



Psychological changes following L2 e-tandem learning: A case study

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Abstract

This study reports on an investigation into students' psychological changes during an eTandem program. The case study explored whether the use of eTandem: (1) reduced students' *Unwillingness To Speak English* (UTSE), (2) reduced students' *Anxiety about Communicating with a Foreigner* (ACF), and (3) allowed for an increase in the parameter known as *Having Things to Communicate* (HTC). In addition, a qualitative study was conducted to determine how participants felt and what they noticed through practicing eTandem. This research comprised a case study of two Japanese male undergraduate students at a national university in Japan and three Chinese students at Pennsylvania State University. Data were collected using a nine-item questionnaire on UTSE, a ten-item questionnaire on anxiety, and a six-item questionnaire on HTC. The questionnaires were administered to the two students before and after eight eTandem sessions. They recorded their experiences in reflection sheets. Results showed that UTSE and anxiety were greatly reduced. In addition, participants substantially improved their HTC on the postquestionnaire. These results suggest that repeated speaking practice via eTandem may help alleviate students' UTSE and anxiety and may help enhance their HTC.

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1 Introduction

In recent years, the Internet-based distance learning approach called online intercultural exchange, telecollaboration, or eTandem has become increasingly important in educational institutions, particularly higher education institutions, and is becoming part of the mainstream of foreign language education.

The advantage of eTandem is that it can contribute to internationalization in educational institutions by providing an alternative to actually visiting foreign countries for learners who cannot do so for various reasons, e.g., personal or financial. In addition, it can provide opportunities to interact in English, so language acquisition can be expected.

In this paper, we introduce a case study conducted in 2020 to help determine the effectiveness of an eTandem program between Chinese students at Pennsylvania State University and Japanese students at Ibaraki University to improve EFL learners' unwillingness to speak English (UTSE), anxiety about communicating with a foreigner (ACF), and having things to communicate (HTC).

2 Literature review

eTandem is a form of learning in which two people with different native languages pair up to learn each other's language and culture via the Internet (Wakisaka, 2013). eTandem is a foreign language learning system based on the principles of learner autonomy and reciprocity. Participants alternate between the roles of learner and expert in language use, taking responsibility for their own and their partner's foreign language learning (O'Rourke, 2007).

Lewis and O'Dowd (2016) conducted a systematic review of studies about learning between classes in university education, mainly in Europe and the United States, and found that there were three studies in the 1990s, 36 studies between 2000 and 2009, and 15 studies between 2010 and 2015.

Edasawa and Kabata (2007) introduced a project in which a group of four to six learners of Japanese living in Canada and learners of English living in Japan (native Japanese speakers) communicated with one another using the two different languages alternately. It was reported that the exchange of information in the group was a valuable experience for the learners, who had few opportunities to interact with native speakers and acquired new vocabulary and expressions through the project.

Wakisaka (2013) investigated changes in the motivation of a German learning Japanese who continued to use eTandem in Germany and Japan and found that free self-expression, acquisition of information about the other person's culture, and a sense of progress increased the participant's motivation to learn. However, Wakisaka stated that stress from factors not directly related to the eTandem project and the burden of the project content, such as writing a study diary, reduced the participant's motivation.

Various studies have reported that learning activities using both face-to-face Tandem learning and eTandem are useful and satisfying (Yang, 2017). Others have examined the need for support in eTandem and emphasized the importance of supporting meta-learning, which includes learning how to learn from and teach the partner (Moriya, 2019).

Tian and Wang (2010) studied an eTandem project conducted by university students studying English in China and Chinese in Australia using Skype outside of class. The results demonstrated that while the project was successful in terms of improving both language and cross-cultural competence, Australian learners of Chinese were not as positive about it as Chinese learners of English. The Australian Chinese learners said this was because their own Chinese proficiency was much lower than their partner's English proficiency, suggesting that the perceived difference in language level between them and their partner was a factor that caused the Chinese learners' lack of confidence in communication. They concluded that the difference in language level between tandem pairs made a difference in their motivation to learn.

Yamauchi (2019) reported that asynchronous video exchange initiatives were less likely to cause foreign language anxiety than synchronous ones and tended to increase interest in culture. Furthermore, she reported that interclass linguistic and cultural exchange activities in the form of video-sharing and commenting based on video exchanges helped to increase participants' satisfaction and interest in their exchange partners and their culture.

3 Research rationale

The fact that communicative learning methods are effective for acquiring a second language (Gass & Mackey, 2007) is supported by Long's (1996) interaction and output hypotheses (Swain, 2005) of second-language acquisition theory and Vygotsky's (1956/2001) sociocultural theory, as is the importance of verbal corrective feedback. In reality, however, Japanese students have few opportunities to practice interaction in English classes. It is said that anxiety can be alleviated by involving them in activities that involve moderate risk and by allowing them to endure ambiguity (Oxford, 1999). Repeatedly negotiating meaning to transform incomprehensible input into

comprehensible input in eTandem learning is expected to stimulate the development of interlanguage and increase opportunities for pushed output and comprehensible output.

Isoda (2007) described UTSE as a learner factor and discussed it within the framework of a study on willingness to communicate (WTC). MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998) defined WTC in a second language as "A readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" (p. 547).

Ohshita (2009) argued for the importance of message-level communication activities from the essential perspective of communication. Message-level communicative activities are those in which learners communicate their opinions and ideas to each other and are considered to have a higher degree of learner self-involvement. For message-level communication to take place, it is essential that learners have something to communicate (HTC). HTC is positioned as one of the five subcategories of international posture proposed by Yashima (2009a). Yashima (2009b) also investigated the relationship between HTC and WTC among English language learners who participated in international volunteer work and reported a high correlation between them.

These previous studies have shown that eTandem has the potential to increase motivation and satisfaction in language learning and to enhance second language proficiency and cross-cultural competence.

However, in Japan, recognition of eTandem learning remains low, and it is not widely practiced. In addition, there are no practical examples of eTandem learning in which pairs of non-native speakers of English use English as their *Lingua Franca*. English is used not only by native English speakers, but also by many people who use it as a second or foreign language, and it is expected that there will be an increasing number of opportunities to communicate in English with non-native English speakers in the future.

In this study, we conducted an eTandem program with Chinese learners of Japanese and Japanese learners of English to investigate the effects of eTandem on UTSE, anxiety about communicating with a foreigner, and WTC with the world. Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to analyse and discuss how participants who have difficulty with English feel and how they are transformed through eTandem learning. The research questions targeted in the study are as follows:

- (1) Does eTandem reduce EFL students' UTSE?
- (2) Does eTandem reduce anxiety about communicating with a foreigner?
- (3) Does eTandem improve HTC?
- (4) How did the participants feel while practicing eTandem?
- (5) What did the participants notice while practicing eTandem?

In this study, eTandem was defined as a 10-minute Japanese lesson and a 10-minute English lesson conducted between Chinese students at Pennsylvania State University and Japanese students at Ibaraki University via Zoom, a free videoconferencing service.

4 Method

4.1 Participants

This study's research comprised a case study of two Japanese male students at a national university in Japan and three Chinese students at Pennsylvania State University. The two Japanese male students majored in mathematics. One (Participant A) was a beginner learner with a TOEIC score of 195 points and the other (participant B) was a lower-intermediate learner with a TOEIC score of 540 points, based on Ishikawa and Ishikawa's (2008) classification (5–495 points = beginner; 500–695 points = intermediate). Although their different TOEIC scores may be an interfering variable, we confirmed that they both had high UTSE and anxiety about communicating with a foreigner and low HTC before the implementation of the eTandem program. The participants had no experience with improvised interaction practices in English or studying abroad. They attended an English Communication class instructed by the author once per week (an elective course at the author's

university) and did not study English elsewhere. In a pre-study interview, the participants said, "I'm nervous because I'm not good at speaking in English" (A), "I think it will be difficult to convey my thoughts well" (B).

The participants hoped to become an elementary school teacher and a junior high school teacher. Practicing eTandem was expected to contribute to alleviating their UTSE, anxiety about communicating with a foreigner, and enhancing their HTC and be a valuable practical learning experience. Because they were able to communicate in class, the author thought it would be easy for them to express their thoughts without being nervous and asked for their cooperation. The author obtained their written consent to participate in the study and use their data in compliance with confidentiality obligations.

4.2 Teaching design

Over a two-month period (June–August 2020), students participated in an eTandem program consisting of a series of video conferences. The students' UTSE, anxiety about communicating with a foreigner, and HTC were compared pre- and post-intervention. After coordinating the date and time with the participants, the 20-minute eTandem was conducted eight times from June to August outside of class time, every Thursday from 21:30–22:00 Japanese time. For students at Pennsylvania State University, it was 8:30–9:00 in the morning.

The eTandem exchange partners comprised three Chinese students at Pennsylvania State University. In the first four sessions, we conducted a video call with a group of three people: two Japanese and one Chinese. In the second four sessions, we had a group of three people: one Japanese and two Chinese. This was because initially the Japanese participants felt uncomfortable speaking in English, so for the first four sessions, until they became more accustomed to speaking, two Japanese students were paired to communicate with a third student from Pennsylvania State University. In the latter four sessions, to increase the amount of speech in the exchanges, the Japanese students were separated, and another group of three was formed with two more students from Pennsylvania State University.

At the start of the exchange, the Chinese students had already completed the Genki 1 textbook for Japanese classes, so their expected level of Japanese was A1. The level of Japanese used in the course materials is equivalent to N5 of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) and A1 of the CEFR, so the content of the conversation was quite limited.

The flow of the eTandem program was as follows: First, the teachers of both classes informed the participants of the theme to be discussed the day before the class started and told them to think about the content of the discussion to some extent. On the day of the eTandem, we first greeted the participants and confirmed the theme, and then during the first 10 minutes Japanese was spoken and in the second 10 minutes, English. Examples of topics are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Examples of topics discussed during eTandem exchanges

Session no.	Topics
1	Introducing yourself, famous things in each country
2	Holidays and annual events
3	Travel you enjoyed, places you would like to visit
4	Pop culture, hobbies
5	Introducing yourself, university
6	Traditional crafts, traditional objects
7	Examination war
8 (final)	About the future

4.3 Data collection

The author observed the events that occurred during the eTandem sessions and investigated the participants' emotional changes before and after. Data were collected and analysed from the questionnaires and reflection sheets. Although this study only targeted one beginner and one lower-intermediate learner, according to the interest-correlation-based selection of the structural-construction research method (Saijo, 2007), it is possible to extend the tools that comprise research (e.g., fieldwork, subjects, and techniques), all of which can be chosen according to the researcher's interests, and the research value can be assured even with a small number of cases. To measure the effects of the practice from multiple angles and increase the study's reliability, the author collected two data items and used quantitative and qualitative analysis methods.

To ascertain whether the effects of the intervention varied, the students were surveyed on their UWTE, anxiety about communicating with a foreigner, and HTC pre-intervention (in June) and post-intervention (in August). The results of both surveys were then analysed to compare changes following the intervention.

4.3.1 Questionnaire 1 - EFL learners' UTSE

Isoda's (2008) questionnaire on UTSE was implemented and measured on a 6-point scale in the pre- and post-surveys (Appendix 1). The author adopted three items indicating a high level of anxiety about speaking English, three items related to low perceived competence to speak English, and three items showing tendencies to avoid speaking English, and analyzed the average of each result.

4.3.2 Questionnaire 2 - Anxiety about communicating with a foreigner

The author modified Motoda's (2000) Japanese Language Anxiety Scale questionnaire (for learners of Japanese as a foreign language) for EFL learners (Appendix 2). The questionnaire consisted of ten statements describing anxiety associated with communication difficulty when conversing with a non-Japanese English speaker. Examples included the fear of being unable to convey something or that the person will fail to understand the participant. Each item was scored on a 6-point scale, with higher scores indicating stronger agreement. The scores were aggregated, and the averages were calculated.

4.3.3 Questionnaire 3 - HTC

Yashima's (2009a) questionnaire on HTC was implemented and measured on a 6-point scale from "6 = This applies to me perfectly" to "1 = This does not apply to me at all" in the pre- and post-surveys (Appendix 3).

4.3.4 Reflection sheets

In order to find out how the students felt and what they noticed after the eTandem experience, a reflection report was conducted for each lesson. The report consisted of the following three items: 1) impressions of speaking in Japanese and English, 2) what I noticed and discovered, and 3) what I want to pay attention to in the future.

5 Results and Discussions

5.1 Questionnaire 1 - EFL learners' UTSE

Tables 2, 3, and 4 show the results of the questionnaires on changes in anxiety, perceived competence, and avoidance, respectively. In addition, the average results of the UTSE of the two participants are shown in Figure 1.

Table 2

Changes in anxiety (N = 2)

Participant	Anxiety 1		Anxiety 2		Anxiety 3	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
A	6	3	6	1	6	2
B	6	3	6	2	6	2

Table 3

Changes in perceived competence (N = 2)

Participant	Perceived competence 1		Perceived competence 2		Perceived competence 3	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
A	5	2	6	2	5	2
B	4	2	6	2	5	2

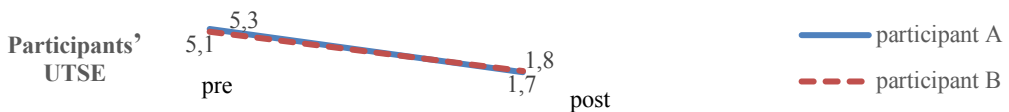
Table 4

Changes in avoidance (N = 2)

Participant	Avoidance 1		Avoidance 2		Avoidance 3	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
A	5	1	5	1	4	1
B	5	1	4	1	4	1

Figure 1

Changes in participants' UTSE



In the pre-eTandem stage, both participants had a very high level of UTSE, but after the instruction, there was a significant reduction in all three UTSE indicators: anxiety, perceived competence, and avoidance. These results suggest that eTandem reduced UTSE, as there was a significant reduction in all its indicators.

5.2 Questionnaire 2 - Anxiety about communicating with a foreigner

Table 5 shows the results of the questionnaire related to ACF, while Figure 2 presents the average results of the two participants' ACF.

Table 5

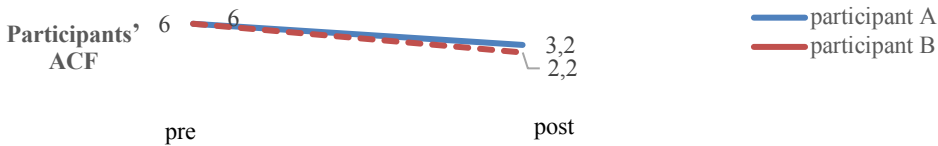
Changes in anxiety about communicating with a foreigner (N = 2)

Items	Participant A		Participant B	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1	6	2	6	2
2	6	4	6	2
3	6	2	6	3
4	6	4	6	3
5	6	3	6	2
6	6	4	6	2
7	6	5	6	3
8	6	4	6	2
9	6	3	6	2
10	6	1	6	1

Note: for a description of question items, see Appendix 2.

Figure 2

Changes in participants' anxiety



In the pre-eTandem stage, both students had a very high level of anxiety about communicating with a foreigner, but after the instruction, there was a significant reduction. This suggests that eTandem reduced anxiety about communicating with a foreigner. Compared to Participant A, Participant B showed greater improvement in all 10 items related to anxiety. These results suggest that eTandem may be effective in reducing anxiety, especially for learners with some ability

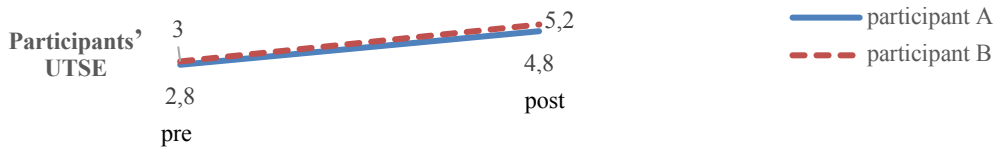
5.3 Questionnaire 3: HTC

Table 6 shows the results of the questionnaire on HTC, while Figure 3 presents the average changes in HTC. (Note: For a description of question items, see Appendix 3).

Table 6

Changes in HTC (N = 2)

Items	Participant A		Participant B	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1	3	5	3	5
2	3	5	3	5
3	2	4	3	5
4	3	5	3	5
5	3	4	3	6
6	3	6	3	5

Figure 3*Changes in participants' HTC*

Regarding HTC, both participants demonstrated an increase in all indicators. The results indicate that through eTandem, both participants began to have things they wanted to talk about with people around the world.

To supplement these results and to find out how the participants felt and what they noticed during eTandem learning, as well as what helped them to reduce UTSE and anxiety and to increase their HTC, the author reviewed the participants' reflection reports. Examples that best represent their characteristics were extracted, with their personal identification letters. The examples are presented below.

At first, “I could hardly understand them because of the speed of their English, even though it may be a normal pace for them” (A), and “I had to ask him to repeat repeatedly because my listening comprehension was too poor. I need to practice listening” (B). As you can see from the reflection reports, actual speaking experience made the participants realize they needed to improve their listening skills.

“Since there were two Japanese people and we could cover for each other in case one of us got stuck while speaking, I was relieved” (A), and “I was a little afraid of silence when I was on my own, but with two Japanese people, I felt comfortable working on it” (B). These descriptions suggest that the two participants were able to help each other while participating in the conversation cooperatively may have reduced their UTSE.

In addition, as the participants repeated the eTandem sessions, “I need to pay more attention to the pauses in my partner's speech” (A), “I need to improve my listening skills more” (A), “I need to increase my vocabulary so that I can answer in an impromptu way” (B), and “I couldn't cope with unexpected things, so I need to improve my basic academic skills” (B). As these quotes indicate, the participants took action to overcome the challenges they faced.

Other comments include, “I respected the other person's ability to speak both Japanese and English” (A), “The other person's willingness to speak in Japanese was high” (B), and “When I didn't understand something, the other person rephrased it in a way that was easier to understand, and I want to imitate him so that I can use expressions that are easier to understand” (B). It can be said that the Chinese students at Pennsylvania State University became role models who embodied the participants' ideal L2 speaking ability, enhancing their motivation.

Regarding the second half of the lesson, the participants said, “Even though I could only sort of understand English, I managed to do my best to show interest and keep talking, like ‘Uh-huh,’ ‘Yes’” (A), “I thought it would be okay even if I didn't understand all of it, so I was able to talk more actively than usual” (B), “I felt that I had grown a little, such as saying please explain it in English in different ways when I did not understand” (B), and “In the past, there had been two Japanese people, but this time I was alone, so I thought I should try my best to speak English, so I could speak very well” (B). These statements indicate that participants felt a sense of confidence and accomplishment while enduring ambiguity.

Other comments written on the reflection form include: “I was surprised to learn that the Rubik's Cube is called Magic Cube in English” (A), “I pronounced the v in very with a b once, which confused him, so I need to be more conscious of the V pronunciation” (A), and “I referred to an apartment as an apartment, but the other person noticed and told me it was an apartment house. Like this, even though I could not understand well, the other person taught me a lot, so it was a good experience and valuable” (B). Participants enjoyed the cross-cultural experience by noticing the differences in vocabulary and pronunciation.

One of the reasons for the increase in HTC was that “I was honestly surprised that the Penn State students knew more about Japanese manga, anime, and food than I did. In order to broaden the topic of conversation, it is necessary to know more about the other country, and I also wanted to create a more appealing image of Japan” (A) and “I thought it was amazing that he could answer any questions I had about China. I would like to learn more about Japanese culture” (B). As is evident in the participants' reflection reports, they recognize a change in their positive attitude toward learning about both their own and their partner's country.

In situations communicating in Japanese, “There were times when my timing overlapped with the other person’s, so I want to adjust my timing appropriately” (A), “I want to be careful about the expressions I use, because there were times when the other person could not understand some difficult words” (A), and “I want to speak in a way that is easy for both parties to understand and ask questions to check for understanding” (B). These statements indicate that Japanese participants took the initiative in the conversation and tried to provide appropriate support.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, we reported the practice of using eTandem and investigated its effectiveness in reducing UTSE and anxiety and increasing HTC. The results demonstrated that UTSE, anxiety, and HTC were greatly improved after the eTandem instruction in comparison to before. This suggests that eTandem is effective in reducing the UTSE and anxiety of learners who have difficulty with English, even for a short period of time (8 weekly sessions of 20 minutes) and can also be expected to improve HTC.

Therefore, in the Japanese educational field, which is said to provide few opportunities to communicate with foreigners in English, practicing interaction in the eTandem environment can increase students’ awareness of their own issues and encourage efforts to overcome them. The accumulation of successful experiences of communicating in English with others is expected to reduce their resistance and anxiety and motivate them to learn English. In addition, the participants experienced a sense of security during the program, as the Penn State students paraphrased their words in easy-to-understand expressions. The change from two-on-one to one-on-two motivated them and the experience of being able to interact with others gave them confidence. These results are consistent with the aforementioned findings that anxiety can be alleviated by allowing participants to participate in moderately risky activities and tolerate ambiguity in a fear-free environment (Oxford, 1999). In other words, it suggests that starting the interaction practice in a small 2:1 eTandem environment, and then subsequently in a 1:2 group after the participants gradually become accustomed to it, may lead to the reduction of resistance and anxiety and the improvement of HTC. Because there are few studies that have aimed to demonstrate psychological changes, this practice has considerable significance.

There are four limitations in this study that need to be addressed in the future. First, this case study includes a very small number of participants in a short period of time, and because we did not confirm statistically significant differences, we should be cautious about generalizing the results. In the future, we would like to confirm the usefulness of this study for a variety of learning groups, therefore the scale of the eTandem experiment should be expanded.

Second, we did not investigate growth in English proficiency. It is necessary to examine not only psychological changes in UTSE, anxiety, and HTC, but also changes in English ability, such as speaking and listening skills.

Third, we did not record the conversations during the eight instructional sessions. A more qualitative analysis could be performed by recording the interactions and analysing the discourse.

Finally, the number of participants in each group was changed from 2:1 in the first half to 1:2 in the second half. Due to the number of participants in the eTandem, it was not possible to have the same number of participants in each group in the first and second halves, so it was not clear which combination was more effective. In the future, it will be important to reduce the number of variables as much as possible, for example, by having the same number of people in pairs from start to finish.

Despite these limitations, the results suggest that there was a decrease in resistance and anxiety toward L2 speaking and an increase in HTC. At first, it may seem difficult to communicate in English through video calls, but the results suggest that by using the beneficial environment of eTandem on both sides, there is a possibility of overcoming challenges and increasing confidence in speaking in English. Further participation in eTandem and subsequent qualitative research on how participants act and what they feel while doing so is needed, as well as the accumulation of more practice-based experiences.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire used to measure EFL learners' unwillingness to speak English (taken from Isoda, 2008).

Answers: 6 = Strongly agree; 5 = Mostly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Disagree; 2 = Mostly disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.

*Reverse-scored items

I get anxious when I talk to people in English.

I am nervous when I talk to people in English.

I am relaxed when I talk to people in English.

I don't think people can understand my English.

I don't think I can speak English with my current English ability.

I don't think I can communicate what I am thinking by speaking English.

I do not want to talk to people in English if I can help it.

I would like to avoid speaking to people in English.

When I have to speak in English, I want to avoid speaking as much as possible.

Appendix 2

Questionnaire used to measure anxiety about communicating with a foreigner (taken from Motoda, 2000).
Answers: 6 = Strongly agree; 5 = Mostly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Disagree; 2 = Mostly disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.

The answers you give will not affect your grades. Please answer honestly, without conferring with classmates. Do not just select the same option for all items; think carefully about your response for each item.

1. I get flustered when a foreigner can't understand what I'm saying in English, no matter how many times I try to say it.
2. I get anxious when I can't express myself well in English during a conversation with a foreigner.
3. I get anxious when a foreigner looks puzzled at something I say in English.
4. I get anxious when a foreigner speaks a lot of English that I don't know.
5. I get anxious when a foreigner responds to something I say in English with a "what?"
6. I get anxious when I don't understand what the foreigner is saying and don't know how to respond.
7. I get flustered when I can't recall the right English words to say during a conversation with a foreigner.
8. I get anxious when I'm unsure whether I'll manage to speak English competently during my first conversational encounter with someone.
9. I get anxious when a foreigner speaks English that is different from what I have studied in the classroom.
10. I get anxious about whether I'll use the right English words when speaking to a foreigner.

Appendix 3

Questionnaire used to measure having things to communicate (taken from Yashima, 2009a).

Answers are given on a six-point scale from "6 = This applies to me perfectly" to "1 = This does not apply to me at all."

*Reverse-scored items

I have thoughts that I want to share with people from other parts of the world.

I have issues to address with people in the world.

I have ideas about international issues, such as environmental issues and the north-south divide.

When it comes to talking to people around the world, I do not know what to say.*

I have no clear opinions about international issues.*

I have a lot to talk about with my foreign friends.

About the Author(s)

Sho Kobayashi is a special appointed associate professor in the Faculty of Education at Osaka Kyoiku University. He is also currently conducting teacher training at the same university. His research interests are in computer-mediated communication, anxiety, willingness to communicate, and international posture in English language education. He has 18 years of experience in various English teaching environments, including junior and senior high schools, and universities.
