

Family Environment Mode Approach (FEMA): An “Anxiety Buster” to Motivate EFL Learners

Merissa Ocampo

Hokkai Gakuen University
Asahi-machi, Toyohira-ku, Sapporo

Abstract

Motivation and anxiety can strongly influence learners in the EFL classroom. High motivation and low anxiety have been shown to positively impact on language learning outcomes. This paper introduces the Family Environment Mode Approach (FEMA), an experimental method that addresses these issues by reducing learners’ anxiety and increasing their learning motivation by challenging them to be “pro-mistake”. While the importance of a conducive learning environment has been well established, few researchers have focused specifically on the value of creating a family-like environment mode, where students can help and accept the mistakes of others and provide criticism in a constructive way. In this study, FEMA is used with tertiary EFL learners in Japan and is shown to help improve not only their academic performance but their emotional stability as well. This paper highlights the need for a “mindset” change concerning how English could be taught, in which the classroom environment may nurture learners intellectually, emotionally and psychologically. Classroom observation and participant questionnaires provide insight into students FEMA experience. In addition, analyzing the “brainwaves of emotion; beta (14-40Hz, associated with anxiety and alertness), alpha (7.5-14Hz, relaxation and super learning, theta (4.0-7.5Hz, enter into light sleep), delta (0.5-4Hz, entering into deep sleep produces large and slow waves and gamma (above 40Hz, the insight wave)” was also carried out as part of this study. Brainwave frequency was measured by the number of oscillations per second (Wolfe P. 2001, p 9). The results showed that students felt relaxed, talked freely, felt everyone in the classroom was friendly, and accepted the comments and suggestions of their classmates positively.

Keywords: Anxiety, Family-Environment Mode Approach (FEMA), mindset, brainwave

Introduction

Creating teaching techniques to improve the education of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) for students has long been a challenge. While hundreds of techniques have been developed, if students' thought processes are not altered then none of these can be used to best effect. In the words of Albert Einstein (2015), "we cannot solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we needed when we created them". Freeing the mind not only creates new possibilities but also, by its nature, generates a change in our behavior.

In a traditional classroom, techniques promoting a conducive, physical classroom set-up have been developed to help motivate students, but less focus has been placed on helping students to change their mindset to embrace a family-environment mode. We provide the student with all kinds of practical necessities, but we do not prepare their mind before beginning to teach. It is like wrapping a box with extravagant and appealing wrapping paper, but the same content is inside. Motivating a change in mindset has been shown to be applicable to all aspects of life; not only education but also in business, where cultivating a family environment helps to achieve excellence in the workplace (Llopis, 2012, pp. 1-2). A positive classroom is one with an environment and culture that celebrates opportunities, transparency, and the opinions of all to enrich conversation and diversity of thought.

According to Asher (1972, pp. 133-139) a teacher's role is not so much to teach as it is to provide opportunities for learning. The teacher has the responsibility of providing the best language exposure for learners to internalize. Thus the teacher controls language input, providing the raw material for the cognitive map learners construct in their own minds. In giving feedback, teachers should follow the example of parents towards their children. At first parents correct very little, but as the child grows older, fewer mistakes in speech are tolerated. Similarly, teachers should refrain from too much correction in the early stages and should not interrupt to correct errors, which can be inhibiting. As time goes on, however, more teacher intervention is expected, as learning becomes more "fine-tuned". When implementing a Family Environment Mode Approach (FEMA) within the classroom, the development of the learner's relationship with the teacher is central. This process is divided into five stages and compared to the ontogenetic development of the child. In the first, "birth" stage, feeling of security and belonging are established. In the second, as the learners' abilities improve, the learner, as child, begins to achieve a measure of independence from the parent. By the third, the learner "speaks independently" and may need to assert his or her own identity, often rejecting unasked-for advice. The fourth stage sees the learners as secure enough to take criticism, and by the last stage the learner merely works on improving style and knowledge of linguistic appropriateness. By the end of the process, the child has become an adult.

The process of learning a new language, then, is like being reborn and developing a new persona, with all the trials and challenges that are associated with birth and maturation. "Consensual validation," or "convalidation," in which mutual warmth, understanding, and a positive evaluation of the other person's worth develop between the teacher and the learner, is important. The acronym SARD, denoting security, attention/aggression, retention/reflection and discrimination, also encapsulates the psychological requirements for successful learning (Curran, 1976, p. 6; La Forge, 1983, p. 69). These ideas resonate with the researcher's FEMA in focusing on psychological requirements for successful learning. When a student is completely involved in the learning process, what is retained is internalized and becomes a part of the learner's persona in the foreign language. When learners have retained a body of material, they are ready to sort through the material and see how one thing relates to another. This discrimination process

becomes more refined and ultimately enables the students to use the language for purposes of communication outside the classroom (La Forge, 1983, p. 69).

To motivate Japanese students to talk more and to eradicate their fear of making mistakes in the classroom, especially in women's communication classes, is a significant challenge. The researcher frequently encourages students by reminding them that "by making mistakes we grow." Through mistakes we learn to know more about ourselves, including our limits and capabilities. When we see mistakes as a lesson to learn and not something to fear, they can be viewed as a good companion in the journey of language learning (Dweck 2007, Myer 2012, Sparks 2013).

FEMA, as illustrated in Figure 1, has been designed to motivate students by changing the classroom mindset from a traditional one to one where failure is embraced and mistakes are viewed as a necessary part of the language-learning journey. Importantly, this process can alleviate, or perhaps eradicate, anxiety and stress completely, and opens up the gateway of learning.

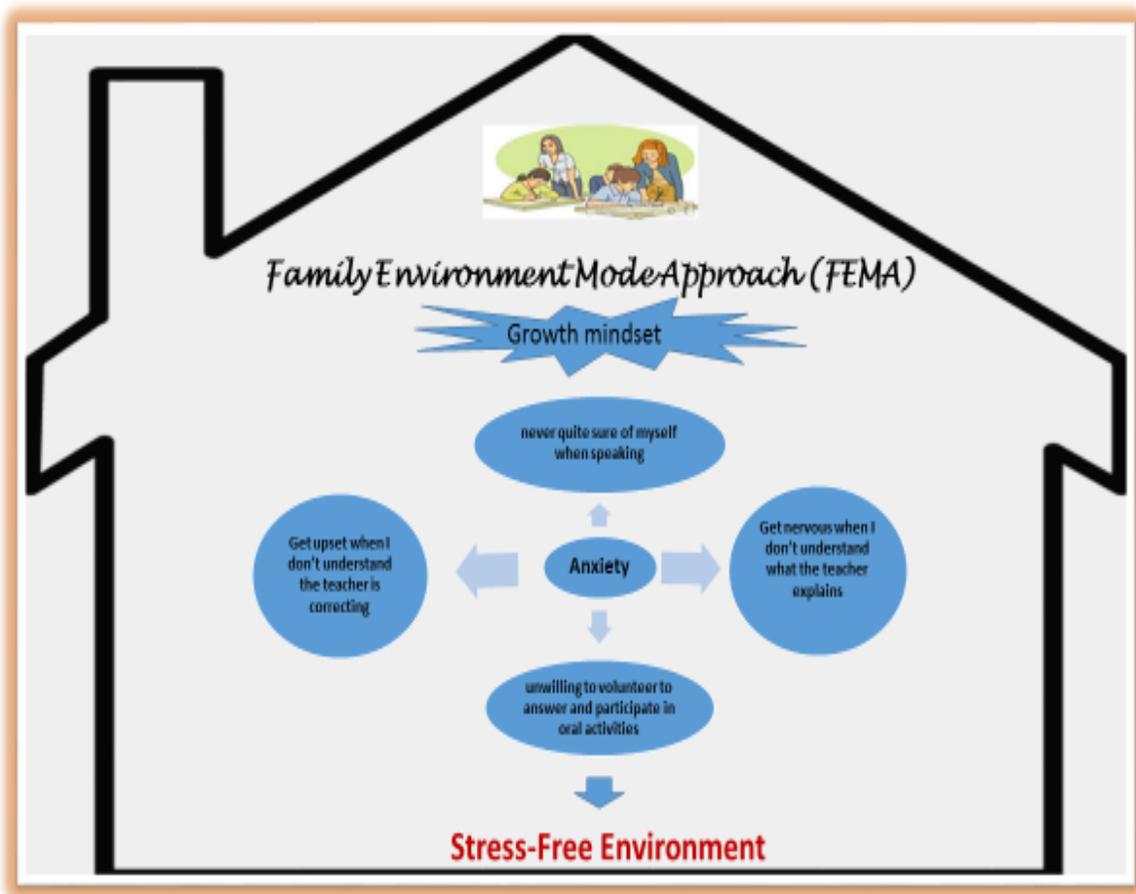


Figure 1: Family Environment Mode Approach (FEMA)

Fear has the power to shut down someone's ability to function properly. When in a state of fear, stress hormones are released, which have been shown to affect our learning and memory. Low and medium levels of the stress hormone Cortisol improve learning and enhance memory, whereas high levels of the same hormone have a negative effect on learning and memory.

Clearly, an environment full of fear and anxiety will not improve learning. No one can perform well on cognitive tasks when their brain is being bombarded with “fight-or-flight” chemistries. A calm environment with a certain degree of variety increases learning, but a tense environment does not.

Hypothesis

FEMA can alleviate anxiety and create a fun and stress-free environment, motivating students to accept each other as a family, and accept mistakes and failures as a challenge on the road to success. This process promotes a growth mindset.

Objectives

1. To examine students’ anxiety using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) after implementing FEMA.
2. To explore the effects of FEMA that result from moving students’ mindsets away from a traditional approach.
3. To alleviate students’ fear and promote a fun and stress-free environment in the classroom.
4. To understand students’ perceptions of their teachers after the implementation of FEMA.

Methodology

This research was conducted during class time and involved three main phases including introduction/presentation to students and ongoing motivational guidance, administering student questionnaires, and measuring the brainwaves of emotion using a sophisticated scientific animatronic cat ears headset that wiggle and swivel to match students’ mood which is called Necomimi. It can sense your state of mind in three steps: first, neurons firing in the brain give off electrical impulses, which are read by the forehead sensor, second, it captures brainwave data, filter out electrical noise, and interprets your brainwaves with NeuroSky’s Attention and Meditation algorithms and finally your mental state is translated into ear movements states: Calibration signal when ear will perk up one will droop, high relaxation when ears will droop down slowly, focus/relaxation when ears will perk up and droop down, high focus when ears will perk up quickly and high interest when ears will perk up and wiggle. During the introductory phase, the purposes, objectives and expected outcomes of FEMA were explained to students as a group during class time and the importance of FEMA was demonstrated. After the initial presentation, these ideas were regularly re-emphasized with the intention of fostering a growth mindset and a feeling of belonging in students. Questionnaires given to students help to probe their subjective experience of the learning process. After FEMA had been implemented for a period of six weeks, students answered both the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and Students Perception of the EFL Teachers (SPEFLT) questionnaires. These questionnaires were given to students in English with a Japanese translation provided (see appendices).

One of the most distinctive features of this research design was the use of Necomimi (brainwave cat ears) to measure the brainwaves of emotion while speaking English during phase three of the project. The device was used voluntarily in a family-like group setting as described earlier by students in an Intensive Speaking Class (ISC). The checking of brainwaves was a collaborative activity, which involved the researcher asking students questions, while other

student participants checked these students' brainwaves. Necomimi indicated students' emotional state while speaking English via a variety of directional movements. These movements are determined by the particular light-touch brainwave sensor that is picked up by the ears. For example, if the student is focused the ears perk up, if relaxed they droop. In the case of a reading for "happy" the ears wiggle. At the present time this technology is limited: the ears cannot pick up incandescent rage, existential sadness, or anything in between. Nevertheless, the readings were sufficient to establish general stress levels during this exploratory study and added a characteristic novelty, which helped to engage students in the project.

Result and Discussion

In this study, it was not the researcher's intention to analyze students' grades, but rather to focus on emotional stability in the classroom while implementing the syllabus of the communication and intensive speaking classes. She became the students' "Ma'am Mom" and a "gatekeeper" to monitor their emotions by utilizing FEMA's homely atmosphere. Just like Asher (1982, pp. 52-59), the researcher believed that an important condition for successful language learning is the absence of stress. First acquisition takes place in a stress free environment, according to Asher, whereas for adults it often causes considerable stress and anxiety. The key to stress-free learning is to tap into the natural bio-program for language development and to thus recapture the relaxed and pleasurable experience of first language learning. By focusing on meaning interpreted through movement, rather than on language forms studied in the abstract, the learner is liberated from self-consciousness and stressful situations and is able to devote their full energy to learning.

Result of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale

Japanese learners are known to be modest, introverted, and often hesitant to speak, especially in front of other people. FEMA's role is to motivate and challenge them to speak without hesitation and alter their mindset gradually, leading them to accept failure and mistakes positively. Of the factors that participants considered to be affecting their anxiety in speaking English, the researcher chose areas with the first 3 high scores, as seen in Figure 2.

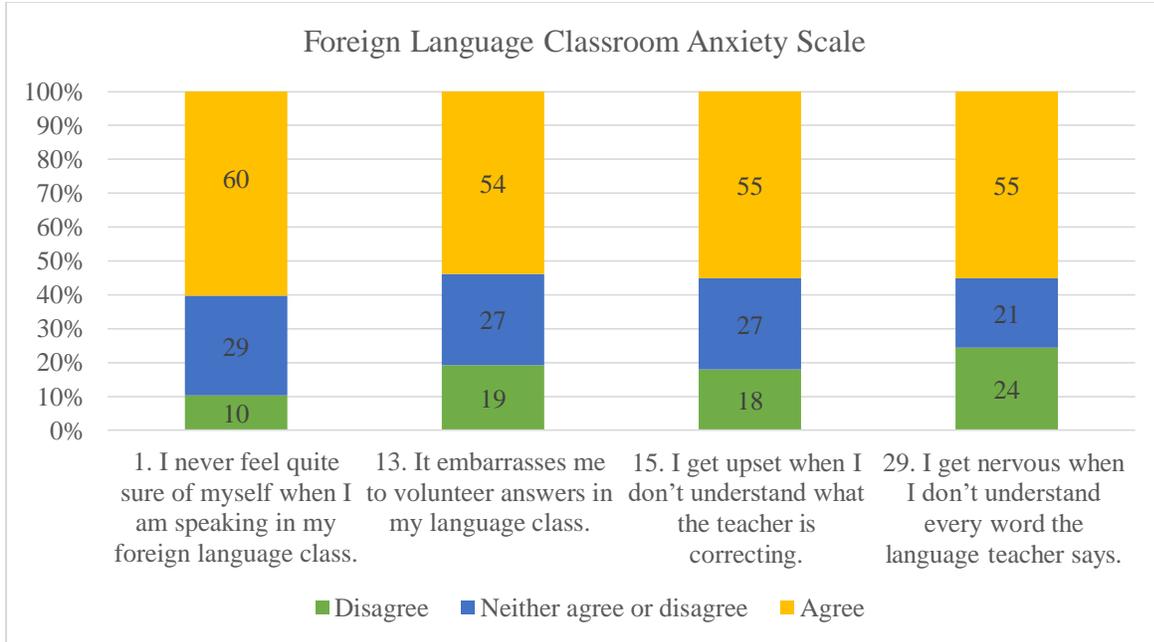


Figure 2: Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)

This result confirms the observations of other authors such as Price (1991), who found the greatest sources of students' language anxiety in the classroom were speaking in front of their peers, fear of being laughed at, being embarrassed, or making a fool of oneself. Students were also very concerned about making errors in pronunciation and wished to develop an accent that approximated that of a native speaker. Similarly, the Japanese students the researcher interviewed were seriously concerned about their pronunciations and grammar. The researcher frequently reminded students of the idea that "you are going to make a million mistakes to learn a new language!", and that embracing discomfort is part of the journey (Myers, 2012). In Figure 3, it can be seen that students felt generally well-supported by their teacher during the implementation of FEMA.

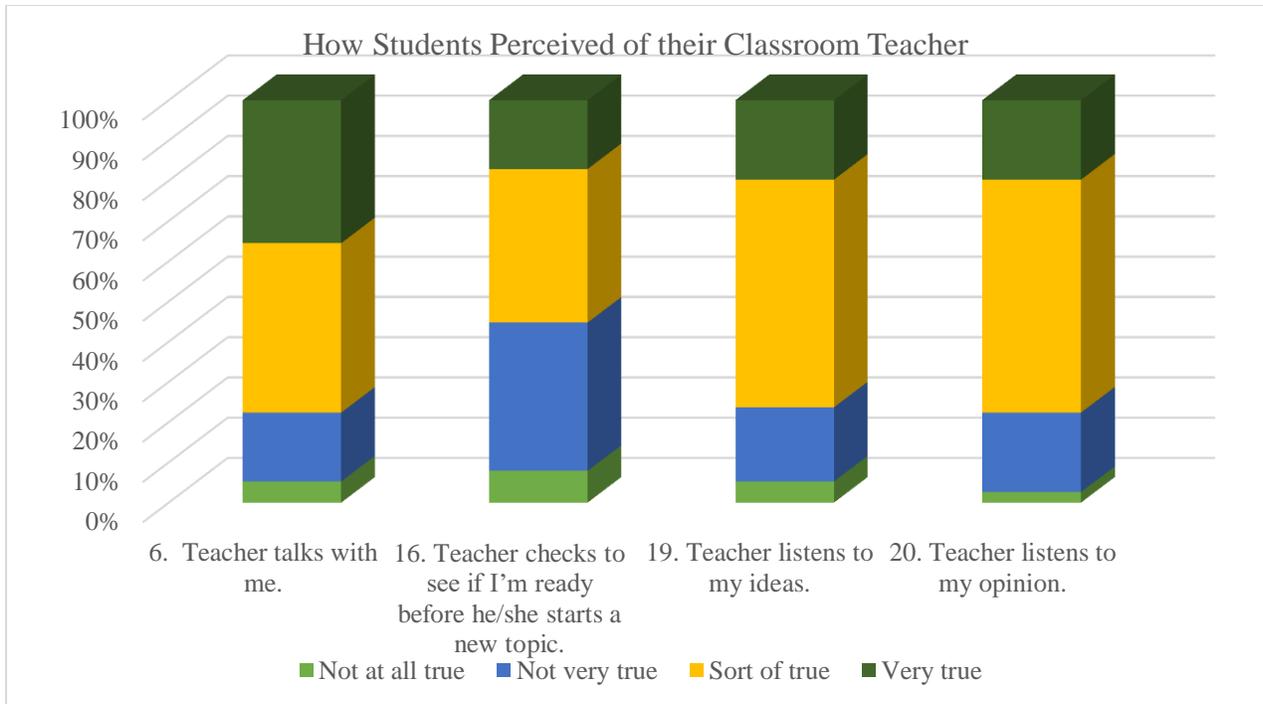


Figure 3: Student perceptions of their EFL teacher

The results also indicated that for the EFL learners, the teacher did not change her reaction much when they made mistakes and always made the focus of her expectations clear for the students in a positive manner. However, as in William (2009), 50% of the students felt that the teacher was responsible for their anxiety. The fear of negative evaluation in the eyes of the teacher may be the main cause of student anxiety, and fears about communication and social evaluation are likely based on a student's relationship with their teachers and peers. Teachers seldom accept the fact that they sometimes affect their students' behavior. Some students look upon the classroom as a place where teachers have to implement the rules of learning for the students to follow. Most of the time we focus on our characteristics as a teacher in a classroom, neglecting the role we play in creating a limited interpersonal relationship with our students. Thus the researcher encouraged teachers to start changing their mindset too, to play different roles in a classroom: as catalyst, consultant, guide, counselor, and a model for learning. All of these are parental roles, requiring one to respond calmly and non-judgmentally, and let the students understand their own problems. The researcher herself played such a role, with the result that seventy five (75%) of the students preferred FEMA because of the following reasons: they felt everybody was friendly, they could talk freely if they changed their mindset, they could share ideas with members of the family, and feel safe and relaxed. By contrast, 25% of them said they preferred a traditional classroom because they just wanted to be listeners, and talking with group members was stressful, a strict teacher was better, and they could concentrate more when studying alone.

The majority of students agreed that changing mindsets with FEMA could help ease their stress and anxieties. However, when asked if they wanted the FEMA approach to be used by other teachers in different subjects, their opinions were almost equally divided. Why students did not support other subject teachers using FEMA demands further investigation. When asked to comment freely, students said they felt the class was relaxing, comfortable, enjoyable, fun, and

they could speak English freely in the classroom. The teacher and classmates were friendly, and they wanted to continue using FEMA. However, some said FEMA learning was difficult, good only for those who wanted to improve their communication skills, and that they did not like group work.

FEMA and Brainwaves of Emotions

To prove that FEMA is an effective approach, the researcher checked the brainwaves of emotions of the students who volunteered to be a part of this fun experiment. The researcher asked the students to prepare questions for their classmates, from simple questions using ‘what,’ to difficult questions using ‘why.’ With this technique, students’ emotions would be determined either in a relaxed state (machine’s ears drooped down), focused and relaxed (machine’s ears stood firmly and wiggle), or relaxed and highly focused (machine’s ears stood firmly.) Students enjoyed the question and answer portion using this machine. Brainwaves of emotions are located in the frontal lobe, which is the most recently-evolved part of the brain, managing emotional impulses in socially appropriate ways for productive behaviors including empathy, altruism, and interpretation of facial expressions. Their emotions were visible to everyone and it encouraged them to be asked questions by their classmates.

Conclusion

Though FEMA is in its infancy, this initial exploratory study has already proven that it can be used effectively to enhance the mind-set of EFL learners to embrace the challenge of growth. This was found to present itself in many ways, including being anxiety and stress-free when facing the challenges of the very difficult journey of learning a foreign language, not being scared of what other people might say about them when they made mistakes, and understanding the importance of a fun and stress-free learning experience. The study showed that students gained considerable confidence to speak in spite of many mistakes they inevitably made. These students accepted the fact that with a growth mindset, approaching failure as a challenge could lead them to prosper. Like Community Language Learning (CLL), FEMA is an approach to foster cooperation rather than competition, to develop critical thinking skills and develop communicative competence through socially structured interaction activities. Various techniques and approaches are of no use if educators do not revolutionize students’ mind. Clearly, in order to reduce learners’ anxiety and increase their learning motivation, instructors must deeply consider the influence that the classroom experience will have on their students (Brown, Robson and Rosenjar, 2001).

Future Research Recommendation

1. In order to gain a better understanding of the way students relate to the use of FEMA a more elaborate research design would be very helpful in future studies.
2. Allowing students to be questioned by students, teachers and other people who do not belong to the class would provide a valuable contrast to the current paper, in which only familiar participants acted as questioners.
3. Pre and post studies examining participants’ brainwaves of emotion prior to, and post, working with FEMA would be an important part of further studies into FEMA.
4. Above all, the researcher highly recommends that ELF teachers fully understand FEMA’s significance, in order to support its effective implementation. In this regard, stress coping strategies can help to ease students’ anxiety when learning a foreign language (Ocampo and Rockell, 2014).

5. To promote this research in the educational community, it would be most beneficial if special seminars for teachers on the importance of Emotional Intelligence and Community Language Learning could be organized. Disseminating knowledge of FEMA in this way would be a positive step forwards in helping educators to alter the mindset of students and encourage them to embrace failure as a challenge to succeed on the journey of learning a foreign language.

References

- Asher, J. J. (1972). Children's first language as a model of second language learning. *Modern Language Journal*, 56(3), 133-139.
- Brown, J., Robson, G., & Rosenkjar, P. R. (2001). Personality, motivation, anxiety, strategies, and language proficiency of Japanese students. In Z. Dornyei & Schmidt (Eds.) *Motivation and second language acquisition* (pp. 361-398). Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.
- Curran, C.A. (1976). *Counseling-learning in second language*. Apple River, Ill.: Apple River Press.
- Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York: Random House.
- Einstein, A. (2015). Brainy Quotes. Motivation. Retrieved from <http://www.brainquote.com/>.
- Hayes, C. W. (1979). Language contact in Japan. In W.F. Mackey & J. Ornstein (Eds) *Sociolinguistic studies in language contact: Methods and cases* (pp. 363-375). The Hague: Mouton Publishers.
- Horwitz, E.K., Horwitz, M.B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, Volume 70(2), 125-132.
- Horwitz, E. K. (1986). Preliminary evidence for the reliability and validity of a foreign language anxiety scale. *Tesol Quarterly*, Volume 20, Issue 3, pages 559-562, September 1986.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- La Forge, P. G. (1983). *Counseling and Culture in Second Language acquisition*, Oxford; New York: Pergamon, page 69, 1983.
- La Forde, P.G. (1971) Community Language Learning. A Pilot study. *Language Learning* 21, Vol.21, Issue 1, pages 45-61, June 1971.
- Llopis G. (2012). Five Ways Leaders Must Build a Family Environment to Achieve Excellence. *Forbes/Leadership*: 1-2. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/>.
- McBride O. (2013) Oil and water do not mix! Retrieved from <http://askoscarmcbride.blogspot.jp/2013/01/oil-water-professional-athletics-vs.html>.
- McBride, O. (2013). Oil & water: Professional athletics vs. finances. Retrieved from <http://askoscarmcbride.blogspot.jp/2013/01/oil-water-professional-athletics-vs.html>.
- Moskowitz, G. (1978). *Caring and Sharing in the Foreign Language Class*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.
- Myers A.G. (2012). Emotions and language learning: Encouragement, knowledge, *The everyday language learner*. October 31, 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.everydaylanguagelearner.com/>.
- Nakata, Y. (1995b). New attitudes among Japanese learners of English. In K. Kitao, S. K. Kitao, J. H. Miller, J. W. Carpenter & C. Rinnert, C. (eds.), *Culture and communication*, 173-184.
- Necomimi Cat Ears (n.d.). Retrieved from www.Necomimi.com. <http://issuu.com/endeavour/>
- Ocampo, M., & Rockell, K. (2014). Perceived stress, burnout and coping strategies of native and non-native English speaking teachers in Japan. *The Asian EFL Journal*, Vol.78- August 2014, 15-26. Asian EFL Journal Press.
- Richards J. C., & Rodgers, T.S. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*, (Second Edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sparks S. D. (2013). "Growth mindset" gaining traction as school improvement strategy. *Education Week*, 33(3), 1-21.
- William K., & Andrade, M.R. (2009). Foreign language learning anxiety in Japanese EFL University classes: Causes, coping, and locus of control. *Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 5(2), 181-191.
- Wolfe P. (2001). Brain Matters, Translating Research into Classroom Practice. *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development*. 1703 North Beauregard St. Alexandria, Virginia USA. p. 9

Appendix

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale

	1.	2	3.	4.	5.	
1. Strongly Disagree 強く同意できない						
2. Disagree 同意できない						
3. Neither Agree or Disagree どちらとも言えない						
4. Agree 同意できる						
5. Strongly Agree 同意できる						
1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class. 外国語の授業で話しているとき私は絶対に確かだという気持ちになれない						
2. I don't worry about making mistakes in language class. 外国語の授業で間違いをすることを私は心配していない						
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class. 外国語の授業で当てられることがわかっているとき私は震えてしまう						
4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language. 外国語の授業で先生が言っていることが理解できないとき私は怖い						
5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes. 外国語の授業をもっとたくさん受けても私は全然平気である						
6. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course. 外国語の授業で私はその内容と全く関係のないことを考えている自分に気づくことがある						
7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at language than I am. 私は他の生徒たちがみんな私よりも外国語が上手であると考えるばかりいる						
8. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class. 外国語の授業のテストのとき私はいつも落ち着いている						
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class. 外国語の授業で準備なしで話さなくてはならないとき私はパニックにかられる						
10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class. 外国語の授業で結局は合格できないかもしれないと私は心配である						
11. I don't understand why some people gets so upset over foreign language classes. 外国語の授業についてある人たちが何故それほど動揺してしまうのか私は理解できない						

Family Environment Mode Approach (FEMA)

12. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know. 外国語の授業で私は緊張して知っていることも忘れてしまう					
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class. 外国語の授業で自ら進んで答えるのが私は恥ずかしい					
14. I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers. ネイティブの人たちと外国語で話しても私は緊張しないだろう					
15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting. 先生が訂正していることが理解できないとき私は動揺する					
16. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it. 外国語の授業で十分に予習をしてきたときでさえ私は不安を感じる					
17. I often feel like not going to my language class. 私はよく外国語の授業に出たくないと感じる					
18. I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class. 外国語の授業で話しているとき私は自信があると感じる					
18. I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class. 外国語の授業で間違いをするたびに先生がそれを直してしまうことを私は恐れている					
19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make. 外国語の授業で間違いをするたびに先生がそれを直してしまうことを私は恐れている					
20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class. 外国語の授業で当てられそうなとき私は心臓がドキドキするのを感じることができる					
21. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get. 外国語のテスト勉強をすればするほど私はわからなくなる					
22. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class. 外国語の授業のために十分予習をしておくことに私はプレッシャーを感じない					
23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do. 私は他の生徒たちがみんな私よりも外国語が上手であるといつも感じている					
24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students. 私は他の生徒たちの前で外国語を話すことについてとても自意識過剰になるのを感じる					
25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind. 外国語の授業は進むのが速いので私は自分が後に残されてしまうのが心配である					

26. I feel tenser and nervous in my language class than in my other classes. 私は他の授業よりも外国語の授業の方がより緊張して神経質になるのを感じる						
27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class. 外国語の授業で話しているとき私は緊張して混乱してしまう						
28. When I am on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed. 外国語の授業が始まるまで私はとても自信がありリラックスしているのを感じる						
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says. 外国語の先生が話している全ての単語がわからないと私は不安になる						
30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language. 外国語を話すために学習しなくてはならないたくさんの文法語法に私は圧倒されるのを感じる						
31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language. 外国語を話すときに他の生徒たちみんなが私を笑うことを私は心配している						
32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language. 私は恐らくネイティブの人たちと一緒にいても快適だと感じるだろう						
33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance. 外国語の先生が私が前もって準備していなかった質問をするとき私は緊張する						

Horwitz, E.K., Horwitz, M.B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, Volume 70 (2), 125-132.