

**The Effect of Emotive Interaction With a Teacher on Junior High School Students'
EFL Writing**

Reiko Yamamoto*

Department of English Studies for Career,
Kyoto Junior College of Foreign Languages,
6 Kasame-cho, Saiin, Ukyo-ku, Kyoto, Japan
*Corresponding Author: re_yamam@kufs.ac.jp

ABSTRACT

This study is an initiative that aimed to place a teacher-student emotive interaction at the centre of the enhancement of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) proficiency of junior high school students in Japan. Junior high school students at adolescence become too conscious of lack of fluency in second language and hesitate to express themselves. Especially, contrary to the situation in the past, the writing skill of Japanese students has been reported to decrease compared with other skills of English proficiency; speaking, listening, and reading. This study focuses on writing instruction over the long run, one whole year. To be specific, this paper reports on a project in which an EFL teacher in Japan explored ways in order to interact with her students at an emotional level. In order to develop teacher-student communication, the instruction includes: 1) At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher revealed her inner self in her short speech and the students reacted to the speech in writing short comment; 2) The teacher gave a notebook for journal writing to each student with the intention of encouraging them to communicate with the teacher personally. 3) The teacher's emotive feedback was given to the students with the intention of encouraging the students to interact with the teacher at an emotive level. On the basis of qualitative analysis of journal writing and the questionnaire which the students were given after the one-year instruction, it was revealed that the writing instruction encouraged the students to engage in an emotive interaction with the teacher. Moreover, the results of statistical analysis of Global Test of English Communication for Students (GTEC for Students) proved the enhancement of writing proficiency of the students.

Keywords: teacher-student interaction, emotion, writing instruction

Introduction

In Japan, 2011 was an epoch-making year, when elementary schools began offering English as a foreign language (EFL) education. The government course guidelines prescribe EFL not as a subject but as activities in a foreign language. Therefore, elementary school students participated in communicative activities without being afraid of making grammatical mistakes or getting bad scores despite their poor English proficiency. Because of the lack of EFL teachers in elementary schools, homeroom teachers took charge of the activities. Homeroom teachers have a good emotional relationship with their students, which also contributes to good EFL teacher-student interaction. The author expected that elementary school students with positive attitudes toward communication would go to junior high school with the same attitudes. The students, however, were found to be less positive in EFL class and became as passive as former junior high school students were. One reason might be that EFL teachers have fewer chances to interact with their students personally compared with

homeroom teachers in elementary school. It is difficult for students to be motivated to interact with their teachers at an emotional level. Moreover, adolescent junior high school students become too conscious of their lack of fluency in the second language and hesitate to express themselves. They become quiet, because the fluency and accuracy needed in oral communication are too difficult for students to achieve. Speaking and listening are taught in elementary school, and writing and reading in junior high school. Writing seems to be a smaller hurdle for junior high school students, because they can take time before expressing themselves and polish what they write. At the same time, an EFL teacher can interact with his/her students personally by writing comments to each student. With the consideration above, this study focuses on writing instruction for junior high school students.

Literature Review

Since practical and communicative competency in EFL was specified in the government course guidelines for junior high schools, these schools in Japan have focused on listening and speaking instruction. As a result, the emphasis on writing instruction has been reduced (Tsuda, 2007). Yoshida (2007) studied junior high school students' English proficiency and reported that their writing skills were poor compared with their listening and reading skills. It is time to reconsider what practical and communicative competency is.

Communication cannot be realised without the connection of language and mind (Watanabe, 2008). According to Watanabe (2008), elementary school students' language learning facilitates a synergistic connection between the language and their minds. At the junior high school level, the connection becomes indirect—the connection between language and others' minds. Junior high school students are at the cusp of adolescence, which is why they are affected by their relationships with others. Harris (1989) asserts that junior high school students' cognition undergoes rapid development and they become more sensitive towards others. The less they interact with others physically, the more they interact emotionally (Harris, 1989). Realizing emotive interaction with others in EFL lessons, however, might affect junior high school students' EFL communicative proficiency.

As reviewed before, relationships with others affect students by connecting language and others' minds. How can EFL classes make teacher–student interactions emotive? How can an EFL teacher make students reveal their inner selves to him/her? Hirose (1999) pointed out that communication through writing is suitable for Japanese EFL learners. Being shy, they can reveal their inner selves in writing better than by facing others and speaking to them directly. Komuro (2001) also insists on the necessity of writing instruction, which matches the specific character of the Japanese. Writing instruction might be effective in realizing emotive interactions between an EFL teacher and the students.

Hypotheses

The author has two hypotheses:

1. Three steps of writing instruction in EFL classes lead junior high school students in Japan to interact with the teacher emotionally.
2. Because of these interactions, the students' writing proficiency enhances.

The goal of this study is to verify these two hypotheses.

Methodology

Participants

This study's participants are 120 eighth-year students (divided into three classes) in a junior high school attached to a national university in Japan. The participants who are provided three steps of writing instruction in an EFL class form the treatment group. The control group consists of 120 ninth-year students from the same school, who are one year senior to the treatment group. The control group took normal writing instruction in an EFL class one year before the treatment group.

Writing Instruction

The three steps of writing instruction were:

1. The teacher revealed her inner self in a short speech and the students reacted to the speech by writing a short comment.
2. The teacher gave each student a notebook to encourage them to communicate with her.
3. The teacher gave the students her emotive feedback on the journal-writing task to encourage them to interact with her at an emotional level.

Step 1, repeated ten times in the previous semester, is shown in Figure 1.

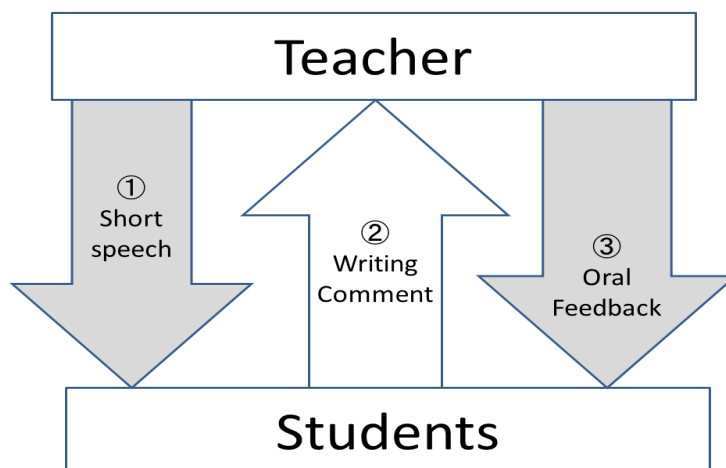


Figure 1.: Process of Step 1

Excerpt 1 is an example of a short speech made by the teacher.

Excerpt 1 [Speech]

When I was a university student, I travelled to China. While I was walking in a park in China, a Chinese boy talked to me in English. He was a university student and wanted to practice English with a foreigner in order to realize his dream to be an English teacher. We talked in English for an hour, and suddenly the boy cried, 'Oh, I forgot the date!' 'Forgot what?' I asked. 'My date!' 'Oh my goodness, where?' 'Here!' We looked around and found a furious girl looking at us. I suggested him to hurry to her and apologize for having forgotten the date, and he did. The girl hit his face without a word and went away. He came back to me and said, 'Never mind'. I mind it! We have never seen each other since that day, but we exchanged addresses and continued to exchange letters, which changed to e-mails later. Luckily, he met another good girl and married her, and got a lovely daughter. Isn't it great that both he and I became English

THE EFFECT OF EMOTIVE INTERACTION WITH A TEACHER ON JUNIOR

teachers in junior high schools? I respect his bravery in speaking to a foreigner in order to practice English. English is a key to making friends all over the world even if you cannot see their faces.

The teacher revealed this very private experience to elicit emotions in the students. The speech is both comical and suggestive. From observations during the speech, the students were fascinated and concentrated on the content. They sometimes laughed and were sometimes serious. After the speech, the teacher instructed the students to write comments on a small sheet and collected the sheets a few minutes later. Excerpts 2 and 3 are the students' comments; the author has retained the original grammatical errors.

Excerpt 2 [Student A]

Chinese boy talked to Ms Yamamoto to speak English. I can't do. He's great! The boy became English teacher. Dreams come true.

Excerpt 3 [Student B]

I think the boy liked Ms Yamamoto. So the girl got angry. Ms Yamamoto was very beautiful, I think.

Next, the teacher took a rough look at the comment sheets and gave oral feedback. Excerpt 4 is the feedback following Excerpts 1, 2, and 3.

Excerpt 4

T : Student B gave me a good comment. (Reads the sheet aloud) Ms Yamamoto was very beautiful, I think.

Ss: (Laugh)

SB: I wrote you WERE beautiful. Not you ARE beautiful.

T: Oh, what a rude boy!

Ss: (Laugh)

Student B was not a good speaker, but he tried to speak positively. It might be because he felt he was interacting with the teacher emotively through comment writing, like the rest of the class. The students became more eager to understand the teacher's personality and inner self, which led to expressing their own inner selves on the comment sheet.

As the second step, the teacher gave each student a notebook to encourage them to communicate with her. It was in the middle of the former semester. Several students found it difficult to write original sentences in EFL. Therefore, the teacher encouraged them to start with one sentence like, 'I don't want to write today' to remove their reluctance to write. They were even allowed to copy a sentence from their favourite songs. The teacher's feedback was a short comment such as 'I see. You're tired today' or 'I like the phrase, too'. Such a small step might be the start of constructing personal relationships between each student and the teacher. The second step is shown in Figure 2.

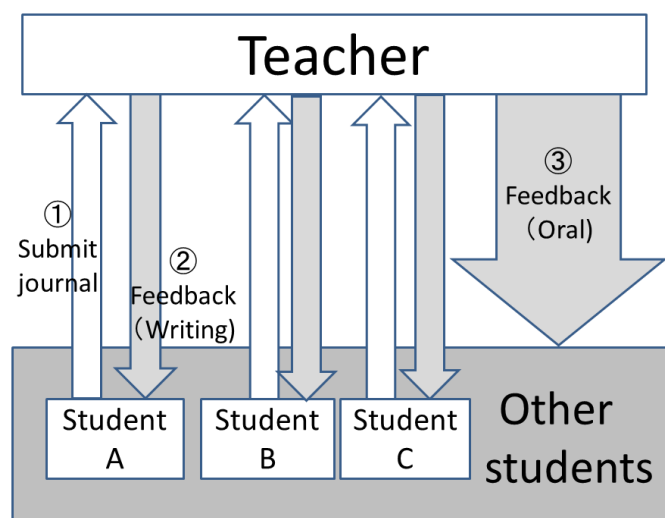


Figure 2.: Process of Step 2

As the last step, the teacher gave the students emotive feedback on their journal-writing task to encourage them to interact with her at an emotional level. It started in the following semester, when more students showed motivation to write about themselves. In this step, the teacher announced a change in the journal system: 1) The students would write what they thought or felt. 2) When the students did not want the teacher to read the journal, they did not need to submit it. 3) Students who wanted to submit the journal would put it in the basket at the entrance of the teachers' office. After class, the teacher gave feedback and put the journal back in the basket. The students took their own before leaving school. By this system, the students would not hesitate to submit the journal containing their private thoughts in front of other students. The third step is shown in Figure 3.

As shown in Figure 3, volunteer students could interact with the teacher, while other students could not. The teacher, however, gave all the students oral feedback in class, informing the class of how many students submitted journals that day or how the teacher was fascinated, affected, and moved by the journals.

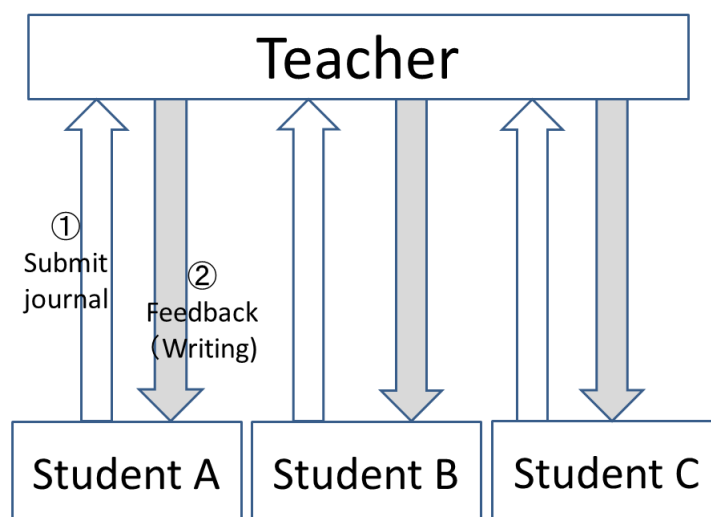


Figure 3.: Process of Step 3

Quantitative Analysis

All the students in the participating school took the Global Test of English Communication for Students (GTEC for Students) at the end of the school year. GTEC for Students was developed by Benesse Corporation (a Japanese company) to estimate Japanese students' EFL proficiency and was adopted mainly by junior high and high schools. In this study, GTEC for Students writing scores (full score: 200 points) are analysed. The treatment group took the test before and after a year of writing instruction. The control group also took the test at the end of their seventh and eighth years, one year before the treatment group did. The treatment and control groups' writing scores are shown in Table 1 and Figure 4.

Table 1

GTEC Writing Scores of the Treatment and Control Groups

	Group	N	M	SD
At the end of 7 th year	Treatment	115	65.02	29.453
	Control	112	75.39	20.436
At the end of 8 th year	Treatment	115	95.73	30.757
	Control	112	90.71	31.004

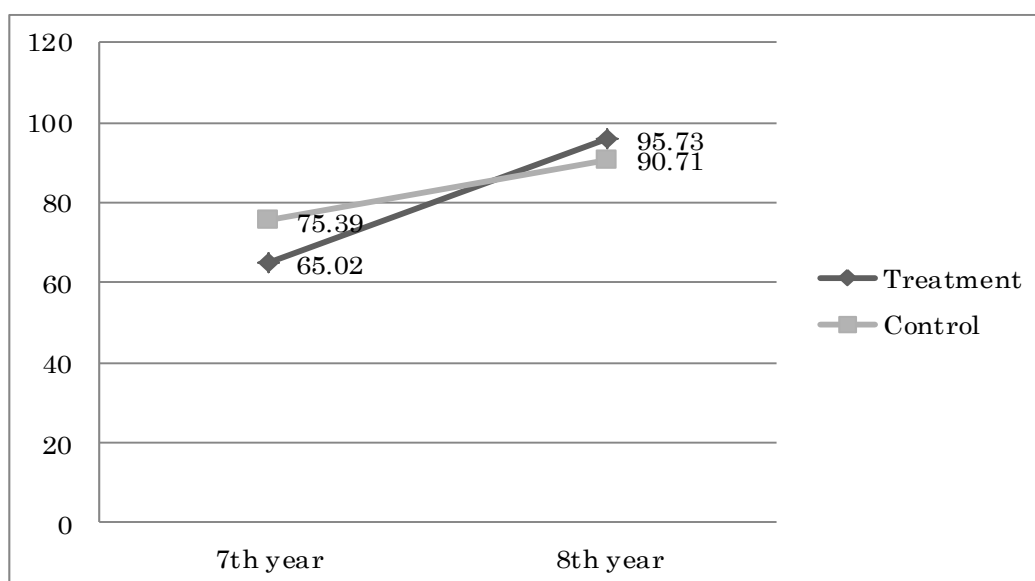


Figure 4.: GTEC Writing Scores of the Treatment and Control Groups

It is natural that the score of a student in GTEC for Students increases during a year from the eighth year to the seventh-year. According to Benesse (2011), the national average of writing proficiency enhancement in GTEC for Students is approximately 15 points. The control group's score increased to almost the same as the national average. In contrast, the treatment group's score increased more than 30 points in a year. At the end of the seventh year, the control group's scores exceeded that of the treatment group, but at the end of the eighth year, the treatment group was ahead of the control group. As explained above, the control group was given normal writing instruction without emotive interaction with a teacher. The instruction time was the same as that of the treatment group. The results of statistical analysis of the two groups' scores are shown in Table 2.

THE EFFECT OF EMOTIVE INTERACTION WITH A TEACHER ON JUNIOR

Table 2
T-Test Results of the Treatment and Control Groups

	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
At the end of 7 th year	3.076	225	.002	.20
At the end of 8 th year	1.226	225	.222	.01

At the end of the seventh year, there was a significant difference ($r=.20$) between the treatment and control groups. After a year of writing instruction, at the end of the eighth year, there was no significant difference ($r=.01$) between the treatment and control groups.

Qualitative Analysis

In the third step, more students began to reveal their inner selves and tried to interact with the teacher emotively. Excerpts 5, 6, and 7 are qualitative data which prove the realization of emotive interactions between the teacher and students.

Excerpt 5

[Student C] I wrote this notebook for a year. Maybe it is the last page of grade 8. I want to say thank you to Ms. Yamamoto. I started this notebook about 1 year ago. I can feel my mistake style. I want to speak English well. Thank you for check my writing. I like English the best of all subjects. I love you and your English lessons.

[Teacher's feedback] Your English writing improved drastically because you did as I advised. So you are a very good student. I'm happy! Thank you for the moving message.

Excerpts 6

[Student D]

I'm member of girls table tennis club. The club is very loose. So members doesn't come club. I gave members advice. But members doesn't came, too. I resigned it. Because my advice is useless. I consult with Mr. Tanaka (Manager of table tennis club). But he said 'It's no use'. I'm in difficult. Now my club's percentage of attendance is very bad. It was 10 percent almost. How do I?

[Teacher's feedback]

You are a captain? It's difficult to start a new club. Maybe new students will come in April. It's a chance to change! Never give up!

Excerpts 7

[Student E]

Today, I spell about my trouble. I had very good friends. First, Yumiko. And Mika. So Rumi. The last ten days, Yumiko had her boyfriend. She said it Mika and Rumi. I don't know it, and I don't tell it. So I ask Mika and Rumi some question. 'What they speak?' Rumi said, 'I don't tell you'. I think it was mysterious. After that, I had a quarrel with Rumi. But I finished quarrel a day. I feel very happy. But Yumiko and Mika are angry for me. I don't quarrel with Yumiko and Mika. I think strange. After that, I am only one. I am sad. How do I forget it?

THE EFFECT OF EMOTIVE INTERACTION WITH A TEACHER ON JUNIOR

Student E apparently had a serious problem with her friends. She added a message in Japanese at the end of the journal, asking the teacher not to tell others about this problem; the teacher had no solution to this. Fortunately, the classroom teacher noticed the unusual atmosphere in his class and asked the EFL teacher if she knew something. Cooperation among the teachers led to the problem's quick resolution. Everyone might wonder: if Student E was brave enough to consult with a teacher, why did she write to the EFL teacher and not go straight to the classroom teacher? The author supposes that Student E, at adolescence, revealed her inner self only through writing or could have revealed her inner self solely in the second language. This reminds the author of a comment by Student F, a ninth-year student. After Student F wrote about her experience in Okinawa, she told the author, 'I don't know why, but I can be frank while writing in English. It is too shameful for me to write that I cried in the War Museum in Japanese, but I can write that in English'. It might be because Student F became too self-conscious and emotional using Japanese, her first language. In contrast, she could be objective about herself in the second language. It is possible that Student E felt similarly, when she bravely confessed her problem in her journal.

Findings

The first hypothesis of this study is 'Three steps of writing instruction in EFL classes lead junior high school students in Japan to interact with the teacher emotionally'. As the excerpts show, the students came to interact with the teacher at an emotive level through the three steps of writing instruction. The qualitative analysis of journal writing in Step 3, in particular, revealed that they opened their inner selves to the teacher. The results proved the first hypothesis.

The second hypothesis of this study is 'Because of these interactions, the students' writing proficiency enhances'. The results of the statistical analysis of GTEC for Students scores proved the students' writing proficiency enhancement. This study succeeded in verifying both hypotheses.

Conclusion

Junior high school students are at the cusp of adolescence. This involves two ambivalent aspects: One is that they are bound to be affected by their relationships with others and they become more sensitive towards others. The other is that they hesitate to express themselves to others because they are highly self-conscious. This study aimed to take advantage of the first aspect and thereby overcome the second through EFL writing instruction. The three steps of writing instruction devised to help an EFL teacher interact with his/her students at an emotional level helped to create the emotional teacher-student interaction. The students' words in the narrative were much more expressive than the teacher, the author, expected. By removing the affective filter, students were free to put meaning in their writing. It is no wonder that their writing scores in the GTEC for Students increased.

Language education is not meant only to teach skills in a short time. A teacher should become close to his/her students during their adolescence by interacting with them at an emotional level. Moreover, junior high school teachers should share the fruit of EFL education at elementary schools. As mentioned above, homeroom teachers at elementary schools have good emotional relationships with their students, which also contributes to good teacher-student interaction in EFL classes. The concept of synchrony between a teacher and students can be carried over to the EFL class in the junior high school. With junior high school students' higher cognitive development, both the teacher and students can enjoy emotive interactions with each other, leading to a fertile world of language.

References

- Benesse Corporation. 2011. Handout for the meeting on the results of GTEC for students of the students at Kyoto Junior High school.
- Harris, P. 1989. *Children and emotion: The development of psychological understanding*. Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Hirose, K. 1999. The review of L2 writing study and suggestion for writing instruction. *Journal of the Department of Foreign Languages of Aichi Prefectural University*, 31, 41-65.
- Komuro, T. *Discussion on English writing*. Tokyo: Kogensha.
- Tsuda, M. 2007. The process from copying to guided writing. *Teaching English Now*, 2007 Fall(10), 6-8.
- Yamamoto, R. 2010. How affective input promotes output. *Journal of the Japan Society for Speech Sciences 1*, 45-57.
- Yamamoto, R. 2014. An empirical study on how to promote learners' simulation of another's emotions: Using a movie for university students in an EFL class to inspire learning. *Journal of the Japan Society for Speech Sciences*, 15, 17-31.
- Yoshida, H. 2007. The writing instruction. *Teaching English Now*, 2007 Fall (10), 2-5
- Watanabe, K. 2008. *The matter on mind and inspiration*. Okayama: Daigaku Kyoiku Shuppan.