Feature Article

A Placement Level Study: Are Students Motivated by Traditional or Communicative Activities?

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This paper reports the findings of an exploratory investigation into first-year Japanese university students' (N = 220) preferences among twelve pedagogical activities based on their English proficiency. Student proficiency levels are pre-intermediate (n = 73), intermediate (n = 74), and upper-intermediate (n = 73) based on a placement exam. Six of the twelve activities may be considered traditional, instructivist classroom pedagogical activities and six may be considered components of a constructivist communicative language teaching pedagogy and/or task-based language teaching activities. A principal components analysis placed the six traditional activity variables into one factor and the communicative / task-based activity variables into two factors of three variables each. Means comparisons between the groups show statistically significant differences in the preference for *Small-group / team activities* for the intermediate and upper-intermediate students compared with the pre-intermediate students. The intermediate students, a sample representing 70% of the students in the faculty, prefer *Activities where I am moving around in the room* more than the other two groups. *Grammar drills / practice* show a statistically significant decline in preference as ability increases. Finally, all of the communicative / task-based activities are ranked higher by the upper-intermediate students compared with the pre-intermediate students. The results and implications are discussed.

本稿では、英語能力に基づいた12の活動のうち、日本の大学一年生（N = 220）教授法の好み研究成果を報告する。理工系の大学や関西の主要私立大学の入学試験にもっとづいて、準中級(PI; n = 73)、中級(IM; n = 74)、上級(UI; n = 73)である。12活動のうち6つは、伝統的で一番為になる教室での、instructivist教育的活動と考えられるかもしれません、残りは構成主義コミュニカティブ･ランゲージ･ティーチング教育および/またはタスク･ベ

ースの言語教育活動の構成要素と考えられるかもしれません。結果は、PIの学生と比較して、IMやUIの学生のためのグループワークの好みにおいて、統計上重要なちがを示している。体を動かしながらの活動は、学生の過半数の典型である、PIとIMの学生の間で統計的有意性を示している。また、文法ドリル/練習は能力が上がるにつれて、統計上有意な減少を示しています。最後に、コミュニカティブ·ランゲージ·ティーチング教育のすべてはUIグループにより　高く位置づけられておりPIグループと比較して統計学的に有意な差を示しています。結果とその結果が暗示することについて議論します。

This paper reports on "the under-researched issue of learners' motivation to engage in the task" (Dörnyei & Tseng, 2009, p. 117) and presents the results of a study which investigated student preference for pedagogical activities based on English proficiency level. Previous studies have contrasted communicative and non-communicative pedagogical approaches for their enjoyment and effectiveness or perceived usefulness (Burden, 2005; Green, 1993). Others have explored correlations between motivation and pedagogical approaches (Jacques, 2001) and between motivations, pedagogical approaches and learning strategies (Schmidt & Watanabe, 2001).

In addition, the distinctions between traditional, teacher fronted classroom activities (TAs) and communicative language teaching methods and/or task-based activities (C/TBAs) have been reported on theoretically and empirically (Burden, 2005; Ellis, 2003; Green, 1993; Jacques, 2001; Nunan, 1998, 2004; Ockert, 2006, 2011, 2015; Schmidt & Watanabe, 2001; Willis, 1996). Students' affective response to different pedagogical approaches is well known to classroom practioners. As Hsu (2005) writes, "some learners like doing grammar and memorizing, others want to speak and role–play; while still others prefer reading and writing, but avoid speaking" (p. 55). However, the author is unaware of any research studies which have investigated student pedagogical preferences based on English proficiency.

The results presented herein are from students (N = 220) in a single faculty who were in one of three course levels. The course levels are Pre-Intermediate (PI; n = 73), Intermediate (IM; n = 74) and Upper-Intermediate (UI; n = 73) as determined by a "TOEIC® -like placement test" (M. Shawback, pers. comm.).

Students took the placement test at the same time as the entrance exam to enter the College of Science and Engineering at a large private university in the Kansai area of Japan. Since the students reported on were in the first semester of university, it should be noted that the results of the activity preferences may reflect activities from high school (HS) and/or junior high school (JHS). However, the results of this research may help educators and curriculum developers make more informed decisions based on ability level and activity preferences. It is hoped that this paper will add to the research literature on classroom pedagogical activities and preferences.

Social Constructivism, 'Flow', and Task-motivation

Over the past several decades, there has been a move toward constructivist approaches to instruction, reflecting the theories of Vygotsky (1978), Dewey (1963), and Leont'ev (1978). Social constructivist theories involve "engaging students in problem solving...and co-operative activities" (Felix, 2005, pp. 19-20). Social constructivists approach learning tasks that "emphasize interpersonal, experiential, activity-based learning" (Felix, 2005, p. 29) as opposed to instructivist approaches, which are generally teacher-fronted.

According to Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991; Csikszentmihalyi, Abuhamdeh & Nakamura, 2005), there are eight aspects that characterize an activity or a task that provides enjoyment: First, we must have a chance of completing the task. That is, the task content and time constraints must both meet student ability level. Second, we must have an opportunity to concentrate on the activity. Third, the task has a clear goal and fourth, immediate feedback is provided on task progress and completion. Fifth, we are deeply but effortlessly involved in the task and forget about any worries or frustrations. Sixth, we have a sense of control over our actions. Seventh, concern for the self disappears when we are engaged in the activity. Finally, our sense of time is altered; we simply forget about time (in Csikszentmihalyi, 1991, p. 49). Research on Flow Theory and second language acquisition (SLA) by Egbert (2003) shows "that teachers can theoretically facilitate the flow experience for students by developing tasks

that might lead to flow" (p. 513). In other words, from the perspective of SLA, "Flow Theory specifies the task conditions under which Flow can occur" (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 82). Specifically, interactive, problem-solving, and group-based activities with a clear goal and which require students to focus intently provide the four aspects that characterize the Flow experience: interest, focused attention, challenge, and control.

Dörnyei (2007) lists several aspects of teacher practice that are relevant to task-based teaching and the task-motivation of students that are conducive to creating the Flow experience:

1. Making learning stimulating and enjoyable.
2. Presenting tasks in a motivating way.
3. Setting specific learner goals.
4. Protecting the learners' self-esteem and increasing their self-confidence.
5. Creating learner autonomy. (p. 728)

Classroom teachers can make learning stimulating and enjoyable in several ways. Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) write about "the rewarding nature of group activities" (in Dörnyei, 2007, p.721). They state that the joy that students feel while performing activities with others and the success in achieving goals (task completion) are affective benefits of working with others. Brophy and Alleman (1991) have written that "(o)ther things being equal, activities that students are likely to enjoy (or at least find meaningful and worthwhile) are preferable to activities that students are not likely to enjoy" (p. 18). After more than twenty years, experts still emphasize the "enjoyable quality" of language learning tasks (Dörnyei, 2009a, p. 18). This paper explores differences of the 'enjoyable quality' of language learning activities based on the students' proficiency.

However, there are several classroom pedagogies and overlap amongst them is to be expected. There are also specific differences (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996) that can be recognized and preferences amongst them can be explored. Since it is well known that "(i)nstruction, tasks, and courses have a motivational structure" (Julkunen, 2001, p. 34), preferences amongst them based on their 'motivational

structure' can be examined.

Classroom Pedagogies

Traditional Approaches

Broadly speaking, when researchers refer to TAs they are referring to a teacher-centered classroom with the students as passive receptors. Communicative approaches, on the other hand, often use tasks involving the students in active, focused and goal- oriented activities where the outcomes are clear and obtainable. For example, Nunan (1998) makes rather clear-cut distinctions between traditional and contemporary communicative task-based language education (pp. 69-91). Naturally, some activities are similar or involve more than one skill. For example, translation involves reading and writing skills. However, Nunan (1998) has provided the following guidelines for a traditional approach to pedagogy:

> 1. *Approach to teaching methodology* - Traditionally, learners are taught about the language and its rules in contrast with learners being actively involved in using the language.
> 2. *Role of the learners* - Traditionally, learners spend their time reproducing language written down by others rather than learning how to use language creatively by responding to "authentic" communicative situations.
> 3. *Approach to language* - Traditionally, grammar and vocabulary are taught as rules or discrete forms to be memorized and reproduced on exams instead of being taught communicatively to express meaning. (pp. 88-89)

Research on Traditional Pedagogical Approaches

Green (1993) was amongst the first researchers in English as a foreign language (EFL) studies to explore student attitudes toward communicative and non-communicative activities. He has defined the following activities as non-communicative in nature: looking up words in a dictionary, explaining grammar, and whole class activities, such as repeating vocabulary words or phrases from a text after the teacher. His research found that the' non-communicative' activities

were rated lower in both 'enjoyableness' and 'usefulness' by the students surveyed.

Research by Schmidt and Watanabe (2001) and Jacques (2001) on correlations between motivation and student preferences for different types of classroom activities found factors comprised of TAs. For example, Jacques' (2001) results contain the items *Grammar should be an important focus in this class*, which grouped with *Reading and writing should be an important focus in this class*, forming the factor Traditional Approach (p. 195; 209). In the Schmidt and Watanabe (2001) study, these two items plus an additional item, *Vocabulary should be an important focus in this class,* came under the factor Traditional Approach (pp. 345-46; 355). Based on these studies, grammar, reading, writing, and vocabulary have been determined to be TAs in the literature.

Communicative Language Teaching & Task-based Activities

Crookes and Schmidt (1991) noted that "communicative approaches are characterized by a fairly extensive use of group work" as this has been said "to result in greater motivation among students" (p. 488). Teachers can help maintain motivation by enhancing interest and curiosity, which "means using less orthodox teaching techniques and/or materials" (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991, pp. 488-489). In order to maintain interest, and in contrast to the traditional classroom practices outlined above, Ellis (2003) provides the following features of a task in the context of TBL activities in communicative language teaching (CLT):

1. A task is a work plan.
2. A task involves a primary focus on meaning.
3. A task involves real-world processes of language use.
4. A task can involve any of the four language skills.
5. A task engages cognitive processes.
6. A task has a clearly defined communicative outcome. (pp. 9-10)

Willis describes task-based activities to be those in which "...the learner uses the target language for a communicative purpose in order to achieve an outcome"

(Willis, 1996, p. 23). She further defines task-based activities under various categories such as listing, ordering/sorting, comparing, problem solving, sharing personal experiences, and creative tasks (Willis, 1996, pp. 23-29). In a more recent article (Willis & Willis, 2009) the relationship between communicative language and task-based language teaching is contrasted with traditional, teacher-fronted approaches. Dörnyei (2003) states, "...tasks constitute the basic building blocks of classroom learning" (p. 14). More specifically, Nation (1991) advocates using problem-solving tasks since these "have a very important feature that makes them work well in getting learners involved. This feature is the definite outcome of the activity. Because of the importance learners place on outcomes, problem-solving tasks involve a lot of highly motivated goal-directed activity" (p. 8).

Within this activity, according to Dörnyei (2009b), language learning in CLT comes from "the learners' communicative competence develops automatically through their active participation in meaningful communicative tasks" (p. 34). Therefore, C/TBAs are rooted in both a different teaching approach and learner roles than TAs. Nunan (1998) writes that in C/TBAs "Learners are *actively* involved in using language" (p. 89, emphasis added). In other words, learners actively engage in cooperative learning tasks using the target language to achieve a specific outcome – a process which in itself is motivating.

Research on Communicative & Task-based Activities

Green's (1993) research on communicative and non-communicative activities included in the former small group work, pair work, and info-seek activities that require "the students move around the classroom, ask each other questions in English" (p. 9). He has noted that "a striking feature of the enjoyableness ratings was that, with only one exception, the communicative activities were rated as more enjoyable than the non-communicative ones" (pp. 4-5). In addition, the communicative items as a whole had a higher mean score for 'effectiveness' than the non-communicative items. Green (1993) noted "The general tendency was for effectiveness and enjoyment ratings to be highly correlated" (p. 8). Since Green's study, several other researchers have investigated pedagogical approaches using more sophisticated analysis.

For example, Jacques (2001, p. 194; 209) and Schmidt and Watanabe (2001, pp. 345-46; 355) found a factor that they labeled Challenging Approaches. This factor consists of the items *I prefer a language class in which there are lots of activities that allow me to participate actively*, plus *I prefer to sit and listen and don't like being forced to speak in language class* (reverse coded), as well as *In a class like this, I prefer activities and material that really challenge me to learn more*. In addition, Jacques (2001, p. 194) and Schmidt and Watanabe (2001, p. 355) found a factor, Cooperative Learning, that has three items: *I like language learning activities in which students work together in pairs or small groups*, *I prefer to work by myself in this language class, not with other students* (reverse coded), and *I prefer a language class in which the students feel they are a cohesive group*.

Dörnyei (2002) has reported on action research involving communicative activities in dyads using an interactive problem-solving activity. The results showed higher correlations between task attitudes and words spoken and turns taken with the dyads as compared to the individual data. This indicates "that task-motivation is, at least partially, co-constructed" (p. 154). In addition, Nation and Hamilton-Jenkins (2000) have shown that group work tasks improve both speaking skills and vocabulary acquisition.

Research on Tasks and Motivation in Japan

In the Japanese language literature, Nose (2005) found a relationship between elementary student interest in learning English and preferred pedagogical activities. This two-part study involved answering questions at the beginning and end of an eight month activity intervention research project. Specifically, 61.1% and 68.8% of the students expressed a positive desire to speak English. For a question on group work or pair work activities, 54% of the respondents expressed a clear preference for both on the second administration (Nose, 2005, p. 3). The need for group work involving activity has been made an explicit goal of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), which recommends to teachers that students "Do not sit still; do activities which move bodies and minds" (quoted in Watanabe, 2010, p. 5) as one of the aims of foreign language activities (FLA) in elementary schools. Using

multi-skill dictation activities as a means to manage, motivate, and activate large groups of false beginners has been reported (for examples, see Norris, 1993; Ockert, 2008).

Additional research in the Japanese EFL (JEFL) environment by Burden (2005) contrasted several TAs (lecture, translation, and grammar exercises) and C/TBAs (pair-work / group-work) and their perceived enjoyableness and usefulness by university students. The results indicate that several activities that are perceived as effective were not perceived as enjoyable (e.g. *Memorizing vocabulary lists*, p. 7, Table 2). In addition, Ockert (2006, 2011) has found distinctions between TAs and C/TBAs based on principal components analysis (PCA) and reported on the relationship between activity type and learner EFL motives. Therefore, students like to engage in specific activities and may also do so based on EFL motives.

This paper adds to the literature on TAs and C/TBAs by reporting on Japanese university students' results for their preferences for pedagogical activities based on the activities' motivating aspect or enjoyableness, according to student ability. The author is unaware of any research into pedagogical preferences of learners of differing English ability level based on a placement exam. The researcher believes the current study will contribute to the growing body of literature on the topic of classroom activities and our understanding of student perceptions of specific activities as enjoyable or motivating based on a placement level analysis.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Questions

The previous studies on TAs and C/TBAs and their motivational qualities / usefulness guide the present research. However, in this research project, three groups of first-year university students of differing levels of proficiency participated. The three levels of proficiency serve as independent variables. Twelve pedagogical activities serve as dependent variables. The research questions explored in this study are:

1. Do the students feel that different pedagogical activities are more motivating

than others? To answer these two research questions, the three groups of students will be treated as a single group ($N = 220$).

2. 2. Are these twelve activities rated differently based on the student proficiency levels? In order to answer this research question, the results are presented by proficiency level.
3. Will a principal components analysis show classroom activity factors according to TA and C/TBA distinctions as described by researchers previously?

Hypotheses

The following two conjectures about this sample are offered:

Hypothesis 1: The participants in this survey will indicate differences in activity preference based on their proficiency level.

Hypothesis 2: A principal components analysis will distinguish between TAs and C/TBAs.

Methods

The process of operationalizing the affective variable 'enjoy' or 'motivating' is shown in Figure 1. The affective stage asks the respondents how they feel regarding each activity – negatively, neutrally, or positively. The degree of negative

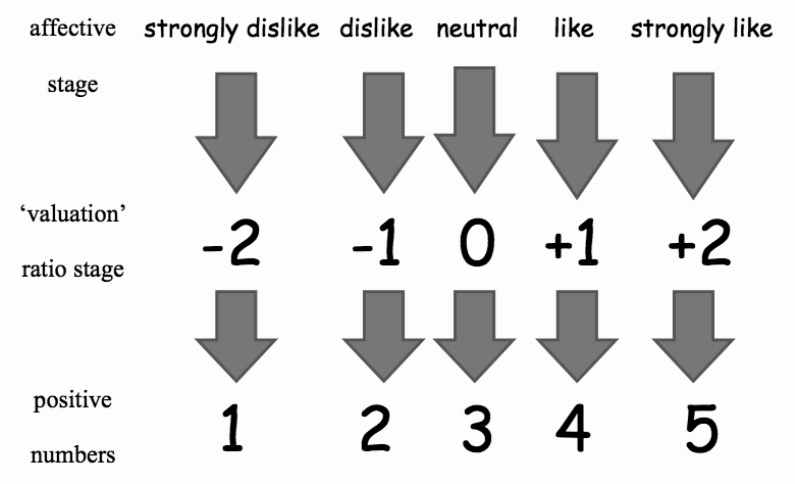

Figure 1. The conversion of statements of affect into a numerical system for data analysis

or positive affect is broken into two positive and two negative ratio valuations. Factor analysis assumes that the data are on an interval scale, but that it is common practice to apply factor-analytic methods to Likert-scale data, which are ordinal. For this research project, the numerical format choices for each item are the numbers 1 to 5. It is important to remember when viewing means scores for each variable that those below '3' are, in fact, representing negative affect for these respondents.

It is also important to consider that survey use in the JEFL environment has a rather 'checkered' history. According to Reid (1990), students from different language and cultural backgrounds differ in the ways they respond to surveys. For example, "NSs used the entire range of the 5-point Likert scale in a reasonably consistent manner, while the Japanese students tended to respond more toward the mean: That is, they responded to the Strongly Agree and the Strongly Disagree categories only rarely" (Reid, 1990, p. 336). As a result, the Japanese student group did not display clearly defined learning style preferences (while the other groups surveyed did show learning style preferences). The author developed the scale used for this research before finding out about this phenomenon. However, appropriate measures were taken before analyzing the data (see Procedures).

Respondents

The participants were all first year students ($N = 220$) in communication classes in the College of Science and Engineering in a top-tier private university in Japan. Students in this college take a TOEIC®-like placement test and are streamed into their respective levels based on their scores relative to other students. The students who score in the lowest 15 percentile are placed in lower-intermediate (PI; $n = 73$) classes and those in the upper 15 percentile are placed in upper-intermediate (UI; $n = 73$) classes. Those in the middle 70 percentile are placed in intermediate (IM; $n = 74$) level classes. Three classes from each level were chosen at random for participation with the cooperation of their Communication I teachers. Female and foreign students account for a very small percentage of the total respondents.

Instrument

The author created an English-language instrument for this research under the supervision of a recognized expert in the field, an approach referred to as the "expert opinion method" (Brown, 2001, pp. 179-180). The scale used in this research was designed with Japanese learners in mind; the items / activities were selected based on JEFL learners' classroom and learning situation. The Classroom Activities Questionnaire lists twelve classroom activities commonly used in foreign language classrooms. The first six are generally used for instructivist or teacher-fronted classrooms and are referred to as TAs. The latter six involve a more active student role, are socio-collaborative (group learning based) and are referred to as C/TBAs. No distinction was made on this survey to indicate to the students that the twelve activities were hypothesized to either one or the other. This questionnaire uses a Likert-type format from 1 to 5, corresponding to (1) strongly dislike, (2) dislike, (3) neutral, (4) like, and (5) strongly like (please see the Appendix). The Cronbach's alpha is .76 for the twelve items, which indicates that it is not a uni-dimensional scale. Rather, there are two or more sub-scales measuring different constructs.

Procedures

The author's colleagues administered the surveys to students in three classes from each level in the fourth week of the first semester. The author was present to assist in distributing the surveys, answer questions, collect the surveys, and ensure that they were filled out. The survey was administered in a paper version and students were encouraged to ask any questions of their instructor after the instructions were read aloud. The students were given as much time as necessary to complete the survey on a voluntary basis. However, no students opted to not fill in the questionnaire. The students were given confidentiality and assured that their course grade would not be affected in any way for their participation or non-participation. Due to the issue raised by Reid (1990), above, students from all three ability levels who chose the '3' option across all items were removed to create a more robust sample. Therefore, 14, 17, and 15 students' results were removed from the PI, IM, and UI groups, respectively, before analysis.

Statistical Issues

Sample size and subject to item ratio in principal components analysis. Some researchers claim that using principal components analysis with small numbers of respondents may be inappropriate; however, others disagree. For example, consider the minimum sample size or subject to variable ratio in several practical studies. Fabrigar, Wegener, MacCallum and Strahan (1999) reviewed articles in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* and the *Journal of Applied Psychology* that used EFA. 18.9% of the articles in the former journal and 13.8% of the articles in the latter had sample sizes of 100 or less. Regarding the ratio of subject to variable, 24.6% of the papers in the former journal and 34.4% in in the latter were 4:1 or less. The sample size for the research presented herein has a total of 220 participants; twelve survey items; therefore, an STV of >18:1. Both the sample size and subject to variable measures meet the criteria for a principal components analysis.

Identification of the factors. There are two main points to consider for factor retention: the minimum items per factor group and the issue of cross-loadings. The communality between the items of .8 or greater may be 'ideal' but numbers between .40 and .70 are more common. Some (e.g. Costello & Osborne, 2005) suggest a minimum loading of .32 as a "good rule of thumb for the minimum loading of an item" (p. 4). However, Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) suggest this cutoff for *N*-sizes of 300+ respondents. Stevens (2009) suggests .40 for *N*-sizes below 200. Since the sample number for this study was 220, the cut-off of .40 is used to determine the factors. There were no cross-loadings above .40 in the PCA results. The level of significance was set at .10, which is appropriate for an exploratory study, according to Cohen (1992).

Results and Discussion

The Activity Rankings, Differences, and Effect Size by Proficiency Level

The collected data were initially analyzed using the SPSS software, and confirmed using the *MyStat* software. The descriptive statistics for the twelve items, minimum / maximum (from 1 to 5) and rankings are in Table 1. In the column for *M*, the

Table 1
The Descriptive Statistics for the Twelve Pedagogical Activities (N = 220)

Variable	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
1. Lecture	3.77	0.86	1	5	-0.31	0.05
2. Listening exercises (CD, tape or DVD)	3.47	0.92	1	5	-0.03	-0.66
3. Dialogue / reading practice from the text	3.23	0.86	1	5	-0.25	0.46
4. Writing exercises	3.14	0.84	1	5	-0.03	-0.20
5. Translation exercises	3.22	0.68	1	5	-0.13	1.02
6. Grammar exercises	2.96	0.82	1	5	-0.28	-0.22
7. Small-group / team activities	3.94	0.76	1	5	-0.72	1.03
8. Info-seek / finding information activities	3.41	0.70	1	5	-0.05	0.68
9. Problem-solving activities	3.43	0.65	2	5	0.32	-0.07
10. Activities involving movement	3.43	0.79	2	5	0.37	-0.30
11. Tasks that are intellectually challenging	3.37	0.69	2	5	0.44	0.10
12. Pair-work	3.74	0.80	1	5	-0.52	0.54

lowest score is 2.96 for *Grammar exercises*. The three highest activity means are for *Lecture* (3.77), *Small-group / team activities* (3.94), and Item 12 *Pair-work* (3.74). The skewness results indicate that variables 2, 4, and 8 have relatively normal distributions; variables 9, 10, and 11 are to the right of the mean. This would be expected since the minimum for each was a '2', indicating that none of the respondents chose 1 (strongly dislike) for either of these activities.

The twelve activities mean scores and standard deviations rankings are in Table 2. *Lecture, Small-group activities*, and *Pair-work* are ranked highly across all three groups. *Small-group activities* are ranked the highest by the IM and UI students. However, with the PI students, *Lecture* is ranked one one-hundredth of a point higher than *Small-group activities*. In addition, the results show a statistically significant difference in the mean score for *Small-group activities* for the IM and UI students compared with the PI students. *Activities while moving* show a statistically significance difference between the PI and IM students (who represent approximately 70% of these Science & Engineering majors). In addition, *Grammar drills / practice* show a decline as ability increases and

Table 2
The Twelve Activity Min / Max and Ranking by English Placement Exam Level

	PI (n = 73)		IM (n = 74)		UI (n = 73)	
	Min / Max	rank	Min / Max	rank	Min / Max	rank
1) Lecture	1 / 5	1	2 / 5	3	1 / 5	2
2) Listening exercises	2 / 5	4	2 / 5	6	1 / 5	9
3) Dialogue / reading	1 / 5	9	1 / 5	9	1 / 5	8
4) Writing exercises	1 / 5	11	1 / 5	10	1 / 5	10
5) Translation exercises	1 / 5	11	1 / 5	8	1 / 5	8
6) Grammar drills / practice	1 / 5	10	1 / 5	11	1 / 4	11
7) Small-group activities	1 / 5	2	2 / 5	1	2 / 5	1
8) Info-seek activities	1 / 5	6	2 / 5	5	1 / 5	6
9) Problem solving activities	2 / 5	7	2 / 5	5	2 / 5	4
10) Activities while moving	2 / 5	8	2 / 5	4	2 / 5	7
11) Challenging tasks	2 / 5	5	2 / 4	7	2 / 5	5
12) Pair work	1 / 5	3	2 / 5	2	2 / 5	3

a statistically significant difference between the UI and PI students. Finally, *Challenging tasks* are considered more enjoyable by the UI students compared with the PI and IM groups, with a statistically significant difference with the IM group. For comparative purposes, it is worth noting that the lowest ranked items by mean score for all three groups are TAs.

The ranking of the items based on mean score and the minimum / maximum for each item by proficiency level reveals the perceived enjoyableness or motivating aspect of the twelve activities. As can be seen in Table 2, none of the C/TBAs received a '1' from the IM students and only *Info-seek activities* received a '1' from among the UI students. The mean score differences between the three groups based on proficiency are compared in Table 3. As can be seen, there are several statistically significant differences between the specific activities and the proficiency levels, notably the lower level of preference for *Grammar drills / practice* by the UI students compared with the PI students ($p < .01$), and the preference for activities while moving by the IM students in comparison with the PI students ($p < .01$).

The effect sizes were calculated for the statistically significant differences

Table 3
The Twelve Activity M, SD, and Mean Score Differences by Placement Exam Level

Student level:	PI (n = 73)		IM (n = 74)		UI (n = 73)	
Activity:	*M* (*SD*)	PI / IM Difference.	*M* (*SD*)	IM / UI Difference	*M* (*SD*)	UI / PI Difference
1) Lecture	3.79 (0.87)	.13	3.66 (0.78)	.20	3.86 (0.85)	.07
2) Listening exercises	3.40 (0.89)	.02	3.38 (0.93)	.15	3.23 (0.92)	.17
3) Dialogue / reading	3.22 (0.90)	.08	3.14 (0.75)	.20	3.34 (0.92)	.14
4) Writing exercises	3.15 (0.86)	.06	3.09 (0.76)	.07	3.16 (0.90)	.01
5) Translation exercises	3.15 (0.66)	.01	3.16 (0.64)	.18	3.34 (0.73)	.19
6) Grammar drills / practice	3.16 (0.71)	.20	2.96 (0.83)	.19	2.77 (0.87)	.39***
7) Small-group activities	3.78 (0.82)	.25**	4.03 (0.74)	.02	4.01 (0.70)	.23**
8) Info-seek activities	3.32 (0.66)	.11	3.43 (0.68)	.06	3.49 (0.75)	.17
9) Problem solving activities	3.30 (0.54)	.13	3.43 (0.64)	.12	3.55 (0.73)	.25**
10) Activities while moving	3.26 (0.69)	.36***	3.62 (0.84)	.21	3.41 (0.80)	.15
11) Challenging tasks	3.34 (0.69)	.11	3.23 (0.51)	.30**	3.53 (0.82)	.19
12) Pair work	3.60 (0.86)	.22*	3.82 (0.67)	.03	3.79 (0.85)	.19

Note. ***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .10

reported in Table 3. According to Field (2009), effect sizes are useful because they provide an objective measure of the importance of an effect. Therefore, it doesn't matter what effect you're looking for, what variables have been measured, or how those variables have been measured. For example, we know that a correlation coefficient of 0 means there is no effect. A coefficient value of 1 means that there is a perfect effect. Cohen (1988, 1992) has provided suggestions about what constitutes a small or large effect for differences in mean scores (in Field, 2009):

> MM r = .20 (small effect): In this case the effect explains 1% of the total variance.
> MM r = .50 (medium effect): The effect accounts for 9% of the total variance.
> MM r = .80 (large effect): The effect accounts for 25% of the variance. (p. 57)

The fact that *any* statistically significant differences exist amongst the items based on ability level for samples so small was a surprise. This study did not test for the effect of any specific pedagogical intervention. Rather, it tested for

differences in preferences for activities between groups of students based on ability, not differences of a specific group before and after applying an experiment. There are several differences between the level of enjoyableness / motivation of specific activities between the three groups of students. The statistical significance findings indicate that these differences are not based on chance alone. Therefore, the effect size was calculated for the six statistically significance differences.

The effect size is calculated by taking the difference in means between two groups and dividing that number by their combined (pooled) standard deviation. This tells us how many standard deviations' difference there is between the means (M) of the two activities for the two groups being compared. For example, an effect size of .25 indicates that the difference between the two mean scores is a quarter of a standard deviation. In the data analysis for this paper, t-tests were used to determine what, if any, statistically significant differences exist between the mean scores for the three groups of students.

The effect size measures for these differences are as follows:

For variable 6 *Grammar drills / practice* between PI and UI, the Cohen's *d* is 0.49.

The variable 7 *Small-group activities* difference between the PI and IM students' effect size measure is 0.32.

In addition, the effect size for the PI and UI students for variable 7 *Small-group activities* is 0.30.

For variable 9 *Problem solving activities*, the difference between the PI and UI students has a Cohen's *d* of 0.39.

For variable 10 *Activities while moving* between PI and IM, the Cohen's *d* is 0.47.

For variable 11 *Challenging tasks* between IM and UI, the Cohen's *d* is 0.44.

There are several effect size measures that are large enough to warrant attention. The largest, for *Grammar drills / practice* between PI and UI (Cohen's *d* 0.49), indicates a medium effect size. Between PI and IM for *Small-group activities* (Cohen's *d* of .32) and for Activities while moving (Cohen's *d* of .30)

are between the cut-off points for small and a medium effect sizes. Finally, for *Challenging tasks*, the effect size for the mean difference between IM and UI, the Cohen's *d* is 0.44. For variable 9 *Problem solving activities*, the difference between PI and UI has a Cohen's *d* (0.39). Both results are above the threshold of .20 for a small effect size. In addition, the lowest mean score is for variable 6 *Grammar drills / practice* for the IM students. The highest mean scores of 4.03 and 4.01 are for the UI and IM students for variable 7 *Small group / team activities.* Finally, the only mean score below a '3' was for the IM students and variable 6 *Grammar drills / practice*, indicating that this pedagogical approach was viewed negatively by these students.

Variable Correlations

The Pearson correlation coefficients for the twelve variables appear in Table 4. The correlations shed light on the relationships between both the survey sections and the variables themselves. Recall that items 1-6 are hypothesized to be TAs and items 7-12 are hypothesized to be C/TBAs. First, the variables on the TAs scale have correlations amongst themselves and variables 7 and 11 on the C/TBAs scale. Second, variables 7, 9, 10, and 12 on the C/TBAs scale have good correlations as well as variables 8, 9 and 11. Variable 5 on the TAs scale correlates well with variables 7, 8, and 11 on the C/TBAs scale, too.

Table 4
The Pearson Correlation Matrix of the Twelve Pedagogical Activities (N = 220)

	Var 1	Var 2	Var 3	Var 4	Var 5	Var 6	Var 7	Var 8	Var 9	Var 10	Var 11
Var 2	0.407*										
Var 3	0.386*	0.296*									
Var 4	0.299*	0.255*	0.362*								
Var 5	0.272*	0.143	0.265*	0.348*							
Var 6	0.268*	0.138	0.187	0.418*	0.284*						
Var 7	0.202	0.079	0.175	0.228*	0.211	0.289*					
Var 8	0.123	0.166	0.189	0.176	0.298*	0.265*	0.192				
Var 9	0.147	0.246*	0.174	0.212	0.181	0.175	0.237*	0.344*			
Var 10	0.171	0.073	0.094	0.111	0.147	0.208	0.310*	0.122	0.165		
Var 11	0.224*	0.194	0.163	0.204	0.284*	0.192	0.094	0.240*	0.340*	0.268*	
Var 12	0.192	0.023	0.114	0.107	0.180	0.180	0.456*	0.192	0.082	0.251*	0.173

Note. *$p < 0.01$

The PCA Results

SPSS tests of factorability include the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. For the KMO, "values between 0.5 and 0.7 are mediocre, values between 0.7 and 0.8 are good, values between 0.8 and 0.9 are great and values above 0.9 are superb" (Hutcheson & Sofroniou, 1999, in Field 2009, p. 647). The results presented in Table 5 show an acceptable KMO level and also the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity shows a level of statistical significance lower than $p < 0.001$. Both indicate that PCA on these data is appropriate.

Table 5
The KMO and Bartlett's test of Sphericity Results

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.775
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	465.771
	df	66
	Sig.	.000

The third Research Question and Hypothesis 2 require a PCA to determine if the variables will 'cluster' into factors / components comprised of TAs or C/TBAs. The PCA results are presented in Table 6. For these results, 60% or less explained variance is satisfactory for the social sciences. The alpha reliability estimate of .76 indicated inconsistency in the data. However, the PCA result of three factors indicates the instrument measures three distinct constructs, one for TAs and two for C/TBAs. Therefore, the PCA results help answer the third Research Question, *Do the respondents' classroom activity preferences group by factor analysis according to the TA and C/TBA distinctions made by several authors?* In addition, they help determine if Hypothesis 2: *Principal components analysis will distinguish between C/TBAs and TAs*, is supported or not. The six hypothesized TAs did, in fact, form a single factor, and the hypothesized C/TBAs formed two factors of three items each.

As can be seen in Table 6, there are no cross-loadings above .40, although the cross-loading of 0.399 for variable 6 *Grammar drills / practice* is clearly about as

Table 6
Results of Principal Components Analysis of the 12 Activities for all of the Students (N = 220)

Item number and name	Factor 1 *Traditional Activities*	Factor 2 *Active Pair / Team work*	Factor 3 *Brains*
1. Lecture (Listen to the teacher and stay in my seat)	**0.726**	0.157	0.030
2. Listening exercises (CD, tape or DVD)	**0.621**	-0.180	0.246
3. Dialogue / reading practice from the text	**0.705**	0.055	0.067
4. Writing exercises	**0.664**	0.171	0.134
5. Translation exercises	**0.421**	0.246	0.328
6. Grammar drills / practice	**0.424**	0.399	0.178
7. Small-group / team activities	0.167	**0.771**	0.074
8. Info-seek / finding information activities	0.119	0.175	**0.653**
9. Problem-solving activities	0.121	0.050	**0.763**
10. Activities where I am moving around in the room	0.018	**0.563**	0.258
11. Tasks that are intellectually challenging	0.157	0.114	**0.680**
12. Pair-work	0.054	**0.770**	0.033
Eigenvalue	3.394	1.390	1.135
% Total rotated variance explained per factor	19.107	15.494	14.720

Note. Principal components analysis with Varimax rotation, with 49.321% total variance explained.

close as possible to also being included with the variables in factor 2, C/TBAs *Active Pair / Teamwork*. Why would grammar drills and practice load with pair and group work? This is a question that deserves further investigation, possibly with a qualitative approach, in the future. In addition, variable 5, *Translation exercises* had a factor loading of 0.328 with factor 3, C/TBAs *Brains*. The difficulty of translating from J<=>E makes this relationship rather more obvious than the previous one.

The three factors are explained in more detail below. However, it should be noted that the factors are formed by items / variables which are related to each other as determined by the software algorithms. As such, the factor groupings themselves do not indicate a 'preference' or approval, or disapproval by the participants. The three PCA factors, Cronbach's alpha reliability estimates, and explanations are as follows:

Factor 1: *Traditional Activities* ($\alpha = .71$)
0.726 Item 1: Lecture

0.621 Item 2: Listening exercises (CD, tape or DVD)
0.705 Item 3: Dialogue / reading practice from the text
0.664 Item 4: Writing exercises
0.421 Item 5: Translation exercises
0.424 Item 6: Grammar drills / practice

The variables loading on this factor consist of activities *Lecture* and *Listening exercises*, which focus on teacher-fronted lessons, audio recordings, movies or listening to a partner in dialogue practice. In addition, this factor also contains *Writing* and *Translation exercises*, *Grammar drills / practice* and *Dialogue / reading practice from the text*, all traditional approaches to foreign language learning. With six variables, this factor has the highest alpha reliability score of the three.

Factor 2: C/TBAs *Active Pair / Teamwork* ($\alpha = .61$)
0.771 Item 7: Small-group / team activities
0.563 Item 10: Activities where I am moving around in the room
0.770 Item 12: Pair-work

The second factor has been labeled C/TBAs *Active Pair / Teamwork* since the three variables loading on this factor involve *Pair-work, Small-group / team activities*, and *Activities where I am moving around in the room*.

Factor 3: C/TBAs *Brains* ($\alpha = .57$)
0.653 Item 8: Info-seek / finding information activities
0.763 Item 9: Problem-solving activities
0.680 Item 11: Tasks that are intellectually challenging

The variables loading on factor three emphasize task-based activities including variables 8 *Info-seek, finding information activities* and 9 *Problem-solving activities,* activities that require problem-solving skills and definite outcomes. In the process of reviewing this paper, it was suggested that variable 11 *Tasks that are intellectually challenging* be dropped from the analysis as it appears based on its

face value to include several activity types. Yet, it loaded with variables 8 and 9 nicely, forming a factor of three items with no meaningful cross-loading.

There are similarities in the results presented in this paper and the results reported by Jacques (2001) and Schmidt and Watanabe (2001). For example, the results reported in the Jacques' (2001) paper contain a factor comprised of items related to grammar, reading and writing. In Schmidt and Watanabe's (2001) research results, vocabulary is also included. The results from both studies have a factor similar to Factor 1 in this study: TAs *Listening, Writing & Grammar*. What may be of interest to classroom practitioners is that the IM students, who are representative of 70% of the first year students, show a greater preference to be active while learning than the PI and UI students. This is interesting since the C/TBAs factor which includes variable 10 *Activities while moving* also includes variables 7 *Small-group activities* and 12 *Pair work*. Therefore, there appears to be a relationship between working with others and being physically active, too.

An as yet unexplored area of research that this paper investigates is the mean score differences between the three factors as outlined above, and comparing the differences between them for each of the three proficiency levels. These results appear in Table 7 and several differences show a high level of statistical significance, indicating that these differences are highly unlikely to be chance alone.

Table 7
The Statistical Significance of the Differences between the Factor Groups by English Ability Level

Factor groups:	Factor 1: TAs *Listening, Writing & Grammar*	Stat. Sig. F1 vs F2	Factor 2: C/TBAs *Active Pair / Team work*	Stat. Sig. F2 vs F3	Factor 3: C/TBAs *Brains*	Stat. Sig. F3 vs F1
All students	$M = 3.30$ (0.87)	$p < .05$	$M = 3.70$ (0.81)	$p < .05$	$M = 3.40$ (0.68)	NA
PI ($n = 73$)	$M = 3.31$ (0.85)	NA	$M = 3.55$ (0.82)	NA	$M = 3.32$ (0.63)	NA
IM ($n = 74$)	$M = 3.23$ (0.82)	$p < .01$	$M = 3.83$ (0.77)	$p < .01$	$M = 3.37$ (0.62)	NA
UI ($n = 73$)	$M = 3.35$ (0.93)	$p < .10$	$M = 3.74$ (0.82)	NA	$M = 3.53$ (0.76)	$p < .10$

Note. The significance level for this analysis was set at $p = < .10$ as this is an exploratory study (Cohen, 1992).

The effect size measures for the mean statistically score differences between the three factors are as follows:

For all students, the difference between Factors 1 and 2, the Cohen's *d* is 0.48.
For all students, the difference between Factors 2 and 3, the Cohen's *d* is 0.40.

For the IM students, the difference between Factors 1 and 2, the Cohen's *d* is 0.75.
For the IM students, the difference between Factors 2 and 3, the Cohen's *d* is 0.66.

For the UI students, the difference between Factors 1 and 2, the Cohen's *d* is 0.44.
For the UI students, the difference between Factors 1 and 3, the Cohen's *d* is 0.21.

As mentioned previously, the IM students represent approximately 70% of the students in the faculty. They are also the group of students that shows the largest (and most statistically significant differences) between Factor 2, C/TBAs *Active Pair / Team work* and the first and third factors. Not unexpectedly, the Cohen's *d* for these two differences (0.75 and 0.66 respectively) are the largest for any reported difference in the mean scores between the three factors by any group of students. These results show that the effect sizes are large enough to inform us that the statistically significant differences in the sampled populations are meaningful. Therefore, careful consideration should be taken to consider student ability level when making decisions on pedagogical activities and how they are presented for use in the classroom.

TAs vs. C/TBAs: Social Constructivism, 'Flow', and Task-motivation

The second research question asked *Do the students from the three different ability levels have different preferences for pedagogical activities?* This question lead to Hypothesis 2: *The participants in this survey will show differences in activity preference based on ability level*. Before looking at this issue more closely, it is worth mentioning that none of the C/TBAs received a score of '1' from any of the IM

level students, whereas all of the TAs received a '1' from the UI level students. What can we infer from this? As a classroom teacher with years of experience at all levels of education in Japan, the author believes that the relationship between language learning, peer interaction, Flow, and task-motivation accounts for the relationship of the variables in Factor 2: C/TBAs *Active Pair / Teamwork*. Further research including a qualitative segment would help us understand this relationship.

Yet, variable 1 *Lecture (Listen to the teacher and stay in my seat)* also received a high mean score for enjoyableness and / or motivational aspect(s). What could account for this? One reason that comes to mind is that the students are simply apathetic toward learning English. Finally, C/TBAs items 9 *Problem solving activities*, 10 *Activities where I am moving around in the room*, and 11 *Tasks that are intellectually challenging* did not receive a '1' for Strongly Dislike from any student from any ability level.

While all three groups ranked *Pair work* and *Small-group activities* in the top three (with *Lecture*), the IM students found both slightly more enjoyable or motivating than the PI and UI groups. These results are similar to those reported previously for two cohorts of IM students (see Ockert, 2006, 2011). This suggests that educators and curriculum developers should take note of the fact that the more advanced the students, the more they may like or need 'real world' communicative opportunities or in-class scenarios. Of specific interest for the theories tested is the homogeneity of the sample. While the students may come from different backgrounds demographically, they are for all intents and purposes very similar. It would be expected that all three groups answer similarly – yet they did not. The evidence herein demonstrates that students of different ability levels may need, and therefore desire, different pedagogies. Furthermore, Dörnyei (2009b) writes that learners should be offered "ample opportunities to participate in *genuine L2 interaction*" (p. 41, emphasis in original). Therefore, students need at least a partner in order to communicate in any kind of 'genuine' L2 interaction. Listening to the teacher, CD, or even watching a movie is not sufficient to supply the type of communicative opportunities that constitute genuine L2 interaction. This may be why the more advanced the students, the

more they seem to favor C/TBAs.

Conclusions

Implications for Placement Testing, Pedagogy, and Curriculum Development

The results should not lead readers to infer that having students engage in the activities that the students chose as more motivating / enjoyable will, in fact, increase their motivation to study English. The relationship of effectiveness and enjoyableness / motivating aspect of pedagogical activities has not been firmly established. In fact, it may not necessarily be a linear relationship but may be circular or even self-reinforcing. What curriculum developers and classroom educators need to be aware of is "the possibility of problems arising from a mismatch of classroom activities with student expectations" (Green, 1993, p. 8). For example, students who have passed a university entrance exam will almost certainly have mastered basic grammar. To place such students in a class in which the teacher places an emphasis on grammatical rules / activities will almost certainly lead to student frustration, boredom, and burnout.

How are these results to be interpreted? For example, are these results generalizable to the larger body of university students in Japan in general? Lazaraton (2005) cautions that using parametric procedures may lead researchers to overgeneralize their results and to make claims regarding their findings that exceed what is permitted by their methodologies (p. 219). However, according to Dörnyei (2011), "researchers should also not to be afraid to extend research interpretations to a general class or population if (there are) reasons to assume that the results apply" (p. 213). In Japanese universities, the vast majority of students who must study English are majoring in subjects other than English. Therefore, the results presented in this paper may very well apply to university English students in Japan in general. Teachers may wish to experiment with various activities to see what works and what does not work so well in their specific situation. For example, can we combine activities that students perceive as enjoyable / motivating with essential activities that are perceived as useful? I.e. make a vocabulary memorization activity a group activity.

Limitations and Future Research

Admittedly, the current study has its limitations. First, several of the activities on the survey are not exclusive. For example, translation requires a source, a text or other written document as well as writing skills. Furthermore, it is more important to recognize this study's sampling limitations. This sample was drawn from the students, overwhelmingly male, of a highly ranked university. Therefore, since the students who answered this survey are a sample of convenience, the results may not generalize to the population of Japanese university students as a whole (see Brown, 2006). However, these students come from varied demographic backgrounds and this should be taken into consideration when interpreting these results for practical applications in the classroom. Yet, this study involved students from a highly homogenous group and further research is needed to determine the extent to which their pedagogical activity preferences would be similar or different to students elsewhere. Gender could play a role in activity preference; future research should take this into consideration and report the results accordingly.

There are several questions which could be addressed in future studies. For example, *What could be the reason why some students prefer one pedagogical approach over another? Could the reason be the relevance of the material to her life now, or future goals for language use? Are educators using 'level appropriate' pedagogies, materials, and methodologies in the classroom? Is this a 'chicken and the egg' syndrome?* In other words, *Which comes first, the desire to engage in specific activities or the level of achievement? Does one cause the other?* Using a mixed methods approach utilizing open-ended questions would help answer the question of why students may prefer certain pedagogical activities. The findings in this paper of a survey of pedagogical activities are by no means conclusive, and it should not be assumed or inferred from these results that any specific activity in and of itself leads to an increase or decrease in proficiency. The author hopes that classroom teachers and curriculum developers may benefit from the information presented herein. It would be wonderful if other researchers explored survey differences as well and shared their students' preferred activities with the broader community of language researchers and teachers worldwide.

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Appendix

What classroom activities do you enjoy or find motivating?

Circle the number on the right that best matches your opinion.
1 = strongly dislike, 2 = dislike, 3 = neutral, 4 = like, 5 = strongly like

1. Lecture (Listen to the teacher and stay in my seat)
2. Listening exercises (using a cd, tape or DVD)
3. Dialogue / reading practice from the text
4. Writing exercises
5. Translation exercises
6. Grammar drills / practice
7. Small-group / team activities
8. Info-seek / finding information activities
9. Problem-solving activities
10. Activities where I am moving around in the room
11. Tasks that are intellectually challenging
12. Pair-work