Lee, J. H. (2018). Exploring relationships between second language learners’ attitudes towards classroom language and variables that motivate their learning. *Language Awareness, 27*(3), 243-258. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09658416.2018.1430148>

Second language learners’ attitudes towards classroom language and teacher ‘nativeness’

# What this research was about and why it is important

The study used a questionnaire to investigate Korean EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners’ attitudes towards the use of their first language (L1) in their learning versus an ‘English-only’ classroom, and the ‘nativeness’ of teachers (English/Korean) in relation to improving their English conversation skills. The results showed that the learners mostly preferred using their L1 (i.e., Korean), and were divided on their preference for English/Korean teachers. Learners who preferred L1 English teachers favoured a challenging learning environment and less use of the L1, whereas learners who preferred L1 Korean teachers preferred a safe and caring learning environment and more use of the L1. The study is useful for helping language teachers make more informed decisions about the use of learners’ L1 in class.

# What the researcher did

*Participants*

* 233 intermediate-level, undergraduate EFL learners (aged 19-22, mixed gender), studying at a public university in Seoul, Republic of Korea, majoring in law, philosophy, engineering, economics, physics and other subjects.
* All learners were attending a communicatively-oriented course (‘English conversation II’) taught by L1 Korean and L1 English instructors. Most learners had been previously taught, at least once, by L1 English instructor.

*Data collection instrument*

* Questionnaire with three sections:
* **Section 1**, several questions on background information (e.g., age) and previous learning experience;
* **Section 2**, (Qs 1-20) contained statements (e.g., ‘*I like it when English teachers explain difficult English words in Korean*’) for learners to rate their agreement with on the scale: ‘1’ (*strongly disagree*)*, ‘*2’(*disagree*)*,* ‘3’ (*agree*)*,* ‘4’ (*strongly agree*);
* **Section 3**, (Qs 21-40) contained statements that learners rated (like in Section 2), but all connected to the sentence ‘*I can immerse myself in learning English more when*…’. In a preliminary version of the questionnaire, a different 35 learners (similar background) wrote their own responses to this sentence. In the main study questionnaire, the researcher presented the most common responses from the preliminary study for agreement rating (e.g., ‘*I can immerse myself in learning English more when*…*my teacher shows interest in students*’).
* Questionnaire administered during conversation class, learners were informed it was not connected to their studies.

# What the researcher found

* The learners were generally in favour of both teachers and learners using the L1 in class, but more varied with regard to teachers using the L1 to teach difficult vocabulary. Most of the learners were opposed to English-only classrooms.
* While most of the learners reported that L1 English teachers would be beneficial for their learning, that they considered teaching skills as more important than the ‘nativeness’ of the teacher, and that conversation skills can be taught equally well by both L1 English and L1 Korean teachers.
* Learners who preferred L1 English teachers favoured a challenging learning environment and less use of the L1, whereas those who preferred L1 Korean teachers preferred a safe learning environment and more use of the L1.

# Things to consider

* This study showed that these learners were, on the whole, in favour of using the L1 in learning English, and ambivalent about their preference for the ‘nativeness’ of teachers (English/Korean) for improving their conversation skills.
* Future research might explore how learning in one’s preferred environment (e.g., challenging vs safe) affects motivation and anxiety.
* As the researcher commented, the study was limited because it did not use methods such as interviews or observations, which would have allowed learners to provide rich, in-depth comments to explain their questionnaire ratings.
* **In your context**: How do your learners feel about use of the L1 in class? To what extent do you think use of the L1 can be beneficial or detrimental for encouraging learning?