The Good Learner and The Poor One

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the differential success of second language learners, in the author's university level courses, suggests a need to examine in detail what learning strategies successful language learners employ. For this purpose I have observed good learners or successful learners and the learning strategies that are employed in my university level classes. Through this study I intend to make sure of a list of good learner strategies and also suggest how teachers can help less successful students to improve their performance. I will also examine affective learner traits as well as teacher performance to show that what defines a good learner is both a product of teacher craftwork as well as individual learning differences in second language learning. This research paper's main focus will examine foreign language aptitude, learning styles, learner strategies and motivation. Research, theory and this author's classroom research support the hypothesis that there are good learners and students of varied aptitude and motivational levels can make progress in SLA. The concluding section will make generalizations on research and theory in relation to the author's own EFL courses and steps necessary to improve the level of communicative skills of students enrolled in those courses.

1. Literature Review

The following section will look at the current state of research between the correlation of personality and communicative competence. Furthermore, a more detailed review will look specifically at learner strategies; definition of the good learner and the good learner according to this researcher's teaching context.

The 'Good Language Leaner' Research

Most research into the good language learner seems to have begun with Rubin in 1975 and together with more resent ones, have proved a useful way of investigating how strategies affect language learning. There seem to be five aspects of successful

language learners that are evident in most studies. Ellis (1994) summarizes the five aspects of the successful language learning evidenced in most research as:

> (1) a concern for language form, (2) a concern form communication (functional practice), (3) an active task approach, (4) an awareness of the learning process, and (5) a capacity to use strategies flexibly in accordance with task requirements (Ellis, 1994 p. 546).

Rubin (1975) and Naiman et al. (1978) cited in Ellis (1994) found that good learners treat language as a system by making cross cultural comparisons, analyzing target language and using reference books. Furthermore, in both studies good language learners also monitor L2 performance and try to learn from errors and ask for clarification of meaning and correction if needed. Gillette's (1987) study also reported that successful learners used their errors as tools for learning. Most research in this field suggests that good language learners search for meaning in the L2 that they are exposed to and try to engage in real communication by seeking out opportunities for natural language use. Naiman et al (1979) in Ellis (1994) reported that learners emphasized fluency in the early stages of SLA; more attention to meaning than form as accuracy tends to hinder fluency. In another study, cited in Ellis (1994) by Picket (1978) stated that good learners take charge of their learning with specific goals and by trying to introduce new topics into the conversation. Furthermore, in what O'Malley and Chamot have called 'metalingual strategies' good learners are aware of the learning process. Good learners make a conscious effort to follow their own learning styles and preferences which is supportive of Rubin and Thompson's (1982) study in which they also suggest that 'good learners find their own way' (Nunan, 1989 p. 47). Last, in one of the most comprehensive studies of leaner strategies, Chamot et al (1988) provide evidence that successful learners are flexible and use strategies that are appropriate for particular tasks (Ellis, 1994).

2. Definitions of Good Learners

Defining the good learner as measured by empirical research results can be elusive although attempts have been made. For example, it is obvious to an experienced teacher that motivation is an important facet to the good learner and its importance can not be denied, however, it may not in fact lead to improved communication skills. For example, all students in a class may be motivated to learn, however, there will be very different end results in terms of the communicative competency levels that they attain.

Rubin and Thompson (1982) cited in Nunan (1989) give a list of strategies that

characterize the good English learner, that is, the characteristics that make some learners more successful than others (Dornyei and Skehan, 2003). Some of those same strategies listed in Nunan (1989) have been observed in students for this research paper, they include the following:

1. Good learners find their own way.
2. Good learners organize information about language.
3. Good learners are creative and experiment with language.
4. Good learners make their own opportunities and strategies for getting practice for using language inside and outside the classroom.
5. Good learners learn to live with uncertainty and make sense of the target language without wanting to understand every word.
6. Good learners use mnemonics. (rhymes, word associations, etc. to recall what has been learned).
7. Good learners make errors work.
8. Good learners use linguistic knowledge. Including knowledge of L1.
9. Good learners let the context help them in comprehension.
10. Good learners learn to make intelligent guesses.
11. Good learners learn chunks of language as wholes to help them perform beyond their competence.
12. Good learners learn production techniques.
13. Good learners learn different styles of speech and writing to vary their language according to the formality of the situation.

2.1. Gunning's List: The Good Japanese University EFL Learner

Through classroom ethnography, I have observed good learners in my university English classes as defined by Rubin and Thompson. In this researcher's teaching context good learner traits not defined by Rubin and Thompson that have been observed include:

1. Good learners are aware that L1 transfer does not help communicative competence, as L1 use with a native speaker might not lead comprehensible understanding.
2. Good learners have the ability to complete tasks using English within time frames set by the teacher (Skehan, 1994).
3. Good learners use L2 for all utterances, including those that are not part of the target language or chunks of language that are being taught for that lesson.
4. Good learners in Japanese universities are able to interact in a variety of

communicative situations with low feelings of anxiety; male-female, unfamiliar partners- familiar partners and the ability to communicate with students from different 'clicks' or groups.

5. Good learners use dictionaries noting new lexical items and collocations.

6. Good learners take risks during group work and whole class activities by volunteering responses and sharing information without teacher fronted elicitation techniques such as nomination.

(Note: For future reference this list will be referred to as Good Japanese Learner list)

It has been noted that in semi-structured interviews that students prefer working with their friends or 'click' and on more than one occasion students have expressed feeling of situational anxiety. It is defined in Ellis (1994) as the correlation between anxiety in classroom settings and learning as opposed to trait anxiety which is best viewed as an aspect of personality.

In support of the good Japanese learner item 4, one of my students, Mika, commented, 'I don't like when only other student for pair is a man student...you say male? I don't feel comfortable. I feel nervous. I am shy girl.' After a communicative activity paired with a female and close friend, Mika, commented in an after class free recall that 'I had good lesson. I felt that I was really talking and it was fun.' I agree with the conclusion put forth by Mitchell and Myles (2001) that anxious students are less willing to speak in class, which can have a negative effect on improving the communicative competence of this author's university students.

3. Research Aims and Teaching Context

The following section will discuss research aims and teaching context, including research design; the questionnaires and interviews and subsequent results. Furthermore, a description of the participants and the course will be presented.

3.1 Research Aims

The purpose of this research is to collect data on individual learning preferences of my university students and to discover the learning habits and traits of successful learners who have attainted some proficiency and communicative competence in their use of English. The areas of interest include out of class study, which tends to reflect motivation, and in class student-student interaction which may indicate students' abilities to work in pairs and groups, which is, in my opinion, an important factor in the characteristic of the good learner.

3.1.1. Teaching Context and Subjects

The subjects who participated in this research are 29 EFL students (15 female; 14 male) who are currently third year English Majors at Nagoya Gakuin University located in central Japan. The students ranged between 20-23 years of age. The class level ranges between low intermediate to lower level advanced. Student levels are based on this researcher's opinion and was not empirically tested nor validated. However, the TOEIC (standardized test frequently taken by Japanese university students) score of students was taken into consideration concerning student levels as it was the only test that all students had taken and the results were readily available. The course is a communicative English class using task-based and data driven learning approaches, procedures, activities and syllabus.

3.2. Questionnaires, Interviews and Field Notes

The data for this study were collected through two questionnaires; a 30-item questionnaire adapted from Nunan (1989) to explore students' general individual learning preferences and characteristics in order to gain some insight into factors that make a good learner. A second 6-item questionnaire was given to students in order to get a better understanding of their beliefs on good learning and to match those beliefs to my the definitions listed in section 2.1; the Good Japanese Learner. Semi-structured interviews and unstructured interview procedures on two students at the opposite ends of the cline were used during the course of this research which lasted for 2 months during the university's fall semester from October to November in order to get a better understanding of the good learner and how teaching procedures may affect learner's attitudes and develop learning skills in order to produce more effective communicators. Furthermore, in order to get a better understanding of the class as a whole, field notes were taken regularly throughout the eight week period of data collection.

4. Data Analysis

That data collected were analyzed using Microsoft Word Excel statistical package. Results concerning items in the questionnaire will be presented in graph form and tables followed by a critical analysis of the data that relates to and supports the hypothesis that individual learning styles make for the good learner in my university courses. However, empirical evidence in this study is not strongly supportive of the hypothesis that aptitude and motivation affect communicative competence in a positive way; general inferences are suggested.

4.1. Critical Analysis of Data

Presented here are the results of questionnaire 1 on learner preferences adopted from Nunan (1989) (see appendix 1). Here I am highlighting on those questions that revealed particularly significant learner traits for this study that support Rubin and Thompson's and Gunning's lists of good learner traits. I selected five good learners and five poor learners based on Rubin and Thompson's list, Gunning's list, TOEIC scores and classroom field notes. The rest of the answers will be reported in appendix 2.

Items 1-5 are reported below. They are questions regarding general learner preferences. They indicated students prefer a variety of learning styles; (1) reading, (2) listening, (3) games, (4) conversations and (5) visually-pictures, film and video.

Questionnaire 1: Results of All Students Items 1-5

Results of Questions 1-5 Learner Preferences
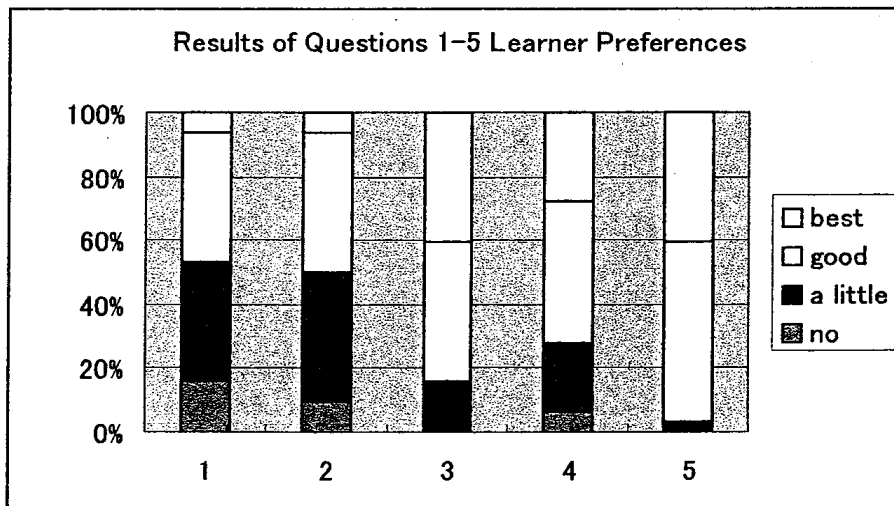
Table 1: Results of 5 Good Learners and 5 Poor Learners
Correlated to Questionnaire 1 Items 1-5
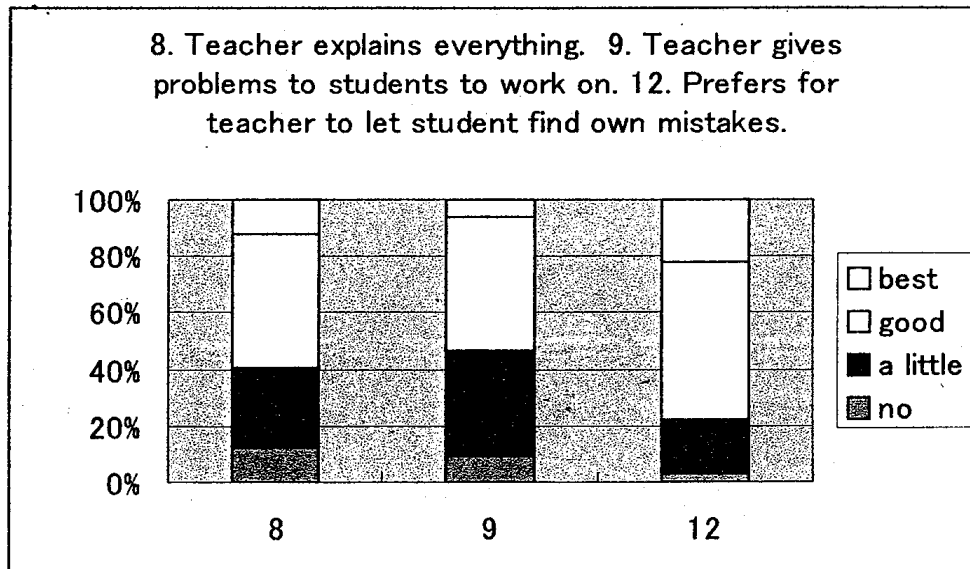
Question	1. Prefers reading in class.	2. Prefers listening in class.	3. Prefers games in class.	4. Prefers conversations in class.	5. Prefers films, pictures and videos in class.
How the question correlates to Rubin and Thompson's list.	Item: 6-recall what has been learned through summarizing reading	Items: 5-students are not able to understand authentic listening	Items: 3-creative with language 6- word association games	Items: 4. find strategies for practicing in class. 12-Production techniques	Items: 5-students are not able to understand all authentic

	passages	texts so have to develop strategies to understand.	9- games that stress world knowledge		listening in video so have to make sense of target language
Good Learner	5 Good	3 Best 2 Good	5 Best	5 Best	4 Best 1 Good
Poor Learners	5 No	3 No 2A little	5 A little	2 No 3 A little	5 A little

As shown, good learners as defined by Rubin and Thompson answered Best or Good for all questions concerning general in class learner preferences in when correlated to Rubin and Thompson's definitions. Furthermore, most of the poor students tend not to exhibit good learner traits regarding Rubin and Thompson's list.

Items 8, 9, and 12 focused on the teacher with results that support Rubin and Thompson's definition that good learners find their own way.
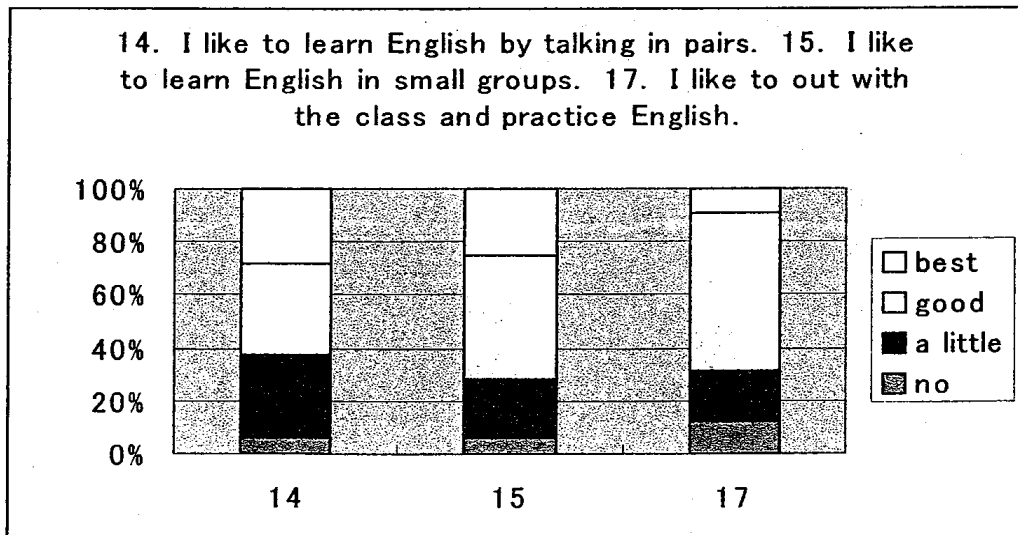
Questionnaire 1: Results of All Students Items 8,9 and 12

8. Teacher explains everything. 9. Teacher gives problems to students to work on. 12. Prefers for teacher to let student find own mistakes.

Table 2: Results of 5 Good Learners and 5 Poor Learners
Correlated to Questionnaire 1 Items 8-9 and 12

Question	8. I like the teacher to explain everything to us.	9. I like the teacher to give us problems to work on.	12. I like the teacher to let me find my mistakes.
How the question correlates to Rubin and Thompson's list.	Goes against Item 1- finding your own way and	Goes against Items 1 and 4- finding your own way and making own opportunities for using English.	Items 1 and 7 (to some degree)-finding your own way and making errors work.
Good Learner	4 No 1 A little	3 No 2 A little	5 Best
Poor Learners	4 Best 1 Good	2 Best 3 Good	5 No

In item 8, good learners did not favor the teacher explaining everything. In item 9, good learners felt unfavorable toward the idea of the teacher giving them problems to work on. Of most significance to Rubin and Thompson's list is item 12 which asked students if they prefer the teacher to let them find their own mistakes. Here all good learners like to find their own mistakes which support the idea that good learners like to make intelligent guesses to find answers without teacher interference.

## Questionnaire 1: Results of All Students Items 14,15 and 17

14. I like to learn English by talking in pairs. 15. I like to learn English in small groups. 17. I like to out with the class and practice English.

Table 3: Results of 5 Good Learners and 5 Poor Learners
Correlated to Questionnaire 1 Items 14-15 and 17

Question	14. I like to learn by talking in pairs.	15. I like to learn English in small groups	17. I like to go out with the class and practice English.
How the question correlates to Rubin and Thompson's list.	Item:12-Productions techniques: keeping the conversation going.	Item:12-production techniques.	Items: 1, 4 and 12. Students find their own way to learn without teacher present. Students make own outside of class opportunities. Production techniques used to keep outside of class conversations going.
Good Learners	2 Best 3 Good	5 Best	3 Best 2 Good
Poor Learners	2 No 3 A little	2 No 3 A little	4 No 1 a little

Furthermore, good learners preferred to work in pairs and groups as the results of questions 14 and 15 suggest that good learners are using production techniques.

For item 17, the results show that good learners like to go out and practice English; this validates Rubin and Thompson's item 4.

Students felt strongly (94%) in item 23 that learning vocabulary is best done through activities and word association which validates Rubin and Thompson's trait that good learners use mnemonics to recall vocabulary as lexical focused lessons use word association activities. All five good learners answered Best for preference to learn by word association activities and games. Going against item 6 of Rubin and Thompson's list, 2 poor learners choose No and A little regarding games and activities for learning words.

23. Learners preference for learning words through activities, games, word associations etc...

no
3%

a little
3%

best
44%
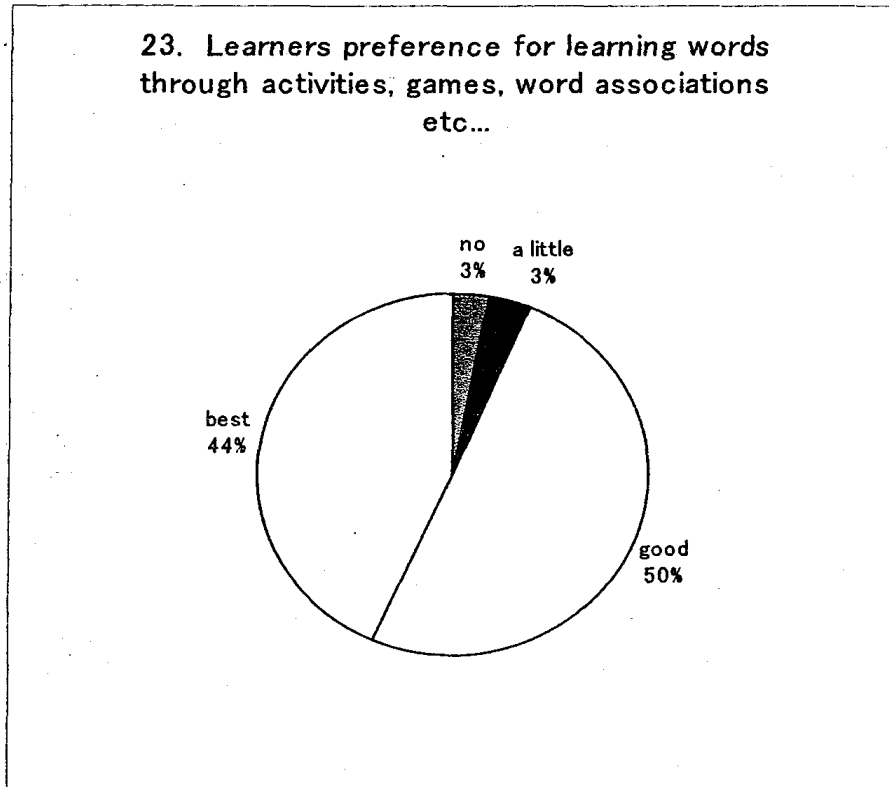
good
50%

Table 4: Results of 5 Good Learners and 5 Poor Learners
Correlated to Questionnaire 1 Item 23

Question	23. I like to learn words by doing something (activity, game etc...)
How the question correlates to Rubin and Thompson's list.	Item 6: (Note: 3 of the good learners enjoy hip hop and rap which predominately employs rhyming as basis of that genre).
Good Learners	5 Best
Poor Learners	1 No 1 A little 3 Good

Questionnaire 1: Results of All Students Items 24-27 and 29-30

At Home: 24. I like to learn by reading. 25. I like to learn through TV. 26. I like to listen to cassettes. 27. I learn by studying books. 29 I like to learn with native speakers. 30. I like to use English with native speakers outside the class.
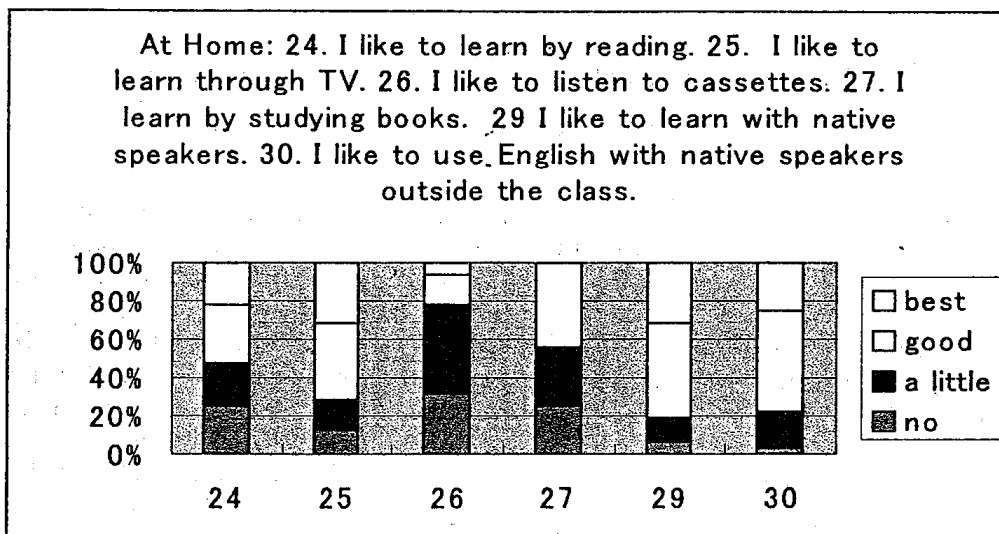

Table 5: Results of 5 Good Learners and 5 Poor Learners
Correlated to Questionnaire 1 Items 24-27

Question	24. At home, prefers reading newspapers etc...	25. At home, prefers watching TV in English.	26. At home, prefers listening to cassettes.	27. At home, prefers studying English books.
How the question relates to Rubin and Thompson's list	Items:1, 4, and 9. Reading news students may be using knowledge of the world to help with comprehension	Items: 1, 4, 5, and 10. Also, Item 13-TV programs employ story lines that utilize different styles of speech.	Items: 1 and 4.	1 and 4. Depending on reading items 5, 9 and 10 may apply.
Good Learners	5 Best	5 Best	2 Best 3 Good	5 Good
Poor Learners	5 No	4 No 1 A little	5 No	5 No

Learning outside the classroom is preferred by all good learners which validates Rubin and Thompson's items 1 and 4 concerning questions 24-27. Furthermore, I suggest that item 5 is validated because students have to live with the uncertainty of not being able to understand authentic texts which are true to questions 24 and 25. Item 13 is validated as students learn different kinds of speech according the type of programs watched, from more formal news programs and interviews to slang which is

predominately used in popular media culture.

Table 6: Results of 5 Good Learners and 5 Poor Learners

Correlated to Questionnaire 1

Question	29. Prefers to learn by watching/listening to foreign speakers.	30. Prefers to learn by using English with native speakers at parties, club activity etc...
How the question correlates to Rubin and Thompson's list.	Items: 5,10, and 13. Especially item 10-making intelligent guesses.	Items: 1, 4, 5, 7,10, 12 and 13. Item 7 seems to be important for learners who communicate with foreigners; making errors work.
Good Learner	5 Best	5 Best
Poor Learner	2 No 3 A little	1 No 4 A little

The above table shows that good learners prefer communication with native speakers which validates many items in Rubin and Thompson's list in that they have to make errors work, make intelligent guesses, learn production techniques and be creative with language. The 5 poor learners do not favor communicating with foreigners. It can be suggested that they are going against some of the good learner traits put forth by Rubin and Thompson. They may not be guessing, making errors work and not seeking out opportunities to use language outside the class, which is validated according to results of the last question.

4.2. Two Learners: The Successful and The Unsuccessful

I interviewed two of my students; one who I considered was a best learner and the other poorest one, four times during the course of 8 weeks beginning with the fall semester. The two students were interviewed once every two weeks during the eight week data collection period. The criteria based for the selection of successful and unsuccessful learner is based on last semester observations, this semester's course, level of overall communicative skills, the level of work done during in class communicative tasks and TOEIC score. The questions (see appendix 3) were asked with the intention of correlating (not empirically) Rubin and Thompson's list of the good learner as well as the list of good learner ideals proposed in section 2.1 (The Good Japanese Learner) with the two students' learner diversities. The names of the two students were changed to insure research confidentiality.

4.2.1. The Successful Learner: Takayuki

After the four interviews, Takayuki expressed many of the same traits that Rubin and Thompson list as good learners. Presented here are the results of the interviews with Takayuki correlated with definitions of the good learner listed by Rubin and Thompson.

Table 7: Rubin and Thompson's Good Learner Characteristics

Takayuki Interview Results

Rubin and Thompson's list of good language learner traits.	Takayuki's interview results.
1. Good learners find there way.	He stated that he doesn't always rely on the teacher and prefers to sometimes 'do it myself'.
2. Good learners organize information about language.	He takes notes and separated contextual information from grammatical points.
3. Good learners are creative and experiment with language.	He used gestures sometimes and mimes if he did not know the word, or if he thought the interlocutor did not know the word. He said that is 'fun'.
4. Good learners make there own opportunities, strategies for getting practice using the language inside and outside the classroom.	He is involved in the International Students Club and is a Japanese tutor for international students. He said it is actually a good time to practice English by 'explaining grammatical points'.
5. Good learners learn to live with uncertainty and develop strategies for making sense of the target language without wanting to understand every word.	He was observed telling other students 'let's not use dictionaries'. When asked about this, he replied that sometimes students do not always have a dictionary so it is best to 'get the meaning'.
6. Good learners use mnemonics (rhymes, word associations, etc. to recall what has been learned).	He enjoys 'rap music' which predominately uses rhymes in lyrics.
7. Good learners make errors work.	He used negotiating for meaning techniques which were very apparent during the interview sessions and observed during class time.
8. Good learners use linguistic knowledge, including knowledge of their first language in mastering a second language.	He is a Japanese tutor to international students; therefore, I suppose he uses meta-language and meta-linguistic knowledge during teaching activities.
9. Good learners let the context (extra-linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world) help them in comprehension.	He seems bright and quite knowledgeable about the world. He is ready to give opinions and thoughts on a wide range of topics discussed in class.
10. Good learners learn to make intelligent guesses.	He is often quoted as uttering 'what was that again' and 'how do you say that' during interview sessions.
11. Good learners learn chunks of	He has asked for clarification of complex

language as wholes and formalized routines to help them perform 'beyond their competence'.	sentence structures which suggest whole language learning.
12. Good learners learn production techniques (e.g. techniques for keeping conversation going).	Clearly observed in all interviews with Takayuki. He often initiated conversations and asked questions and responded to statements using back channel cues and auditory feedback.
13. Good learners learn different styles of speech and writing and learn to vary their language according to the formality of the situation.	He used less slang words in our more 'formal' interviews' but during class time he enjoyed using slang and other language more appropriate with friends.

Although aptitude and communicative competence is difficult to correlate empirically, Takayuki did have a higher TOEIC test score (605) than other students in the class and his communicative ability was more advanced than other students observed. The TOEIC is designed to measure listening comprehension and reading skills of individual students whose native language is not English (Gilfert, 1996). A TOEIC score of 600 is frequently considered the minimum acceptable for working overseas (Gilfert, 1996).

Takayuki expresses himself in such a way that he is easily understood by his teacher, a foreigner. Takayuki believed that speaking any Japanese during class time hindered his learning. He was observed using English without switching to Japanese throughout the 8 weeks. This validates my hypothesis 1 in Good Japanese Learner. He was observed finishing tasks and activities on time and usually of superior quality. This validates my hypothesis 2 in Good Japanese Learners. When asked about his use of English outside of tasks and other classroom oriented activities he said that he tries to 'speak to others in English, but nobody does it'. This validates my hypothesis 3 in Good Japanese Learner. He also stated that he is neither introverted or feels any kind of anxiety or stress when communicating with others in the class regardless of group, click, male or female. This validates my hypothesis 4 in Good Japanese Learner. One interesting point is that when asked about dictionary use, he replied that he does not like using them at all. 'They stop my flow of speaking. And I don't like to speak to partners who are always stopping to find words'. But, he commented that when he uses a dictionary during reading tasks he writes down the word meaning, use and form regarding collocations. This validates my hypothesis 5 in Good Japanese Learner. Last, he felt 'ok about telling everyone answers in front of the class'. This validates my hypothesis 6 in Good Japanese learner.

Table 8: Gunning's Hypothesis on Good Language Learners

Takayuki's Interview Results

Gunning's Hypothesis on good language learners.	Takayuki's interview results.
1. Good learners don't switch to L1.	He was observed using English without switching to Japanese throughout the 8 weeks.
2. Good learners complete tasks within allotted time.	He predominately finished tasks on time and of superior quality
3. Good Learners use L2 for all occasions.	He tries to speak to others in English.
4. Good learners are willing to interact.	He is neither introverted or feels any kind of anxiety or stress with communicating with others in the class regardless of group, click, male or female.
5. Good learners study words with context and collocation.	When he uses a dictionary during reading tasks he writes down the word meaning, use and form regarding collocations.
6. Good learners take risks.	He felt 'ok about telling everyone answers in front of the class'.

4.2.2. The Unsuccessful Learner: Shintaro

Unlike Takayuki, Shintaro did not express any of the good learner characteristics of Japanese students listed in section 2.1- Good Japanese Learner. Interview results can be observed below:

Table 9: Gunning's Hypothesis on Good Language Learner

Shintaro's Interview Results

Gunning's Hypothesis on good language learners.	Shintaro's interview results.
1. Good learners don't switch to L1.	He often used Japanese during the interviews and in class.
2. Good learners complete tasks within allotted time.	Tasks were often incomplete and not finished within allotted time frames.
3. Good Learners use L2 for all occasions.	Not observed speaking to others in English.
4. Good learners are willing to interact.	Only interacted with close circle of friends.
5. Good learners study words with context and collocation.	Often does not bring dictionary to class. He said writing down word meaning, use and form regarding collocations was 'めんどくさい' (a hassle).
6. Good learners take risks.	During the 8 week period he was not observed volunteering answers.

Furthermore, during the course of this semester and last semester he was not

observed exhibiting the characteristics of 13 good learner traits described by Rubin and Thompson. Presented here are the results concerning Shintaro's very low correlation to Rubin and Thompson's definitions of good learners.

Table 10: Rubin and Thompson's Good Learner Characteristics

Shintaro's Interview Results

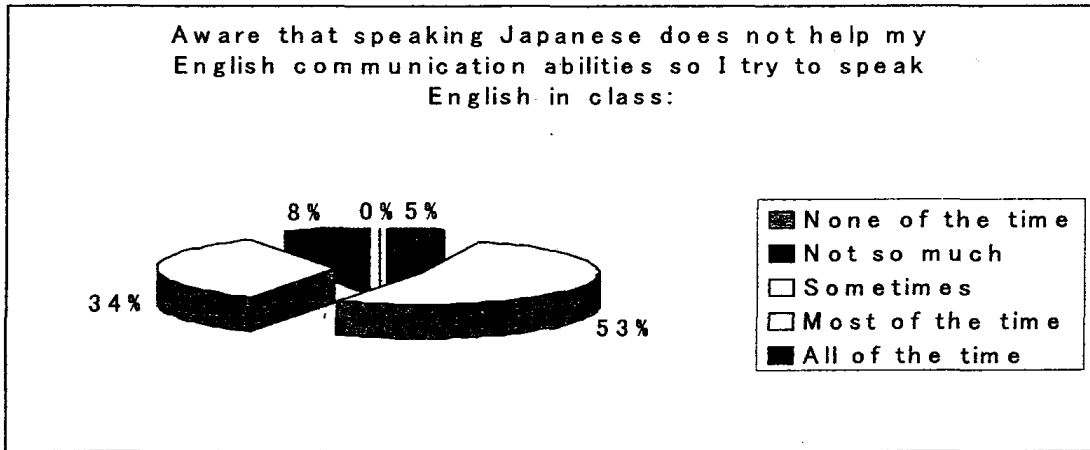| Rubin and Thompson's list of good language learner traits	Shintaro's interview results
1. Good learners find there way.	Relied on teacher fronted activities to promote language.
2. Good learners organize information about language.	Not observed.
3. Good learners are creative and experiment with language.	Stated that he felt frustrated when not using pre-taught forms.
4. Good learners make there own opportunities, strategies for getting practice using the language inside and outside the classroom.	Never practiced outside of class.
5. Good learners learn to live with uncertainty and develop strategies for making sense of the target language without wanting to understand every word.	Used strategies to understand interlocutor because he did not bring dictionary to class and relied on other strategies to understand. Should be noted: usually unsuccessfully.
6. Good learners use mnemonics (rhymes, word associations, etc. to recall what has been learned)	Very rarely completed word association tasks or activities.
7. Good learners make errors work.	Even with errors in communication, he made no attempts to find ways to negotiate meaning with interlocutor.
8. Good learners use linguistic knowledge, including knowledge of their first language in mastering a second language.	When discussing meta-language terminology, he had very little linguistic knowledge of English.
9. Good learners let the context (extra-linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world) help them in comprehension.	He preferred to talk about things that only interested him. Unwilling to discuss topics in any kind of depth. Short, trite answers to discussion questions.
10. Good learners learn to make intelligent guesses.	When he did have his dictionary, he often over relied on it which actually hindered his ability to communicate.
11. Good learners learn chunks of language as wholes and formalized routines to help them perform 'beyond their competence'.	He spoke in limited short sentences consisting mostly of single word answers during interviews.
12. Good learners learn production techniques (e.g. techniques for keeping conversation going).	Never exhibited back channel cues or auditory feedback. Very rarely asked questions during interviews.

1 3. Good learners learn different styles of speech and writing and learn to vary their language according to the formality of the situation.	Different levels of politeness and use of slang not observed during interviews or during class time.

Shintaro's TOEIC score is low for a third year English Major at 350. Although not a complete measure of language aptitude, it can be suggested for this study that there is a correlation between aptitude as exhibited in TOEIC. scores and communicative ability as observed in the two students. Takayuki, with a much higher score has far more advanced skills. Shintaro was selected for this study primarily because of his seemingly low motivational level. His answers to the questionnaire concerning out of class activities showed a very low interest which may reflect on his ability, which is also very low. His answers to question 24-30 were all no. In other words, Shintaro goes against item 4 of Robin and Thompson's good learner traits. Items 24-27 which referred specifically to use of English at home, his answers were all no. Furthermore he answered no, to the last item on whether he liked to use English in a natural setting with native speakers. When questioned about his out of class activity, he stated that he simply 'was not interested in using English'. During class he was observed rarely completing tasks, predominately speaking Japanese, and never pairing with other students on his own accord. This goes against items 1,2,3 and 4 of the Good Japanese Learner. Therefore, it can be stated that Shintaro is not a good learner, does not exhibit any qualities, traits or characteristics that define a good learner strategies according to the Good Japanese Learner list and by the definitions put forth by Rubin and Thompson cited in Nunan (1989).
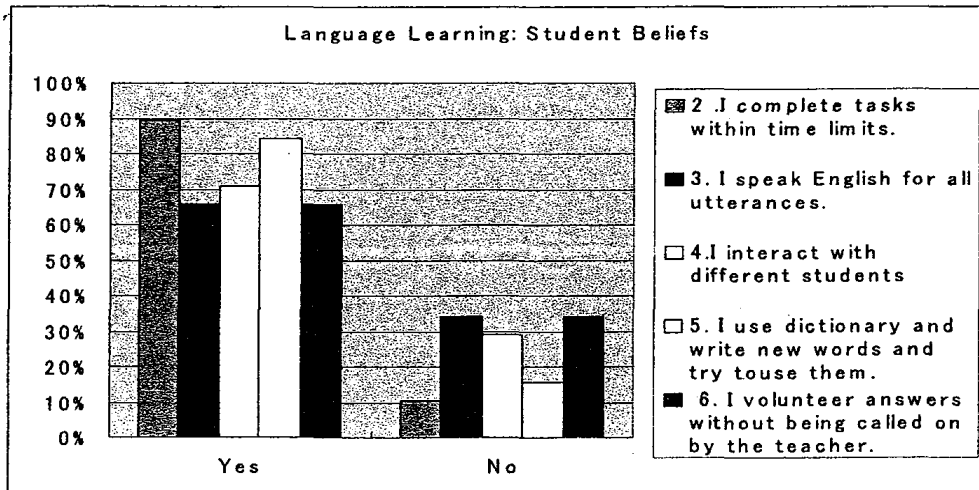
5. Better Learners- Awareness of the Learning Process

I gave questionnaire 2 (see appendix 4) with the intention of correlating students' learner beliefs with the good learner characteristics listed in section 2.1. I feel that students who are aware of good learner traits become more effective learners themselves. The students surveyed generally have strong beliefs concerning their own ideas about the characteristics of good learners. Item 1 asked students about L1 use in classroom and most (87%) felt that it hindered learning. This correlates with item 1 of the good Japanese learner.

Results of Item 1: L1 use in the classroom.

Aware that speaking Japanese does not help my
English communication abilities so I try to speak
English in class:

8%   0% 5%

34%

53%

- ▨ None of the time
- ■ Not so much
- □ Sometimes
- □ Most of the time
- ■ All of the time

Results of Items 2-6

Language Learning: Student Beliefs

100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%

Yes   No

- ▨ 2 .I complete tasks within time limits.
- ■ 3. I speak English for all utterances.
- □ 4.I interact with different students
- □ 5. I use dictionary and write new words and try touse them.
- ■ 6. I volunteer answers without being called on by the teacher.

Table 11: Gunning's Hypothesis Compared to Student Beliefs on Language Learning based on results of items 2-6 listed above

Gunning's Hypothesis on good language learners.	Students Beliefs about Good Learners.
1. Good learners don't switch to L1.	87% felt that L1 switch hindered learning
2. Good learners complete tasks within allotted time.	89% felt that they completed tasks within the time allocated by the teacher.
3. Good Learners use L2 for all occasions.	66% felt they used L2 for all utterances.
4. Good learners are willing to interact.	71% of students are willing to interact without stress or anxiety.
5. Good learners study words with context and collocation.	84% of students felt they used a dictionary and listed new words and tried to use them.
6. Good learners take risks.	66% of students felt that they volunteer answers without teacher elicitation.

The table shows that students have a favorable opinion of their own good learner traits. Effective language learning can only be achieved when students are aware of their own good learner qualities, which have been validated by the results of the second questionnaire.

5.1. Discussion- Learning to Learn a Language

Learning a language is a complex process and various skills and strategies must be taught for students and developed to be successful. One area of importance is the need for the teacher to help the students become aware of the leaning process as it related to language acquisition. My students need to understand the difference between learning about a language and learning to use it for verbal communication. Most successful learners tend to be the latter and focus on communicative speaking practice. This may be difficult for all students as the learning preference are varied as well as how much time they spend on out of class speaking practice. Most of my students seem to want to practice outside the class, as indicated in the questionnaire, but just how much they are actually communicating in English can not be determined. Furthermore, students need to use real world contacts which are more stimulating and interesting then student world exposure, which can be edited and controlled (Offner, 1997). The extent to which my students are seeking that real world exposure seems to be minimal. Through unstructured student interviews, I feel that a fraction of my students actually seek out quality speaking practice with native speakers or other students.

The more students are exposed to English language the faster and easier it will be to assimilate the language. I can not measure the extent to which students study and review on a daily basis. Students who have improved from last year to this year have

indicated to me that they study and practice English at home on a daily basis rather than cramming all at once.

How students better comprehend the learning process to become better learners is up to the creativity of the teacher, and the type of class that is being taught. In some cases it may be best for the teacher to review the learning process in the students' native language (Offner, 1997). In other cases, exercises, tasks and classroom activities that specifically focus on the learning to learn a language process may be best. The table below illustrates the procedures I use in class with aims and methodologies listed.

Table 12: Activities to Promote Awareness of the Learning Process

Type of Activity/Procedure	Aim of Activity/Procedure	Method of Activity/Procedure
Class Policy Handout.	Get students to think about the learning process from the first day of course.	Policy hand out lists Rubin and Thompson's Good Learner traits.
Blackboard Advice	To remind students on weekly basis and to introduce good learner tips and advice not listed in the Class Policy Handout.	In the corner of blackboard a tip/advice is written. Often the tip/advice is student generated.
Good Learner Statements	Students seem to be encouraged by other successful students.	Students are asked to write in a journal. Some statements regarding good learner traits are copied and distributed to students.
Good Learner Questionnaires.	Students can observe their own learning choices reflected in results of questionnaire.	Whole class discussion of good learner traits.

Once learner preferences are known to the teacher, specific methods, procedures and activities may be employed in instructed SLA to help students become better learners. For a complete list of activities see Doughty (2003) in Doughty and Long (2003).

6. Results of Validation

Based on the validation of research there are some commonalities between the two questionnaires given to the entire class and the interviews with the two students that support the list of good learners traits put forth by Rubin and Thompson and myself. The interviews with Takayuki and Shintaro, the questionnaires and classroom observations support Gunning's list of the Good Japanese Learner and aspects of Rubin and Thompson's list as well. I observed good Japanese university language learners as

students who:

- Do not switch to L1 during communicative tasks.
- Finish tasks during the allotted time frames.
- Use English for all utterances.
- Interact with students without feelings of anxiety or stress.
- Bring dictionary and write meaning, use and form of new lexical items.
- Take risks in class and are willing to 'speak out' without teacher fronted elicitation.

7. Conclusion

This research paper has attempted to support two hypothesis' on good language learning by making sure of the Rubin and Thompson list of good learning characteristics and my hypothesis of the Good Japanese Learner. The literature review established that prior research in the study of good learner traits has been continuing for many years although results have been varied and at times inconclusive. The questionnaires for this study, the first one on learner preferences and the second one correlating the entire class beliefs on good learner traits, showed in percentages how students feel about the learning process. More quantitative research methodology is needed to empirically validate learner attitudes on communicative competency. Although teachers need a repertoire of procedures and activities to stimulate interest, the extent to which students become better learners is partially their responsibility (Lightbrown and Spada, 1999). Future research should look more closely at the unsuccessful learner and learner disabilities in the classroom.

Appendix 1: Learner Preference Questionnaire 1

HOW DO YOU LIKE TO LEARN BEST

Name_____Major_____TOEIC SCORE_____

Circle· Male   Female

Complete the following survey. Write the answer that best corresponds to your feelings about studying English. Please write **NO, A LITTLE, GOOD** or **BEST**.

1. In English class, I like to learn by reading._____
2. In class, I like to listen to and use cassettes._____
3. In class, I like to learn by games._____
4. In class, I like to learn by conversations._____
5. In class, I like to learn by pictures, films and video._____
6. I want to write everything in my notebook._____
7. I like to have my own textbook._____
8. I like the teacher to explain everything to us._____
9. I like the teacher to give us problems to work on._____
10. I like the teacher to help me talk about by interests._____
11. I like the teacher to tell me all my mistakes._____
12. I like the teacher to let me find my mistakes._____
13. I like to study English by myself._____
14. I like to learn English by talking in pairs._____
15. I like to learn English in small groups._____
16. I like to learn English with the whole (all) the class._____
17. I like to go out with the class and practice English._____
18. I like to study grammar._____
19. I like to learn many new words._____
20. I like to practice sounds and pronunciation._____
21. I like to learn English words by seeing them._____
22. I like to learn English words by hearing them._____
23. I like to learn English words by doing something (activity, game etc...)_____
24. At home, I like to learn by reading newspapers or magazines etc..._____
25. At home I like to learn by watching TV in English._____
26. At home, I like to learn by using cassettes._____
27. At home, I like to learn by studying English books._____
28. I like to learn by talking to friends in English._____
29. I like to learn by watching/listening to native speakers_____

30. I like to learn by using English with native speakers at parties, club activity etc_____.

Note: *The questionnaire on learner preferences was adopted from Willing (1988) cited in Nunan (1989).*

Appendix 2: Results of Questionnaire Administered to 39 EFL Students.

Survey results
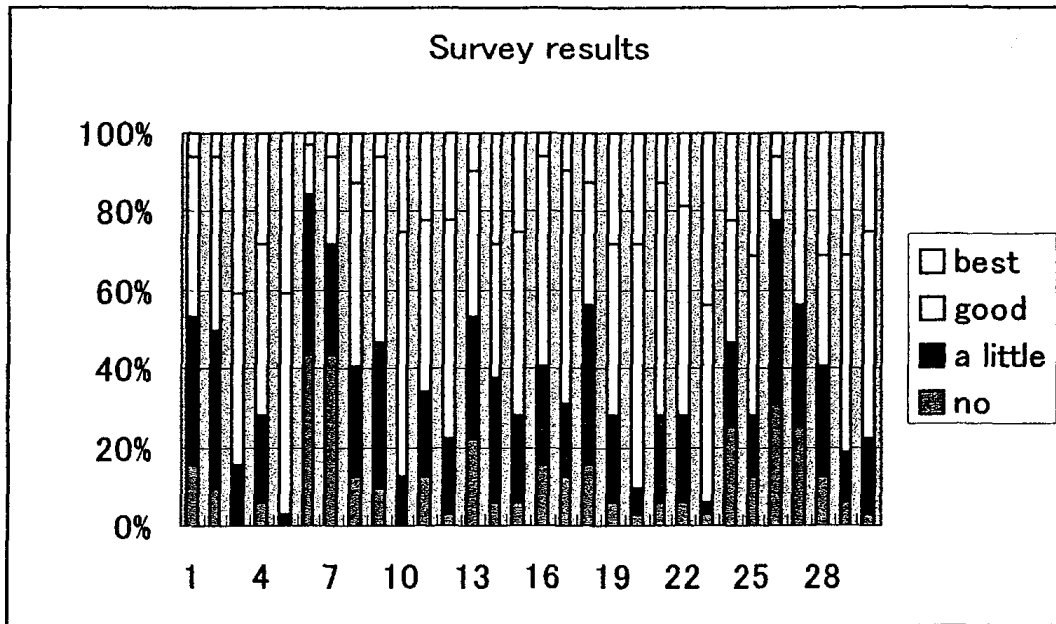
Results: Categories of Learner Preferences based on responses from questionnaire

Learner Type	Description of Procedures and Activities	Correlating Questions
Type 1: Concrete	Prefers games, pictures, films, video, using cassettes talking in pairs and other 'hands on' activities.	2,3,4,5,14,15,26, 27 and 30.
Type 2: Analytical	Prefer to study grammar, studying English books, reading newspapers, studying alone, finding their own mistakes and working on problems set by the teacher.	9,12,13,18 and 24.
Type 3: Communicative	Prefer to learn by watching, listening to native speakers, talking to friends in English, using English out of class, learning new words by hearing them, and learning by conversations.	17,25,28,29 and 30.
Type 4: Authority-Oriented	Prefer to learn by having teacher explain everything, they prefer textbooks, write in notebooks, study grammar, learn by seeing and reading new words.	1,6,7,8,18 and 21.

Appendix 3: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

The following questions were asked to get a deeper understanding of learner diversities between two students who the teacher regarded as successful and unsuccessful. The questions asked led to other questions and a freer talk about their attitudes toward language learning.

1. How often to you use Japanese in class with other students? And, why do you use Japanese?

2. Do you finish the tasks and activities presented by the teacher? Do you complete them because you are graded on class participation or do you complete them because you really want to improve your communication skills?

3. Do you use English even when are not doing an activity? For example, greetings, and other daily conversational topics?

4. Do you mind studying, talking or working with a partner of the opposite sex? How do you feel about being partnered with a student you do not know very well? Do you like to work with groups of students who you are not very well acquainted with?

5. When you use a dictionary do you write down as much about the word as possible or just write down the meaning?

6. Do you volunteer answers in front of the entire class without being called on first by the teacher? How do you feel when you are called on to answer a question in front of the entire class?

Language Learning

Please answer the following questions.

Circle the best answer.

1. I am aware that speaking Japanese does not help my English communication abilities so I try to speak English in class. (None of the time) (not so much) (sometimes) (most of the time) (all of the time)

2. I usually complete the tasks and activities in the time set by the teacher. Yes No

3. I use English for during the class time even when greeting students and talking about daily life, and other things that are not a part of the teacher's lesson or activities. Yes No

4. I like to work with all students and I do not feel stressed or anxious if I have to work with students I don't know very well or students of the opposite gender. Yes No

5. I bring a dictionary to class every lesson and write down new words and try to use them during the tasks and activities. Yes No

6. I volunteer answers during pair, group and whole class work without the teacher calling on me. Yes No

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