

# Intensive Language Program: Effects on Japanese High School Students in China

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## Abstract

The present study examined the effect of an intensive language program on the learners' beliefs and motivations of Japanese high school students placed in another second language environment. Fifty-one students at Shanghai Japanese High School participated in a four-day intensive language camp in Shanghai, China, during which they were required to stay at a dormitory on campus and attend English and Chinese lessons during the daytime and cultural exchange events at night. A questionnaire was administered before and after the camp took place to measure "Importance of Grammar," "Relation," "Risk Taking," and "Reflection-Impulsivity." The results show that through the experience of an intensive language program, the students (a) became more conscious of grammar and tried to use English more accurately, and (b) became less likely to be passively motivated by the temptation of others.

**Keywords:** Japanese EFL learners in China, intensive language program, learners' beliefs, motivations

## Introduction

### Background

A high school division of the Japanese school opened in Shanghai, China, for the first time in the world in April 2011. Since more Japanese high schools are expected to be established in other parts of the world in the future, providing a direction for English language education is becoming more important. However, there has been no research concerning high school students in Japanese schools. Therefore, there is an urgent need to grasp the characteristics of those students and their surrounding environment so that we can suggest effective educational approaches for their English learning. The current study aims to investigate how the experience of participating in an intensive language camp influences the learners' beliefs and motivations of students in Shanghai Japanese High School.

### **Effects of Intensive Language Programs on Learners' Beliefs and Motivations**

A number of intensive language programs, including immersion programs and residential seminars, have been implemented and studied to evaluate their effectiveness on English language learning (e.g., Chihara & Kato, 2008; Inoi, 2000; Inoi & Jaques, 2003; Inoi & Jaques, 2006; Iwakiri, 1993; Liskin-Gasparro, 1998; Rugasken & Harris, 2009; Walker & Tedick, 2000). Aside from improvement in English language proficiency, the major interest that has been extensively studied is the changes in learners' affective factors. Here, I would first like to introduce and summarize the literature reporting the effects of intensive language programs on affective factors such as learners' beliefs and motivations, and then I would like to provide the research objectives based on the literature review.

**Programs of longer than two weeks.** Iwakiri (1993) investigated the effect of a five-week Australian program on the personal development of Japanese junior college students and found that they became more confident in speaking English after the program. Inoi (2000) examined the effects of a three-week Seattle program for Japanese students and reported that they became more motivated to study English and less afraid of speaking it. Rugasken and Harris (2009) implemented a 15-day camp for Thai students that included classroom learning and field trips, reporting that the camp deepened the students' cultural understanding.

**Programs of shorter than two weeks.** Inoi & Jaques (2003) held a three-day intensive English program for Japanese university students and obtained favorable feedback from the post-program questionnaire, although it did not necessarily succeed in assessing the extent to which the program positively affected their attitudes about learning English. Inoi and Jaques (2006), designing more objective assessments of the program, reported that some positive belief changes were observed. More specifically, after the program, students more strongly supported the equal potential of everyone as a language learner; they became less embarrassed and less afraid of making mistakes when speaking English; and they found it less difficult to speak English. Chihara and Kato (2008) held a short-term intensive residential English seminar and investigated its effect on English learning and motivation. They reported a significant rise in the TOEIC-IP scores and concluded that the results were due to the fact that the participants were highly motivated and that the high motivation is the key to the desirable results.

### **Purpose of the Study**

To sum up the studies mentioned above, it can be said that (a) intensive language programs

can have some effect on learners' belief changes, and (b) if the period of the program is long enough, participants build up confidence and become more motivated to learn English.

However, it is not clear if a prediction based on these results can apply to the EFL learners who reside in an environment where another language is used as a second language. A good example of such learners is the students at Shanghai Japanese High School, as they are already exposed to Chinese—a foreign language—in their everyday lives, and participating in an intensive language program can mean a qualitatively different type of environmental change for them. Therefore, the present study examines the effect of an intensive language program on learners' beliefs and motivations of Japanese high school students in another second language environment.

## Method

### Language Camp

The language camp is a four-day intensive training program for improving foreign language skills. The program was planned and implemented by Donghua University, located in Shanghai, China. During their time at the camp, participants were required to stay at a dormitory on campus and attended English and Chinese lessons during the daytime and cultural exchange events at night. The schedule of the program is illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1.** *Time table of the language camp*

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
7:00 am - 8:30 am		Rising & Breakfast		
8:30 am - 12:10 pm	Orientation	Chinese Lessons		
12:10 pm - 1:00 pm	Lunch			
1:00 pm - 4:15 pm	English Lessons			Closing
4:15 pm - 5:10 pm	Free Time			
5:10 pm - 6:30 pm	Dinner			
6:30 pm - 8:00 pm	International Exchange			
8:00 pm - 11:00 pm	Free Time			
11:00 pm	Lights Out			

Four 45-minute Chinese lessons were taught at the university in the morning by Chinese language teachers whose first language is Chinese. The lessons included conversation practice, study of grammar, vocabulary, and study of Chinese culture. Chinese proficiency of each participant was measured prior to the camp, and students were allotted to either the basic or advanced class. Each class comprised 10 to 15 participants.

Four 45-minute English lessons were taught at the university in the afternoon by English language teachers whose first language is either English or Chinese. The lessons included conversation practice, listening comprehension with video clips, study of grammar, vocabulary, and study of English culture. English proficiency of each participant was measured prior to the camp, and students were allotted to either the basic or advanced class. Each class comprised 10 to 15 participants.

In the evening, the participants attended cultural exchange events, where they played sports and games and chatted with both local students and international students who came from countries other than China.

### **Participants**

Fifty-one first-year students at Shanghai Japanese High School (21 boys and 30 girls) participated in the language camp. Participants were either 15 or 16 years old.

### **Time of Investigation**

The language camp was implemented in July 2012. A questionnaire was administered before and after the event to examine how participants' learners' beliefs and motivations could change.

### **Questionnaire**

The questionnaire included "Importance of Grammar," "Relation," "Risk Taking," and "Reflection-Impulsivity" (see Appendix).

"Importance of Grammar" is one of the factors of Belief of English Learning (Sekitani, 2008) and comprises six items, such as "I think correct grammar is important when I speak English." The participants were asked to respond to the question, "I will ask you about how you feel when you learn English." The responses were collected on a five-point scale, from 1 ("not true at all") to 5 ("absolutely true").

"Relation" is one of the factors of the Two-Axis Model of Learning Motivation (Ichikawa, 1998)

and refers to the degree to which learners are tempted by others. It comprises six items, such as “My classmates do, so I am tempted to do.” The participants were asked to respond to the question, “Why do you learn English?” The responses were collected on a five-point scale, from 1 (“not true at all”) to 5 (“absolutely true”).

“Risk Taking” is concerned with learners’ willingness to take a risk and to make mistakes in order to learn to communicate (Mori, 1999). It comprises six items, such as “I don’t mind making mistakes if I can learn to communicate.” The participants were asked to respond to the question, “I will ask you about what you think about English learning.” The responses were collected on a six-point scale, from 1 (“not true at all”) to 6 (“absolutely true”).

“Reflection-Impulsivity” (Takigiku & Sakamoto, 1991) consisted of 10 items, including “I prefer to get things done as soon as possible rather than to take time for preparation,” and so on. The participants were asked to respond to the question, “To what extent are the following statements true to you?” Participants were asked to score their answers on a four-point scale, ranging from 1 (“not true at all”) to 4 (“absolutely true”).

## Results

In order to examine the difference before and after the English camp, paired *t*-tests were conducted for each of the four variables (see Table 2).

“Importance of Grammar” was significantly higher in the post-test than in the pre-test ( $t(45) = 1.84, p < .10$ ). “Relation” was also significantly higher in the post-test than in the pre-test ( $t(48) = 2.69, p < .05$ ). No significant differences between pre- and post-tests were observed for “Risk Taking” and “Reflection-Impulsivity.”

**Table 2. Means of pre- and post-tests and the *t*-test results**

Variable	Time	Mean (SD)	<i>t</i> value
Importance of Grammar	Pre-test	16.65 (3.42)	1.84+
	Post-test	17.52 (3.38)	
Relation	Pre-test	15.12 (3.71)	-2.69*
	Post-test	13.65 (4.48)	
Risk Taking	Pre-test	27.73 (3.21)	-0.44
	Post-test	27.53 (3.50)	
Reflection-Impulsivity	Pre-test	24.73 (4.98)	0.81
	Post-test	25.06 (4.63)	

+ $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$

## Discussion

The results show that through the experience of an intensive language program, participants became more conscious about grammar and tried to use English more accurately. As mentioned earlier, Inoi and Jaques (2006) reported that some positive belief changes were observed before and after the intensive program. However, they failed to detect a change in students' perceptions of the importance of grammar, suspecting that their perceptions had originally been so strong that the program did not have any effect on them. Therefore, there is a possibility that Japanese high school students learning in another second language environment have lower perceptions of the importance of grammar. This is probably because they use Chinese for daily life necessities, which do not require complicated grammar, and this experience inhibits them from forming such perceptions for English as well. They seem to strengthen their belief in the importance of grammar as they engage in communication tasks during lessons that require complicated linguistic structuring. Generally, learners with stronger beliefs in the importance of grammar are thought to be desirable in learning language (Abraham & Vann, 1987), and thus the fact that the intensive program had effects on strengthening the belief can provide important suggestions for EFL learning in another second language setting.

Another finding is that the students became less motivated based on passive orientations, such as "My classmates do, so I am tempted to do." According to Horino and Ichikawa (1997), "Relation" is categorized as a "Content-Detached" factor, which has little relation to the use of learning strategies and learning achievements. There is a possibility that through the experience of the intensive program where active commitment is required, students became less likely to be passively motivated by the temptation of others.

Despite such findings as Inoi (2000) and Inoi and Jaques (2006), one possible reason why no significant difference was observed in "Risk Taking" is that the students were already able to take enough risks compared to EFL learners in the mono-lingual settings. There was also no difference observed in "Reflection-Impulsivity," probably because it is one of the innate traits that is hard to change.

The present study was the first attempt to examine the effect of intensive language programs on the learners' beliefs and motivations of Japanese high school students in another second language environment, and it was able to provide knowledge as to its purpose. Finally, implica-

tions for further research should be addressed with the remaining tasks. First, although the findings of the present study suggest that there is a qualitative difference in the learners' beliefs and motivations between EFL learners in different environments, more direct comparison will be necessary to confirm the results. The same measurements should be used for Japanese EFL learners in a mono-lingual environment so that parallel comparison will be possible. Second, the measurements should be conducted for learners' beliefs and motivations for the second language (e.g., the Chinese language for students in Shanghai Japanese High School), as well as EFL so that possible transfer from their affective factors for the second language to those for the EFL can be detected. It is also hoped that longitudinal studies will be conducted to clarify the process of the transfer.

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## Appendix

### Question Items Used in the Questionnaire

#### Importance of Grammar

- (1) I think making grammatical mistakes is no problem as long as I can make myself understood.  
(意味が通じれば文法が間違っても問題はないと思う)
- (2) I think grammatical accuracy is not necessary when I speak English (reversed).  
(英語を話すときは文法的な正確さは必要ないと思う)
- (3) I think correct grammar is important when I speak English.  
(英語を話すとき、正しい文法は大切だと思う)
- (4) I think learning grammar is important in order to master English.  
(英語ができるようになるには文法を学ぶことは大切だと思う)
- (5) I don't like studying such trifles as grammar (reversed).  
(自分は文法など細かいことを勉強するのは好きではない)
- (6) I cannot be satisfied unless I completely understand grammar.  
(自分は文法的に完璧に理解できないと気がすまない)

#### Relation

- (1) I think it is natural: everybody does it.  
(みんながやるからなんとなくあたりまえと思って)
- (2) I would like to accompany my friends in my school.  
(友達といっしょに何かをしたいから)
- (3) I would like to be regarded as a member by my parents and favorite teachers.  
(親や好きな先生に認めてもらいたいから)
- (4) People around me do so.  
(まわりの人たちがよく勉強するので、それにつられて)
- (5) I think it is strange if I do not follow people around me.  
(みんながすることをやらないと、おかしいような気がして)
- (6) I feel sorry for my parents and teachers if I do not study.  
(勉強しないと、親や先生にわるい気がして)

#### Risk Taking

- (1) I don't mind making mistakes if I can learn to communicate.  
(私はコミュニケーションができるようになるなら、間違いをおかすことを気にしない)
- (2) It's a waste of time to work on problems that do not have a single clear-cut answer.  
(一つのはっきりとした答えのない問題に取り組むのは時間のむだだ)
- (3) If you don't understand something when you are learning English within a short amount of time, you should keep trying.  
(短い間に英語を勉強しているときにもしわからないことがあれば、努力し続けるべきだ)

- (4) I don't mind appearing foolish if I can make myself understood.  
(私は自分の言いたいことがわかってもらえるなら、ばかだと思われても気にしない)
- (5) You learn a lot by having mistakes corrected.  
(間違いを訂正してもらうことによって多く学ぶものだ)
- (6) When doing a reading assignment, I look up almost all unknown words in a dictionary.  
(読解の課題をするとき、私は知らない単語をほぼすべて辞書で調べる)
- (7) If you don't understand something well during the first reading, you will get more the second time.  
(初めて読んだときに理解できなくても、二回目にはもっとわかるものだ)

### Reflection-impulsivity

- (1) I would not be satisfied without thinking things over well.  
(何でもよく考えてみないと気がすまない方だ)
- (2) I would rather spend enough time on everything to think things over well.  
(何事も時間をかけてじっくり考えたい方だ)
- (3) I would rather think deeply.  
(深く物事を考える方だ)
- (4) I would rather spend enough time to think carefully before deciding.  
(何かを決めるとき、時間をかけて慎重(しんちょう)に考える方だ)
- (5) I would not be satisfied without examining every possibility.  
(すべての選択肢(せんたくし)をよく検討しないと気がすまない方だ)
- (6) I am a careful person.  
(用心深い方だ)
- (7) I often reconsider before taking an action.  
(実行する前に考え直してることが多い方だ)
- (8) I would rather plan beforehand when shopping.  
(買い物は、前もっていろいろ計画してからする方だ)
- (9) I would rather take an action before planning (reversed).  
(計画を立てるよりも早く実行したい方だ)
- (10) I often take actions before thinking well (reversed).  
(よく考えずに行動してしまうことが多い方だ)