# PERCEIVED ANXIETY OF ENGLISH LEARNER AND TEACHER IN A CALL ENVIRONMENT CLASSROOM

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## Abstract

*This exploratory study examines Foreign Language Anxiety of both English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers and learners in a Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) environment. Many studies have focused on students' anxieties but overlooked the possibility that teachers may also experience anxiety, potentially harming foreign language teaching delivery. The result of this study revealed that teachers experienced a double impact of the intense feeling of anxiety and worry about how to cope with teaching Grammar, Communication, and Reading with a combination of CALL gadgets in a CALL environment. While the English learners in this study, being computer science majors, were not impacted by stress to the same degree when following instructions on how to use such gadgets. Among student concerns, deep anxiety was only experienced by learners if a sudden shift between using computer screen and whiteboard occurred in the course of instruction.*

**Keywords**

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Anxiety, Family Environment Mode Approach (FEMA), Mindset

# 1. Introduction

For many decades, foreign language researchers have been aware that anxiety exists as an impediment to language learning. Accordingly, they have concentrated their efforts on investigating its effects and sources, as well as on devising ways to help anxious learners cope with such feelings to improve overall achievement and performance in the target language. Teaching is a demanding profession; teachers may have encounters with unruly students, curriculum demands, and complaining parents as well as numerous other issues on a daily basis. Many teachers have invested heavily in the target language in terms of motivation, time, effort, and ego (Horwitz, 1995) and have a significant personal stake in succeeding in their endeavors. When it becomes necessary for such teachers to incorporate technology in their work, those with relatively limited computer knowledge and experience can be overwhelmed in a Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) environment classroom. This is a significant concern because; just as non-native English-speaking teachers are increasing worldwide, so too is the number of teachers with limited computer knowledge (Braine, 2010; Selvi, 2011). Gibson P. (2014) in a recent study noted the positive effect of technology intervention on students' attitudes towards the use of computers for educational purposes but this finding did not apply to the teachers in the study. Thus the current paper considers anxiety on the part of both students and teachers, with one eye firmly on how technology in the classroom might impact on the numerous other educational stressors that have been recognized.

Spielberger (1983) defines anxiety generally as the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with the arousal of the nervous system. Anxiety mimics those things that people experience when under stress, with the absence of the precipitating external stressor. During the current project, the researcher experienced this mimicking anxiety personally. It occurred when attempting to configure and connect various electronic devices in the classroom while students talked amongst themselves and made efforts to resolve issues with their own workstations. Anxiety can certainly affects people strongly and inhibit learning. This result from the narrowing of cognitive perspective similar to that found in stress reactions where attention is focused on potential sources of threat or danger (Barlow et al., 1996). However, despite the common experience of anxiousness, language anxiety, in particular, is rather difficult to define in a simple sentence (Scovel, 1978). Linguists have attempted to

describe the form of cognitive anxiety induced while learning a foreign language. Foreign language (FL) anxiety is defined as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors" (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Two ways of conceptualizing the anxiety specific to language learning have been prosed by Horwitz and Young (1991): (1) as a transfer of other types of anxiety (i.e., trait anxiety, test anxiety, or public speaking anxiety) or (2) as situation-specific anxiety. Early research focusing on the effects of anxiety on second language learning (SLL) used the anxiety transfer approach and yielded unclear and conflicting results (Horwitz et.al., 2010). Given the difficulty clearly pinpointing the key sources of anxiety, it is reasonable to suggest that teachers themselves might be one of the factors that stress and demotivate EFL students. One example of this is the direct or indirect affective influence on students when teachers are anxious and stressed prior to class.

In the field of foreign language education, there is general agreement regarding the negative correlation between foreign language anxiety and language learning. Thus teachers strive to reduce language learner anxiety and make the classroom experience more comfortable, supportive, and nurturing. The reduction of learners' fear and anxieties is a major role of educators. It follows then that helping those invested in the educational process, whether as teachers or learners, become more aware of the specific associated challenges will promote more effective language education (Bigdeli & Bai, 2009). Teachers play a central role in creating a classroom climate that fosters learning and socio-emotional wellbeing. However, the difficulties involved in managing classroom dynamics can add to the burden of stress they already feel (Flook, L. et.al, 2013). For those who continue in the profession, the cumulative effects of stress can negatively impact their ability to be responsive and effective teachers. Multiple sources of teacher stress have been cited. These include demands on time, workload, disruptive student behavior, and other organizational factors (Blase, 1986; Boyle, 1995).

This multitude of stressors may explain the growing disillusionment of teachers and their leaving profession at an increasing rate in many parts of the world, factors that support the need for more research on teacher motivation (Dörnyei, 2010). Work to date has identified a sense of self-efficacy and connectedness with students and colleagues as important elements linked to teaching engagement and the lessening of emotional exhaustion and psychological distress (Klassen, 2012 & Tuettemann, 1992). This is supported by Frenzel A. et.al (2012) who found that for teachers, satisfaction of the need for relatedness with students leads to higher levels of

engagement and positive emotions, and lower levels of negative emotions, than does satisfaction of the need for relatedness with peers. However, the combination of physical, psychological/emotional and behavioral stressor that teachers experience can disrupt their relationships with students (Ocampo & Rockell, 2014). In recognition of the confluence of factors described above, the need for research that addresses English language teachers' anxiety is now more important than ever.

From the learners' point of view anxiety may reduce the enjoyment of study (Gregersen, 2002). However, in some cases stress and anxiety can be experienced to the extent that "anxious students may avoid studying and in some cases skip class entirely in an effort to alleviate their anxiety (Horwitz et al. 1986)". Why do language learners experience stress? Self-perception of speaking ability, issues relating to testing, and even the teachers themselves have been recognized as key causes. Horwitz et al. (1986) and Ocampo (2017) claim that learners' anxiety arises mainly from their self-concept of ability. Kitano (2001) argues "speaking skill is usually the first thing that learners compare with that of peers, teachers, and native speakers". Hence, learners' low self-perception of speaking ability is a cause or source of anxiety in second language learning. Language testing and fear of tests can also be source of anxiety experienced by a great number of students. Horwitz et al. (1986) found that when many grammar items needed to be remembered, a large number of students in their study claimed to know the rules but were unable to recall them when asked to in an exam situation. Later, after completing a test, if students remember that they entered a wrong answer because of nervousness then ongoing anxiety can also be produced. In addition, certain types of question can also bring on test anxiety, particularly if a student has never encountered the specific question format previously. Finally, as mentioned earlier, despite their purported intention to help, instructors themselves can actually serve as a source of student anxiety. In the day-to-day world of education, some instructors persist with beliefs and behaviors that contradict the findings of the educational research, such as the idea that intimidating students will motivate them to learn the foreign language. This misconception is well illustrated by Young (1991) who states: Instructors who believe their role is to correct students constantly when they make any error, who feel that they cannot have students working in pairs because the class may get out of control, who believe that the teacher should be doing most of the talking and teaching, and who think their role is more like a drill sergeants than a facilitator may be contributing to learner language anxiety. Cognizant of above,

and having conducted previous work on anxiety with Japanese learners of English (Ocampo and Rockell, 2014), an initial observation of teachers operating within a strongly CALL-oriented environment prompted the researcher to undertake this investigation of anxiety and CALL.

## 2. Methodology

This study was conducted in a prefectural university, situated in Fukushima, Japan, at which the English language is used as the main medium of instruction in teaching English. The target respondents were 260 computer major, second and third-year students (male = 230, female = 30). During the end of spring 2016, summer 2016, and winter 2017, during class time, students were asked to voluntarily answer the adapted Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire from Horwitz and Cope (1986) (Appendix A) and a Mindset Quiz Survey (Appendix B).

The written questionnaires were given to students in English with a Japanese translation and used a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In addition, two part-time teachers were asked informally during spoken interviews about their experience of using a CALL classroom environment for teaching the course Reading and Grammar for TOEFL. Questions asked included the following: 1.Which do you prefer to use in teaching English grammar; CALL environment classroom and use the designated software in teaching conversation, grammar and reading or the traditional classroom and why? 2. Are you comfortable using the CALL classroom using related devices such as overhead projectors, microphones, etc. in teaching grammar and reading and why? 3. What do you think about the advantages and disadvantages of CALL classroom? 4. Do you have CALL classroom training or have you attended an orientation prior the beginning of the semester? Throughout the study the researcher participated in the role of teacher in which she also implemented the Family Environment Mode Approach (FEMA) (Ocampo, 2015 & 2016). The general aim of this approach is to motivate and challenge students to speak without hesitations and alter their mindset gradually, leading them to accept failure and language mistakes positively. Thus FEMA underpinned the classroom-based research in this study.

## 3. Results and Discussion

In general, during the research period, in which FEMA was applied, a number of the students showed their willingness to speak out and participate in classroom discussions, affirming its potential to positively influence classroom atmosphere. Results of the FLCAS, Mindset Quiz survey, insights relating to anxiety and the use of technological devices in a CALL environment, and feedback from informal teacher interviews are presented below.

A. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale Result.

Based on the written questionnaires, the following factors were found to be affecting students grammar and reading English (Figure 1): Becoming nervous when they didn't understand every word the language teacher says or when asked question for which they hadn't prepared in advance, panicking when they had to speak without preparation, often feeling like not going to their language class, and never feeling quite sure of themselves when speaking in the foreign language class. This result was comparable to the researcher's earlier study (Ocampo, 2016) in which the three highest scores affecting students' anxiety in speaking English were: Never feeling quite sure of themselves when speaking in a language class, becoming upset when they did not understand the teacher's corrections, and becoming nervous when they did not understand every word the language teacher was saying. Participants in this earlier study also felt too embarrassed to answer voluntarily in the class, a factor that did not appear in the results of the current study.

Both professionals and students are often subject to stress, anxiety and burnout, which lead to inability to respond effectively in the classroom. Moreover, Lepore, S.J. (1997), suggested that through the process of contemplating one's thoughts and reappraise intrusive thoughts as nonthreatening entities expressing their stress-related thoughts and feelings may gain some insight into the stressor, which in turn renders any memories of the stressor nonthreatening.
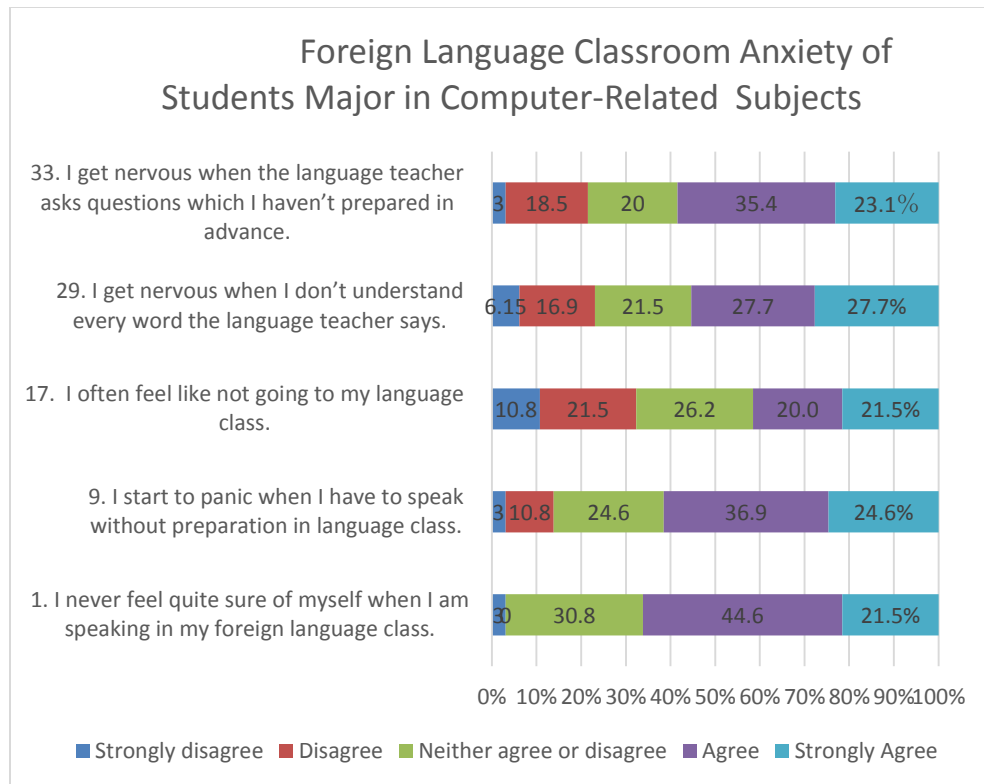
**Figure 1:** *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety of Students Major in Computer-Related subjects*

**B. Anxiety and Difficulty in Using CALL Environment Classroom using Computer Related Gadgets**

FLCAS findings revealed that students did not have any difficulty using computer-related gadgets such as a computer, headsets, etc. in a CALL environment classroom. This observation may not seem surprising, given that the participants were all computer science majors. However, the teachers employed to instruct them, who shared their experiences in this study, despite being English language experts, possessed only limited technical skills. In the role of teacher, with the incumbent expectations of knowledge and competence, it can be embarrassing to have to ask for assistance from a student. On one occasion during this study, the researcher did so in order to speed up the flow of the lecture and eventually, one of the students voluntarily assisted. However, this situation doubled the experience of the anxiety of the researcher, who also began to sweat profusely due to too much pressure.

Teachers reported struggling with connecting all the various electronic classroom gadgets and devices quickly, and sometimes had recourse to the use of whiteboard and markers, which

have long been part of the traditional technique of teaching. On such occasions, the majority of students would indicate their dissatisfaction. Rather than responding in kind, working with a corresponding labor-intensive approach such as note taking by hand, or even typing into a file, many merely took pictures with their smartphones either during or before leaving the classroom. While the researcher, in particular, believes that a more intensive, process-oriented engagement with classroom texts and materials, as delivered by the instructor in real time, promotes learning, these benefits did not appear clear to the 'tech-savvy' students. In fact, very few of them copied what was written on the board and some even claimed that writing in their notebooks is tiresome and time-consuming. The issue of note taking points to a significant disconnect between the mindsets of teachers and student participants in this study. Despite the teacher persistently explaining the advantages of recording lessons manually and encouraging them to make notes of important words and grammar rules, an inspection of students' notebooks and textbooks revealed that very few actually did so at all. The behavior of these students can also be viewed in the light of their responses to a Mindset Quiz survey, which found 81% of them to possess a fixed mindset with some growth, rendering them resistant to suggestion, despite the implementation of FEMA and a great deal of personal effort on the part of the teacher.

C. Results of informal communication with teachers teaching EFL in a CALL environment classroom.

Informal conversations with other teaching professionals during this study provided important insights and tended to emphasize the impracticality and barriers to immediate teacher-student engagement that can result in a CALL classroom, particularly without adequate prior orientation. Participants were not prompted beforehand or given the list of questions presented earlier in the methodology, to ensure a degree of spontaneity that might promote the gathering of true feeling and ideas of the teachers. The following teachers' comments illustrate their perceptions: "Since I am teaching Communication and Reading classes, I prefer to use the ordinary classroom with moveable chairs to change the arrangement and students to move freely and talk around the classroom", "I prefer to use the ordinary classroom to see students while doing their activities", "I am teaching TOEIC class and I prefer to use textbooks and copied materials than using computer for me to monitor and write my correction and comments to the students when I return their papers", "Since I am not yet used to manipulate gadgets in a CALL

classroom, it takes time for me to prepare the lesson and so I am losing time", "It is stressful to be in a CALL classroom when everybody is expecting you are really good at using gadgets available in a CALL classroom", "As a teacher, it is a bit stressful to have a limited knowledge about computer especially when your students are computer major", and "I think it is difficult for us especially during the first 2 weeks of the semester to familiarize ourselves to the gadgets in the classroom since we don't have enough actual orientation on how to use them ".

D. Physical Arrangement of a CALL Classroom

Global connectivity and immediate communicative exchanges facilitated by the Internet are commonplace nowadays. Language educators are aware of this fact and a number of attempts have been made to plan and coordinate computer programs for language instruction. However, despite these initiatives, according to Swanson (1998), "core English classes in colleges and universities around Japan are renowned for class size, and the apathy and reticence of students". For language teachers, the frustrations are enormous. Swanson discovered that a "normal" class has its own urgency towards goal completion, while computer-based ones have a time-scale pegged to the usage of the machine. Tasks that required a certain amount of time ended up taking much longer and although students found safety in the computer interface Swanson felt increasingly cut off.

Figure 2, shows the physical arrangement of a CALL classroom. In the researcher's view, this type of environment is not ideal for a communication class, especially if the target is communicative fluency. Visual access restricted to a direct front-on or rear view of fixed blocks of computer desks limits interaction between teacher and students. This hinders the creation of a safe and productive ESL learning environment.

**Figure 2:** *Physical Arrangement of a CALL Classroom*

## 3. Conclusion and Recommendations

Learning and teaching foreign language requires the utmost acuity in correctly performing a precise orchestration of cognitive functions. Thus, as the respondents of this study found, it can prove to be an extremely stress-inducing task. As shown, language stress can be further impacted when technology is incorporated and there is an uneven level of technical competence between teachers and learners. Here a disjuncture in mindset that inhibits the full potential of the educational exercise occurs. In the current study, this was seen most clearly where, despite teachers trying hard to expand their traditional classroom experience and embrace technology, albeit with limited success, students were unwilling to reciprocate. They resisted incorporating traditional techniques such as basic writing or typing. Teachers' exhortations and attempts to motivate students were ignored during the current research. It can be admitted that the sense of self-efficacy and connectedness with students and colleagues referred to earlier as being linked to teaching engagement, as lessening of psychological distress (Klassen, 2012) were partially unsuccessful in this exploratory study. Also, although the students in this study submitted their assignments on time to comply with the course requirements, they tended to

favor technologically mediated communication, using such platforms as Moodle and Yahoo Mail. This situation reduced the opportunity for them to speak in person with the researcher. One possible solution that teachers might employ to reduce classroom anxiety is to turn to the very technological tools that are contributing to these problems. They can be coopted and use in news ways that help them expand and re-evaluate their teaching beliefs. For example, instructors could make videos of themselves teaching to facilitate an objective evaluation of their own teaching style and the reaction of learners. Another importance avenue that could help teachers alleviate the anxiety specific to CALL is to become involved in conferences, workshops, and panels to keep up-to-date with recent teaching philosophies, practices, and research in a more social way (Young, 1991).

Despite having continuously labored to minimize the anxiety of the learners and support their language learning attempts, it is unfortunate that researchers have tended to overlook teachers. This study has drawn attention to the idea that teachers may also experience feelings of language anxiety compounded by CALL, and paralleling those experienced by anxious language learners (Tum, 2013). The susceptibility of non-native speaker teachers to feelings of uneasiness, discomfort, or concern when using the target language notwithstanding (Medgyers (1983), these concerns are not specifically related to language, but rather to the environment the teachers and the students are working within. Thus the researcher would like to consider that it is not only non-native speakers nor native speakers but also part-time teachers and those with limited regular access to computer software, devices and gadgets that are prone to anxiety. Certainly, as Papert (1987) tells us, "in the presence of computers, cultures might change and with them people's way of learning and thinking. But to understand the change, you have to center your attention on the culture, not on the computer". This helps prospective teachers consider the total environment of the classroom rather than focusing narrowly on what a computer program can "do".

This study has demonstrated that work-related stress and specifically classroom environment is a significant problem for EFL teachers. As shown, these can be exacerbated in a CALL environment, especially when adequate prior orientation is not given to instructors. Given this reality, ongoing research, including a deeper analysis of teachers' anxiety, their coping strategies and stress management and how these factors affect the teacher-student relationship, is strongly recommended by the researcher. The small amount of research to date on foreign

language anxiety has looked at speaking and listening but less attention has been given to foreign language reading anxiety. It is the current understanding, however, that the accumulated stress and anxiety caused by speaking, listening and reading equally influence the participation of students in the classroom and remain an important area for continued investigation. Finally, as pointed out earlier, throughout the current investigation the Family Environment Mode Approach (FEMA) undergirded the researcher's approach to teaching and dealing with the students. Though it is in its infancy, it has already been proven to effectively enhance the mindset of EFL learners to embrace the challenge of growth (Ocampo, 2016). Future work combining FEMA and CALL may also prove a fruitful direction for ongoing research and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of anxiety in the language classroom.

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## Appendix A

### Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale

| | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Disagree<br>2. Disagree<br>3. Neither Agree or Disagree<br>4. Agree<br>5. Strongly Agree | | | | | | |
| 1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class. | | | | | | |
| 2. I don't worry about making mistakes in language class. | | | | | | |
| 3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class. | | | | | | |
| 4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language. | | | | | | |
| 5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes. | | | | | | |
| 6. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course. | | | | | | |
| 7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at language than I am. | | | | | | |
| 8. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class. | | | | | | |
| 9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class. | | | | | | |
| 10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class. | | | | | | |
| 11. I don't understand why some people gets so upset over foreign language classes. | | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know. | | | | | |
| 13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class. | | | | | |
| 14. I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers. | | | | | |
| 15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting. | | | | | |
| 16. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it. | | | | | |
| 17. I often feel like not going to my language class. | | | | | |
| 18. I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class. | | | | | |
| 19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make. | | | | | |
| 20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class. | | | | | |
| 21. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get. | | | | | |
| 22. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class. | | | | | |
| 23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do. | | | | | |
| 24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students | | | | | |
| 25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind. | | | | | |
| 26. I feel tenser and nervous in my language class than in other classes. | | | | | |
| 27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class. | | | | | |
| 28. When I am on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed | | | | | |
| 29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says | | | | | |
| 30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language. | | | | | |
| 31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language. | | | | | |
| 32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language. | | | | | |
| 33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance. | | | | | |

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# Appendix B

## Mindset Quiz Survey

Attitudes about learning & intelligence survey. By each statement, mark strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. Mark these choices for what you have felt after the implementation of Family Environment Mode Approach (FEMA) in the class.

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Your intelligence is something very basic about you that you can't change very much. | | | | |
| 2. No matter how much intelligence you have, you can always change it quite a bit. | | | | |
| 3. You can always substantially change how intelligent you are. | | | | |
| 4. You are a certain kind of person, and there is not much that can be done to really change that. | | | | |
| 5. You can always change basic things about the kind of person you are. | | | | |
| 6. Music talent can be learned by anyone. | | | | |
| 7. Only a few people will be truly good at sports – you have to be "born with it." | | | | |
| 8. Math is much easier to learn if you are male or maybe come from a culture who values math. | | | | |
| 9. The harder you work at something, the better you will be at it. | | | | |
| 10. No matter what kind of person you are, you can always change substantially. | | | | |
| 11. Trying new things is stressful for me and I avoid it. | | | | |
| 12. Some people are good and kind, and some are not – it's not often that people change. | | | | |
| 13. I appreciate when parents, coaches, teachers give me feedback about my performance. | | | | |
| 14. I often get angry when I get feedback about my performance. | | | | |
| 15. All human beings without a brain injury or birth defect are capable of the same amount of learning. | | | | |
| 16. You can learn new things, but you can't really change how intelligent you are. | | | | |
| 17. You can do things differently, but the important parts of who you are can't really be changed. | | | | |
| 18. Human beings are basically good but sometimes make terrible decisions. | | | | |

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| 19. An important reason why I do my school work is that I like to learn new things. | | | | |
| 20. Truly smart people do not need to try hard. | | | | |

Adapted from: http://classroom20.com.com/forum/topic/motivating-students-with