students were mostly different each semester, though there were a number who attended more than one of the classes, and who were able to offer impressions over a longer term than the others, typically showing heightened awareness and making observations of greater depth and extent.

TABLE 2. Courses Selected for the Research

Semester	Course Title	Instruments
2002/1	ELT Methodology (n = 37)	ILJ
	Teaching Prose Writing (n = 30	ILJ
2002/2	Comparative ELT Methodology (n = 23)	ILJ, CBA
	Teaching English through Literature (n = 12)	ILJ, CBA
	Multimedia English (n = 17	ILJ, CBA
2003/`	ELT Methodology (n = 27)	ILJ, CBA
	Composition (n = 39)	ILJ, CBA
	Textbook Design and Analysis (n = 39)	CBA

* ILJ = Interactive Learning Journal; CBA = Classroom-Based Assessment

In order to investigate attitude change, a number of contributory factors were considered: confidence, self-esteem, motivation, anxiety, autonomy and responsibility. Rather than study any of these in isolation, it was acknowledged that the language classroom is a dynamic, complex, "open system in a steady state" (Laszlo, 2002, p. 32), in which every factor interacts with the others, and cannot be meaningfully studied out of context. Measuring the growth of these factors in combination was also discounted (though Willing's Measure of autonomy (1988) was used in the learning journal), since any attempt at objective measurement of affective factors falls foul of Coughlan and Duff's (1994) warning about experimental conditions and activity (above). However, a lack of objectively-observed quantitative data was not seen as a problem for this study, since attitude change is driven by individual beliefs and perceptions, which represent reality for the learner (Rogers, 1951, cited in Pine & Boy 1977, p. 111), and which are by nature self-confirming. If a student "knows" (for example) that he/she is a "poor learner," than he/she will act in ways which make this perception true, and will exhibit a belief system typical of poor learners (low self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, anxiety etc.). The researcher therefore attempted to promote and monitor changes in the belief systems of the learners, according to their perceptions of these changes. By this principle, a perceived change leads to or confirms an actual change. In the language of propositional logic, $Bp \Rightarrow p$ (belief in a proposition leads to the proposition being true), and even $BBp \Rightarrow p$

(believing that one believes a proposition leads to accepting the proposition as true).

The research was ongoing during each of the three semesters, and was integrated into course content. Since the research took place in the English Education Department, it was not difficult to include reflection on matters related to language learning, and this occurred in three main areas: i) the use of a learner journal; ii) attention to the learning environment; and iii) classroom-based assessment (self/peer-assessment, portfolios). Overall attitude change was monitored through a pre/post-course questionnaire, which examined students' feelings about their abilities and related affective factors.

1. Learner Journal

Students who attended selected courses (Table 2) were asked to work on a learner journal (Finch, 2004a) in one of the three, weekly, 50-minute class periods. The journal was both reflective and interactive, in that it contained group learning-to-learn activities in addition to individual diary-style pages. Students would discuss learning-related issues in class, and then write their personal reflections on these (or on any topics they wished to write about) at home. Each semester, fifteen individual reflections were made out of class time by each student, each reflection being made on a sheet of A4 paper. The teacher gave feedback on these reflections twice each semester, writing his own reflections in designated places in the journal.

Group interaction served to "get the [cognitive] wheels turning," on the principle that shared reflection on relevant topics would raise individual awareness and positively affect beliefs, perceptions and attitudes. This joint exploration of educational issues was an ongoing part of normal classwork. The research instruments did not appear out of context, or on special "one-off" days, and students were not required to offer unconsidered responses to the questionnaires. Instead, they had time to discuss issues together, to record group members' opinions, to agree or disagree, and to come to individual and group decisions. Because of acquired familiarity with the research, and because the researcher/teacher was not involved in data collection or analysis until the journal had been completed, it was hoped that students would not be tempted to write comments which they thought the teacher might want to read, and would instead become genuinely and meaningfully involved in the activities in the journal. Self-assessments, deficiency analyses, needs analyses and pre/post-course questionnaires, though ostensibly individual activities, were carried out by the students in interview format, and represented opinions that they were prepared to share with each other.

2. The Learning Environment

In view of the literature identifying the learning environment as a significant factor in language learning (e.g. Fraser, 1986; Finch, 2001), it was assumed that positive attitude change would occur most notably in a learning environment which: i) was non-threatening; ii) promoted confidence and self-esteem; iii) promoted extrinsic motivation; and iv) encouraged learners to take responsibility for achievement and assessment of learning. The learning environment of the courses in which the research occurred was therefore designed to promote positive affect and autonomy, and students were encouraged to reflect on this (cf. Table 1: CEQ, CES, CLE, FLCAS). They were expected to read relevant chapters of set books in their own time and to discuss these in non-journal lessons, working through related activities at their own pace. Assessment was absolute and non-competitive (it was possible for everyone to get an A+), and was based on self/peer-assessment, which occurred regularly (relevant activities in the learner journal, ongoing self-assessments, and peer-assessed projects). There was a minimum of lecturing, and students were expected to access relevant literature and to be adequately informed when attending the classes, which rapidly took on the format of workshop sessions. In these workshops, students variously worked on the journal, discussed teaching/learning issues, performed interactive work on given assignments, and gave sample (peer-assessed) language lessons. In this way, the classroom became a place in which students met to discuss and to work. Students adapted quickly to this (imposed) autonomy; they were happy to manage their learning and to be accountable for the result of that management, despite the novelty (for them) of the approach.

3. Classroom-Based Assessment

Classroom-based assessment (self/peer-assessment, portfolios, learning journals, learning conversations) was used from semester 2002/II, based on the principle that student involvement in assessment would promote positive attitudes, in addition to helping them become skilled goal-setters, assessors, and more active language learners (Miller & Ng 1996, p. 134). The types of classroom-based assessment employed comprised: i) ongoing self assessment (participation, confidence, motivation, autonomy, language skills, achievement, etc.), peer-assessment (presentations and sample lessons), portfolios (also peer-assessed) and student-designed tests. The typical end-of-semester test was transformed into a learner-centered activity in which groups were responsible for testing individual chapters of a reference text, using any testing format which they felt to be appropriate. Groups decided which chapter to focus on and were responsible for every part of the testing process, including the grading of the completed test papers (cf. McClean, 1995, p. 145). Feedback on this exercise was given on a questionnaire, and focused on affect and perceptions.

4. Pre/post-course Questionnaire

The concept of a pre/post-course language proficiency test was replaced by a questionnaire (Table 3, below) in which students were asked how they felt about their confidence, motivation, independence, and learning beliefs. Students performed this activity in an interview format, asking the questions to each other (usually in pairs) and summarizing the responses on the questionnaire form. By asking students to complete this questionnaire at the beginning and end of each course, it was hoped to be able to identify changes in perceived affect and attitudes.

TABLE 3. Pre/Post-Course Questionnaire

1. How do you feel about your language skills (speaking, listening, reading, writing)?
2. How do you feel about your study skills (remembering, concentrating, note-taking)?
3. How do you feel about self-assessment and peer-assessment?
4. How do you feel about your confidence?
5. How do you feel about your motivation?
6. How do you feel about your independence as a learner?
7. How do you feel about your future?
8. How do you feel about taking part in this research?
9. (Post-course) Has the learner journal helped your learning?-

5. General

The methods employed in the research (learning journal, non-threatening learning environment, classroom-based assessment) were new to the students, but were not introduced to them gradually. Instead, the learning situation was presented in its full form on day one of each course. Students adapted quickly to the new format, and soon became familiar with self-directed activities and self/peer assessment. Problems of adaptation or comprehension showed themselves most noticeably in the use of the learning journal, which some students showed a tendency to neglect during the mid-term testing period, when they were studying intensively for the summative, memory-based tests required in other courses. This situation provided an opportunity for the teacher/researcher to counsel individuals and to stimulate discussion on time-management, learning as an ongoing process, and evaluation theory. On the whole, students were enthusiastic about the classes and soon became used to being at the heart of the assessment process (including the design of assessment criteria) as well as of the learning process.

Assessment records were open to everyone during the semester and students could enter their

scores and check their marks in class. This transparency meant that students who recorded unrealistic scores were challenged by their peers and often revised their entries. It was typical of Korean students that lack of self-esteem and of assessment skills produced low self-assessment scores, especially in more advanced students, who tended to be over-critical of their abilities. However, these perceptions were modified as the semester progressed and as students became used to the idea that there was no-one to cheat or to impress by putting unrealistic scores, that the learning environment was non-threatening and facilitative, that self-assessment skills would help them in their future lives (goal-setting, decision-making, evaluation of achievements), and that such assessment was about personal growth rather than comparison with others.

IV. RESULTS

The learning journals contained a great deal of individual reflection on learning-related and attitude-related issues, though there is no time in this paper to investigate this in depth. Instead, such content of the learning journals is seen here as part of the process of growth and attitude change that occurred during the research period. Consequently the pre/post-course questionnaires form the basis of the data considered in this paper, since they identify perceptions at the beginning and end of each course.

By the end of each semester, the students' attention had been focused on relevant issues for 15 weeks, and significant differences in pre/post-course responses to the same questions appear. Some sample differences from individual students are presented below:

> Pre-course, question 1 (cf Table 3): *Poor. All of them are poor*.
> Post-course, question 1 (cf Table 3): *Anxiety disappeared*.
>
> Pre-course, question 3: *This assessment is not objective*.
> Post-course, question 3: *Self-assessment is useful to reflect my learning attitude and peer-assessment makes us critical*.
>
> Pre-course, question 8: *Doubtful about the result*.
> Post-course, question 8: *This makes me think of the classes until now and how I have improved through the course. I learned of responsibilities. I have to go on and do my best.*

Responses such as these, while presenting evidence of attitude change and improved writing ability, are isolated examples, however, and cannot claim to be representative of the entire data. In view of this consideration, it was decided to examine the language used by the

students in their responses, on the assumption that attitude change would be reflected in the unconscious choice of vocabulary, and that positive attitude change would be shown by a shift in perspective; away from the pessimist's "the glass is half-empty" to the optimist's "the glass is half full." Such examination would focus on the student's perceptions of their situations, rather than on the situations themselves, and would make it unnecessary to itemize every type of response. Instead of looking at *what* the students were saying, the research attempted to focus on *how* they were saying it. This approach identified sub-conscious shifts in language use and therefore examined student perceptions which were not necessarily evident in the writings themselves.

The pre/post questionnaires were collected at the end of each semester, and were examined for the use of positive and negative keywords. In this way, affective and comparative vocabulary items were identified and recorded, resulting in a quantitative inspection of qualitative data. The classification of positive and negative keywords is subjective by nature, and the question of double negatives is a problem in itself, since the concept is highly specific to western cultures. It is (for example) not easy to discover what Korean learners mean when they write things such as "not bad" or "I am not unhappy with my abilities." Are they transferring L1 ideas in such utterances and finding a modest (and culturally acceptable) way of saying "I am satisfied" ("the full grain bows its head" - Korean proverb), or do they mean (in the western sense) that although they are not happy with their abilities, they are also not unhappy- Such problems were acknowledged and students' levels of interlanguage and cultural awareness were given due consideration when tables of word-frequencies were drawn up, the main features of which are presented in Tables 4 and 5.

TABLE 4. Frequency of positive keywords in student responses to the pre/post-course questionnaire

Positive Keywords	Pre n=170		Post n=212		Positive Keywords	Pre n=170		Post n=212	
Positive Keywords	2128	%	3329	%	Positive Keywords	2128	%	3329	%
active	7	0.22	16	0.4	independent	80	2.56	92	2.28
attitude	7	0.22	15	0.37	learn/er	97	3.1	159	3.93
better	33	1.05	54	1.34	learning	66	2.11	146	3.61
bright	42	1.34	27	0.67	like	69	2.2	35	0.87
can	77	2.46	165	4.08	more (than)	54	1.73	113	2.79
chance	0	0	20	0.49	most	15	0.48	21	0.52
comfortable	2	0.06	11	0.27	motivation	116	3.71	146	3.61
concentration	24	0.77	2	0.05	much	19	0.61	31	0.77

confident(ce)	148	4.73	257	6.36	necessary	5	0.16	11	0.27
develop	8	0.26	16	0.4	optimistic	14	0.45	9	0.22
do my best	40	1.28	49	1.21	positive	21	0.67	37	0.92
easy	15	0.48	11	0.27	reflect	0	0	135	3.34
effort	6	0.19	20	0.49	satisfied	18	0.58	34	0.84
enjoy/able	14	0.45	18	0.45	skill	57	1.82	146	3.61
getting better	6	0.19	60	1.48	study	129	4.12	178	4.4
good	315	10.06	234	5.79	study harder	39	1.25	59	1.46
great	9	0.29	24	0.59	Try(ing)	37	1.18	69	1.71
happy	10	0.32	19	0.47	useful	22	0.7	34	0.84
help(ful)	32	1.02	106	2.62	very	129	4.12	130	3.22
high/er	45	1.44	38	0.94	want	99	3.16	71	1.76
hope(ful)	17	0.54	20	0.49	well	29	0.93	22	0.54
important	47	1.5	49	1.21	yes	0	0	88	2.18
improve/d	61	1.95	214	5.29			68%		82.34%

TABLE 5. Frequency of negative keywords in student responses to the pre/post-course questionnaire

Negative Keywords	Pre n=170		Post n=212		Negative Keywords	Pre n=170		Post n=212	
Negative Keywords	891	%	663	%	Negative Keywords	891	%	663	%
bad	14	0.45	8	0.2	need (must)	107	3.42	91	2.25
cannot	29	0.93	27	0.67	nervous	15	0.48	17	0.42
dependent	42	1.34	28	0.69	never before	16	0.51	6	0.15
difficult	74	2.36	75	1.86	no change	19	0.61	25	0.62
don't (know)	95	3.04	80	1.98	not-	71	2.27	52	1.29
fear (afraid)	19	0.61	20	0.49	not bad	36	1.15	22	0.54
lack	24	0.77	16	0.4	not good	86	2.75	45	1.11
lazy	9	0.29	21	0.52	poor	50	1.6	28	0.69
little	71	2.27	44	1.09	sorry	10	0.32	1	0.02
low	33	1.05	12	0.3	uncertain	17	0.54	11	0.27
middle	34	1.09	17	0.42	worry	20	0.64	17	0.42
							28.49%		16.40%

Of the 224 participants in the research, 170 completed and handed in the pre-course and 212 the post-course questionnaire. This discrepancy in numbers was largely due to instances of students registering late, changing to a different course (both by week 3), or losing their

pre-course sheets (these were not collected till the final week). Because of this, percentages are shown and are referred to in discussion of the results. Of the 105 items of relevant vocabulary identified and recorded, those appearing in Tables 4 and 5 are the ones which appeared more than 10 times in responses to one or both of the questionnaires. Items such as "need" and "not bad" have been categorized as negative language, though they have possible positive associations, depending on context. The choice of "not bad" (double negative) rather than "good" is an example of a definite choice of language ("the glass is not empty"). "Never before" might also be placed in the "Positive" column, except that there has been a choice to use the negative "never" instead of the more positive (for example) "First time." Other problems with the positive/negative classification come from the possible juxtaposition in the originals of two or more of the items (hence "not bad" and "not good" are presented separately). However, such occurrences are limited to the number of instances of the keywords involved. Negative items such as "not" (71 pre, 52 post), "little" (71 pre, 44 post), "lack" (24 pre, 16 post), "low" (33 pre, 12 post) and "poor" (50 pre, 28 post) can together modify positive concepts such as "confidence," "motivation," and "skill" a maximum of 249 (pre) and 152 (post) times. Compared with the 2218 (pre) and 3329 (post) total number of appearances of positive vocabulary, such possibilities leave room for 1870 (pre) and 3177 (post) non-modified appearances of positive expressions. However, negative words can also appear alone (cf. "Poor. All of them are poor" - above) and in the same sentence (e.g. "I don't have much difficulty listening"), functioning as double negatives and reducing the number of modifications of positive keywords.

The number of negative modifiers itemized in the previous paragraph shows a significant decline from the pre-course (269) to the post-course questionnaire (152), despite the extra number of post-course questionnaires completed, and this trend is mirrored in Table 5 by negative keywords overall, which represent 28.49% (891, pre) and 16.40% (663, post) of the total keywords. The corresponding reverse trend in the positive keywords (Table 4) sees a shift from 68% (2218, pre) to 82.34% (3329, post). Thus it can be said that overall, proportional positive vocabulary has increased by 14.3% (a relative shift of 21%), and negative vocabulary has decreased by 12% (a relative shift of 57.5%).

Looking at specific keywords, there are some obvious indications of this trend, and some surprises. "Good", for example, has 315 pre-course and 234 post-course appearances, and decreases in use from 10% to 5.8%. This can perhaps be explained by the replacement of situational statements with those referring to perceptions of growth: "getting better" (0.19% to 1.48%), "improved" (1.95% to 5.29%), and "more" (1.73% to 2.79%). This change is typified in various post-course responses along the lines of "My speaking skill is improved rather than some months ago" (question 1). "Bright" is another case of a positive word decreasing in

usage (1.34% to 0.67%). It is interesting that this word appears almost exclusively in response to question 7 ("How do you feel about your future-") and that students become less positive as the semester progresses, as attention is drawn to this concept, and as graduation draws nearer (some students were seniors). "Fear" (0.61% to 0.49%) and "worry" (0.64% to 0.42%) also appear mostly in reference to question 7. "Reflect" (0% to 3.34%) and "yes" (0% to 2.18%) are instances of concepts which appear during the research period. The latter appears because question 9, which suggests a yes/no answer, only appears on the post-course questionnaire. There are no instances of "no" responses to this question, however. Students either found a way of answering in the affirmative (n = 88 for "yes", though there were also other responses such as "These methods are helpful"), or made no response. "Reflect" appears significantly in post-course responses, and shows that students have become familiar with the concept of thinking about their goals, achievements and assessment of these.

The changes outlined above are indicative of attitude change as exemplified in unconscious choice of words. It is important to add, however, that these changes occurred in a non-threatening learning environment, and cannot be generalized to every EFL learning situation. As must be the case with any research into institutionalized learning, it was acknowledged that the classroom is a dynamically complex system, and that all outcomes are dependant upon initial conditions and the interactions which occur (Finch, 2004b). Thus: i) the initial conditions included the use of absolute (rather than normative) assessment; ii) final grades were not a matter of competition and (because of this) a source of stress; iii) assessment was based on self/peer-assessment of effort and achievement, as demonstrated in ongoing self-assessments, portfolios and group presentations; iv) use of the learner journal was student-directed (autonomy in decision making); v) course assignments encouraged collaboration; and vi) the teacher's role was one of facilitator. counselor and learning resource. In addition to the findings regarding unconscious choice of words, evidence of improved confidence, motivation, responsibility and writing skills was identified in the weekly individual reflections made by the students in their learner journals. There is no space here to present representative examples, but a number of trends were identified by the teacher/researcher:

1. weekly entries in the journal increased in length over the course of the semester;
2. the proportionate number of grammatical inaccuracies decreased without explicit teacher-correction (the process of writing regularly seemed to produce improved writing skills);
3. commentary in the individual reflections gained in depth as students became more articulate;
4. topics of the individual reflections became more oriented to language learning

(students wrote about whatever they felt to be important to them);

5. there was a noticeable shift in the entries from initial confusion (about the future) and lack of confidence, towards determination to "do my best" and confidence that goals set by them could be achieved

V. CONCLUSION

The research methodology used in this case study recognized that attitudinal changes cannot be attributed to isolated factors, and that any factors examined must be viewed in context in order to have any meaning. It also recognized that attitudes represent reality for the people who possess them, and that attitude change is a function of changes in subjective beliefs and perceptions, rather than of objective and external examination. The study therefore investigated attitude change as perceived and reported by the subjects themselves. There was no attempt to identify causal factors, since it was impossible to investigate the entire gamut of connectivities impacting upon the students, and there was also no attempt to compare results with any control groups, or to generalize the results. The case study investigated the application of educational theories in a specific school, at a specific time, and with specific participants. The learning environment of the study was constant and the participants responded to the research cooperatively, consistently, naturally, and over a period of time. Improved language learning was seen as a by-product of the main goal of positively influencing the factors which drive self-directed learning, and which produce positive attitude change.

The results showed encouraging indications of such attitude change, which occurred within the context of: i) use of an interactive/reflective learner journal; ii) a non-threatening learning environment; and iii) classroom-based assessment. Analysis of the pre/post-course questionnaires completed in interview format by the students indicated an increase in the use of positive vocabulary, and a corresponding decrease in the use of negative vocabulary, suggesting that sub-conscious perceptions and perspectives had changed, along with the language used to describe them. These changes were demonstrated in the interactive/reflective learner journal, which was a definite factor in attitude change for a number of reasons.

1. By being both interactive and reflective, the journal afforded students a framework in which to discuss issues of present and future significance, which had not previously been explored by them in any depth.
2. By allowing students to reflect individually upon whatever they found to be important subsequent to these discussions, and by stressing that there were no "correct" answers

and that every opinion was valid, the journal also encouraged growth of confidence and self-esteem in students who had previously labelled themselves as poor learners.

3. By allowing groups to proceed through the journal at their own pace, students were allowed to spend time on issues that they found relevant and meaningful, thus giving validity to their perceptions.
4. By bringing teaching/learning-related issues to the attention of the students, the journal promoted cooperative exploration of beliefs, leading to positive modification of attitudes to learning.
5. By encouraging students to make individual reflections on a regular basis, without explicit correction by the teacher, the fear of "making mistakes" was disabled, and writing skills were allowed to improve simply through extended practice and occasional peer-feedback.

When focusing on indicators such as confidence, motivation, responsibility and independence as reasons for advocating the use of interactive/reflective learner journals, it is hypothesized that improvements in these areas will be long-lasting and self-directed, and that students will develop positive attitudes to learning (including problem-solving and assessment skills) which will be beneficial in their future lives. To test this hypothesis, it will be necessary to contact these students in 5 or 10 years, by which time almost all the factors involved in this research will be irrelevant to its subjects. However, they will still possess perceptions about the research and the courses in which it took place, and these will still represent reality for them. It is to be hoped that such contact can be made, and that a report on their perceptions at that time can be written.

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