Exploring the Role of Art-Based Journaling in Enhancing and Maintaining Motivation in English Language Learning

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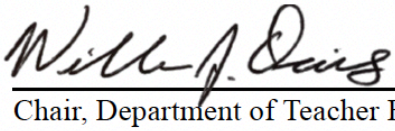

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Abstract

This research aimed to determine whether self-expression through art and journaling can build and sustain language-learning motivation. Several motivational and cognitive aspects are at play for people learning a target language. Integrative, instrumental, and intrinsic/extrinsic motivators might predict a student's success in acquiring a target language. Instrumental motivators refer to a learner's need to learn a target language. Integrative motivators address the learner's perception of target-language speakers. This research aimed to help my students remain motivated in language learning by letting them express their emotions through content-based journaling activities. The results did not support a connection between self-expression and motivation. However, data analysis revealed a significant divergence: more negatively coded sentiments emerged when participants were given art projects rather than written assignments. Students showed more negatively themed art pieces and positively coded written work when asked to reflect on the nature of language learning. This finding suggests that art serves as a safer space for students to express the negative aspects of language learning, whereas their writing may reflect what they perceive as "correct" or expected.

Keywords: language learning, journaling, self-expression, motivation

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I have been an educator for seven years. The bulk of my teaching has been in South Korea. While in Korea, I have only worked at for-profit, private English academies or hagwons. Hagwons face many problems, including inadequate curricula, low student motivation (which leads to student burnout, high parental expectations, and notions of linguistic superiority), and insufficient vetting of incoming teachers, among others. Because of hagwons' problems, students tend to lose motivation very quickly. Not only does this affect their work at the English hagwon, but I have heard from many students that this lack of motivation and academic stress bleeds into all other aspects of their lives. Further, while working for these academies, due to the aforementioned problems, my co-teachers and I would also lose motivation. This lack of teacher care or motivation, which is widespread across all hagwons, only fuels the proverbial fire in Korea's for-profit English education world. It feels like a cycle of new teachers arriving for a year, burning out nine months into their contract, and then leaving their schools with a negative attitude toward teaching in general. While pointing fingers and assigning blame may seem pointless, significant systemic issues must be addressed to improve students' and teachers' well-being. Regardless of how they feel about hagwons, teachers should always strive to give their students the best education they deserve, irrespective of the curriculum and teaching styles dictated by the principal in their academies. Nevertheless, there are considerable limitations in what I, or my co-teachers, could provide to my students.

For this reason, I am excited to create an art-based journaling project to assess sustained motivation for my thesis at Southern Utah University. By the end of my thesis research, I plan to build a free-writing curriculum that uses words and art to help students boost their motivation.

Autoethnography

Many teachers hired in South Korea have little to no teaching experience. It is a joke among teachers in Korea that the only qualification for teaching is having a pulse. A hidden

awareness of this facade affects our students, staff, and teachers' attitudes about their work. We are all aware that we are not teaching in *real* schools. Expulsion from a hagwon will not bar them from attending a prestigious university. Further, the older students get, the less willing they are to learn. They know that their work at the English hagwons is not of high importance. This response leads to a lack of motivation. Further, when our students feel burned out, we, the teachers, also feel frustrated.

In 2017, I decided to move to Korea on a whim, with no teaching experience. My first school was in the suburbs of Seoul, run by a very enthusiastic, warmhearted principal. The week-long teacher training provided for me on my arrival in Korea felt like an appropriate approach to language learning at the time. I was told to read stories aloud with my students and ask them questions about the text. For example, "Where is the dog? Why is she going to the park?" It was not until my second or third year that I noticed that this language teaching was not providing my students with a critical lens. They only scanned the pages to find the answer and read it aloud. With this lazy approach to language education came the eventual lack of motivation in my students and me. My co-teachers and I would complain about the milquetoast approach to language learning.

Three years into my stay in Korea, I was lucky enough to get a job in a hagwon that used a Socratic approach to language teaching. This is where I first became interested in content-based language learning. "Content-based language teaching (CBLT) is an approach to instruction in which students are taught academic content in a language they are still learning" (Lightbrown, 2014). When I approached language learning through the lens of science, history, or art, I saw a significant increase in student motivation. Also, not only did I notice my students feeling more energetic and attentive in class, but I also had a much higher student retention. Further, my students and I could discuss complex philosophical or outlier scholastic concepts, thanks to their inclination toward critical thinking. For example, we often debated human morality and whether or not specific national laws helped create an altruistic society.

These moments of motivation and excitement in my students energized me and led me to create personalized curricula as side projects for my students. We would often intertwine the arts and English education. One such activity involved my students bringing in mementos from their families, and we used the sun's rays to create shadows on photo-sensitive paper. Another project was a three-month assignment about culture. I gave my students 35mm film cameras loaded with black-and-white film. Alongside the cameras, I gave them a scavenger hunt sheet. The objects they needed to find and photograph were varied but primarily involved shapes, shadows, and form. I also required them to document a moment of their lives that could be considered a piece in their cultural “puzzle.” I used the scavenger hunt list to talk about prepositions of space and shapes. Examples included, “Photograph bright light falling on a chair. Photograph horizontal lines against a wall.” By using both adjectives and prepositions, I gave my second-grade students a way to see these English words in action while also exploring art.

Further, I wanted them to photograph aspects of their culture as another layer in the photograph scavenger hunt. Previously, we spent a few months discussing culture throughout the semester. They had a great understanding of the concept, but sometimes defaulted to the food they ate or the clothing they wore as definitions of culture. I wanted them to see that culture is not just the food we eat. While looking at their culture, they took photographs of the parks they walked through with their families, the stores they shopped at, and the religious buildings they entered every week. This showed them that there are micro and macro understandings of culture. By the end of the assignment, I had them write brief statements about their favorite photographs and speak about their importance to the class. I had never seen so much joy and excitement from the photographer and the audience when they went over their works of art in front of the class. I could tell that they remained motivated to listen and learn about the other students’ cultures and findings. While this activity was enjoyable for everyone involved, I was limited in the amount of data I could collect. Because this photo project was more of an

extracurricular activity, I could not test whether their motivation increased. All of my findings were anecdotal.

Researcher Stance

I have personally seen systemic and cultural stress affect my students. With each passing year, child suicide rises in South Korea. Also, there have been many cases of teacher suicide due to the societal pressures of teaching. I believe that we all need to work together as a team to create learning spaces that help students grow personally while also maintaining motivation for their target subject. Because I see the systemic issues that cause physical and mental harm to my students, I am extra careful in the words and actions I assume in class. I walk into my classroom daily with an empathetic heart for my students. Some days, learning our target goals for the day might be unattainable. Adapting to students' needs is paramount for educators in the 21st century. My teaching philosophy and understanding of the lens of this thesis will inform a content-based curriculum grounded in a social constructivist mindset. I choose to view my research through this paradigm to allow for subjective growth and understanding in my students' progression. While quantitative, number-driven data can help show and explain academic growth, it often pigeonholes students into data groups. Empathy will be the cornerstone of understanding academic and social problems. Moreover, developing a research-backed solution to the problem affecting students, staff, parents, and the culture will hopefully bring about the needed change in South Korea.

My motivation for language learning also extends to my own experiences. I have lived in Brazil, Germany, China, South Korea, and Japan. In all these countries, I set out to learn their languages. During my language learning, I often wrote about my difficulty achieving fluency. The easiest language for me was German. While living in Berlin, I was offered a job requiring a C1 (Advanced Level) proficiency. I was at an A2 (Elementary Level) at the time of the job offer. The excitement of a high-paying job was an excellent motivator for me to improve my German, and I eventually reached my target level, C1.

I noted that while living in Korea, I never achieved a high level of fluency. First, the Korean accent was always challenging for me to master. In Korean, the vowels are very different from those in Standard American English. Second, I would always be spoken back to in English when speaking Korean. While this could have just been an opportunity for the other person to practice their English, I always felt demotivated in thinking that my Korean was so awful that they immediately assumed I did not speak. Due to an unwillingness to communicate, I noticed that my Korean quickly fossilized at an intermediate speaking level. These feelings of demotivation got me particularly interested in proper pedagogical approaches to teaching my students. One big issue of concern for me was how I gave corrective feedback. If given improperly, corrective feedback can cause significant distress and further reduce motivation.

Nature of the Problem

The central problem addressed by this study is that students lose motivation to learn a target language due to cultural and scholastic pressure (Lie, 2015; Statistics Korea, 2023), a lack of awareness of the type of schooling hagwons represent, and a loss of interest in the subject matter. This problem affects all my students, regardless of academic level. A lack of motivation can cause a range of problems. A lack of motivation might cause linguistic fossilization. It can also lead to low self-esteem among my students. Especially when they think they are “not good enough.” Further, I have noticed that when students lack the vocabulary to express themselves in the target language, there is an uptick in behavioral issues among my students, as they cannot tell me *why* they are feeling irritated.

Motivation in language learning has been studied. It is understood that motivation comes from two different areas. One is the learner's communication needs. If a student in Mexico is learning Bahasa Indonesia, they might need to know less of the language, especially if they are around a few Indonesian people. This lack of need will cause the student to feel less motivated. Second, students' motivation can arise from their relationships with the people associated with the second language (Lightbrown & Spada, 2013). For example, a student who

admires writers or artists from a particular culture will be more motivated to learn that culture's language. This, in turn, will help the student study and become more motivated in learning.

A lack of motivation can also cause students to stagnate. This stagnation can persist for years if left unaddressed. Fossilization refers to a linguistic “plateau” that some students reach when they are not given proper instruction in their target language. Further, students’ first-language conventions might impede the acquisition of the target language (Lightbrown & Spada, 2013). While the connection between motivation and language fossilization might not be strong, I would like to explore solutions to help my students maintain motivation to overcome linguistic fossilization. Throughout my teaching career, I have seen my students struggle with fossilization. For example, one of my fourth-grade students could not distinguish between the negative auxiliaries “does not” and “did not.” I noticed that regardless of the type of instruction and corrective feedback I gave her, she could never differentiate between the two. Because I never had the chance to give her one-on-one feedback, I felt limited to recasting or to more direct forms of feedback. As I will write later in this thesis, fossilization remains frozen unless there is a combination of direct, clear feedback and motivation.

Purpose

This study aims to help my students overcome their loss of motivation through journaling and art activities. While it is unfeasible to find an area of interest that all my students share, I hope to see many students interested in the arts. Because there are so many media within the arts, an art-based English language learning curriculum will help my students build and retain motivation. I am building a six-week art curriculum that will give my students enough freedom to work with the art medium of their choice. Allowing them to explore themes will make them more inclined to express themselves. With this in mind, an art-based curriculum will help me achieve my research objective.

Challenges and Potential Barriers

I have three main concerns with this research study: time, interest, and opportunities for corrective feedback. The first barrier, time, could make it difficult to determine whether motivation increases in such a short time frame, as the goal is to improve students' target-language proficiency through weekly tests. Also, art projects take varying degrees of time based on an artist's ability, motivation, and vision. If students need more time on a journal assignment but it's due in one week, they may feel demotivated. Second, interest could also significantly affect the research. For example, if I continue to grow in my photography assignment, as I mentioned earlier, yet few students like photography, they could lose interest and become bored, which could hurt their studies.

Finally, because this is a language-based curriculum at its core, I still need to focus on language building, including grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and writing assignments related to the works of art. If I notice errors in my students' grammar during class, when will I feel it is appropriate to correct them? Should I inform them that this is an English class with an emphasis on art or an art class with a focus on English?

Research Question

- What role does creative self-expression through art and journaling play in enhancing and/or maintaining student motivation in language learning?

Definitions

content-based language teaching (CBLT). An approach to language learning where students learn a target language through another academic subject, i.e., using French to learn about organic biology

corrective feedback. A response to a learner's error that identifies the problem and gives them information to adjust the problem

fossilization. A term used in language acquisition where a student's language halts and errors in grammar and pronunciation become fixed

hagwon. Private education programs, usually attended by students after school, often called cram schools

instrumental motivation. A form of motivation where the speaker needs to learn a language for financial stability, for example.

integrative motivation. A form of motivation wherein the learner has a positive opinion about the target language's primary speakers

interlanguage. A linguistic system that includes features of a learner's first language and target language

scaffolding. An instructional tool where a teacher gives guided support to bridge a learning gap, enabling a student to complete a task beyond their current independent ability

target language. The learner's language they are trying to acquire or improve

willingness to communicate. Learner's readiness to communicate in the target language

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Research has shown that a content-based curriculum can better help students learn a target language (Lightbrown, 2013, 2014; Vanpatten et al., 2020). A content-based curriculum involves teaching a target language *through* another subject, like the sciences, arts, history, or math. By using a content-based approach, students use practical target-language skills and feel less pressured to make grammar-based mistakes, as they focus on the subject at hand. I will discuss cultural, motivational, cognitive factors, input vs. output, content-based approaches, emotional aspects, and fossilization in language learning. To properly implement a content-based approach, teachers need clear language-learning goals in mind as they build a content-based curriculum. Further, a teacher must employ appropriate pedagogical approaches, such as fostering curiosity, promoting autonomy, encouraging communication, assigning appropriate group work, setting attainable goals, offering effective praise, and providing corrective feedback. The content a teacher teaches (e.g., science, art, math) is at the teacher's discretion. However, to build excitement and motivation, a teacher should choose a content-based approach in a subject they are familiar with. My research will focus on art and journaling projects because of my strong passion for the arts and creative writing. Other teachers have used media, history, and culture to implement their content-based approach. For example, I will discuss a researcher who acknowledges the desire to learn more about the learners' Korean heritage. By bypassing a student's innate response to language learning mistakes, they naturally internalize a target language's practical vocabulary and grammar.

Historic Perspectives on Language Learning

Early second-language acquisition (SLA) models identified key components of a successful language learner. Such findings indicate that input vs. output and exposure play a significant role in language learning (VanPatten et al., 2020). Further, it has been established that most language learners follow a similar path towards acquisition, with identifiable stages through which they progress. In the early days of SLA theory, behaviourists greatly influenced its

concepts. They believed that positive or negative actions were met with rewards or punishments that affected a language learner, for example. Chomsky's (1965) concept of an innate ability to learn language heavily influenced early theories of SLA. Chomsky also surmised that all languages had a universal grammar. These theories are highly contested, with the majority being disproved. In the 1970s and 80s, Krashen (1981) formulated the Monitor Theory. The monitor theory states that language acquisition is related to the difficulty of the content being acquired. When students are exposed to a target-language goal slightly above their current level, they are more likely to acquire the target language (VanPatten et al., 2020).

As time passed, several schools of thought emerged that challenged both behaviorists and Chomskyists. The functionalist approach to language learning posits that language's primary function is communication. Moreover, a language does not exist without language users (VanPatten et al., 2020). Theorists Coorman and Kilborn (1991) argue that a person's first language gives them an advantage in SLA. This is because they are already familiar with semantic concepts from their first language (VanPatten et al., 2020). Adults can draw on problem-solving and motivation from their previously learned languages to help them progress toward target-language proficiency (Lightbrown, 2014). Teachers can scaffold functional linguistic concepts by recognizing a student's first language. Through scaffolding, learners can use the form and function of communication of their first language to help them acquire their target language. According to a functionalist, meaning-making is the most important aspect of language learning. By incorporating a content-based approach to learning, they learn through the meaning of other subjects in their target language, thus strengthening SLA. As such, teachers should understand a student's primary language well to identify common grammar mistakes and provide proper corrective feedback.

A few interrelated perspectives on language learning currently view it as a complex system of interconnected mental processes. The complex systems perspective posits that language learning is a nonlinear system influenced by several other systems, akin to the stock

market (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). Moreover, the scientific study of chaos can help describe the nonlinear aspects of language learning. As such, a keen understanding of the cultural and socio-political influences our students face is paramount in understanding the chaotic nature of language learning. Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008) are critical of early language-learning models because they do not explain the complex interconnectedness among linguistic processes. Understanding a single part of a learner's language learning process is not enough; you must understand the interactions among all parts. They compare language learning to a pyramid of sand. We can recognize when a piece of sand causes an avalanche into a larger pile of sand. However, we should understand the relationship between sand particles before, during, and after the avalanche. Action research is often invalid because it fails to consider broader perspectives on language learning. Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008) further note that action-based researchers focus on what happens as a result of the study, not on what happens during the research. Moving forward in research, Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008) express their hope that computer programs and brain imaging can be used to explain language learning theories further.

In recent years, the concept of translanguaging has become very popular in linguistic and educational circles. Translanguaging is the understanding that students come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Sayer, 2013). Most of our second language learners have adopted societal safety measures known as code-switching. Code-switching is the change in affectation a person adopts to fit in with the majority culture. For example, a student from a Korean household might change their vocabulary and speech habits when they enter a school with a white majority. Translanguaging recognizes code-switching and encourages students to use their preferred communication style(s). By allowing students to use all their resources, teachers advocate equity in the classroom. Further, it can create linguistic scaffolds with positive feedback and corrective measures. Sayer (2013) wants to decouple notions of "bad" language learning in the context of standard languages and learning content. Sayer theorizes that

translanguaging allows students to continue their self-identification performances while co-constructing themselves in a positive, supportive classroom (Sayer, 2013). With a focus on engaging learning activities and a classroom that encourages differences, teachers and students can work in tandem toward linguistic or academic goals.

Educational and Cultural Context in East Asia

Educational contexts in East Asia are highly competitive. Private academies, hagwons (S. Korea), jukus (Japan), and biji bans (Taiwan) are attended by 78.5 percent of elementary school students and 66.4 percent of high school students in Korea (The Korea Times, 2024) and 51.6% in Tokyo (Kimura, 2018). The added pressure put on students, through societal pressure, has been seen to affect students' mental health, especially in the South Korean educational context. "Korea's youth suicide rate rose from 0.8 for 10-14 years old and 6.4 [per 100,000 population] for 15-19 years old in 2000 to 1.9 and 9.9, respectively, in 2019. In particular, the suicide rate for adolescent girls aged 10-14 nearly tripled from 1.2 in 2017 to 3.2 in 2022. (Statistics Korea, 2023)" As such, suicide in Korea is one of the significant causes of death in teenagers and those in their twenties and thirties. South Korea has the highest rate of suicide among all OECD countries" (Statistics Korea, 2023). A common sentiment among Korean hagwon students is the amount of pressure they feel. Often, students study from eight in the morning until ten in the evening. Does this add pressure on Korean students to build and maintain happy, motivated students?

In South Korea, societal concepts of cultural capital drive students to study day and night. For Korean families, education is one form of cultural capital, or "widely shared high-status cultural signals (e.g., attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods, and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion" (Lamont & Lareau,1988, p. 156). Some studies show that the amount of money students' parents spend on cram schools affects their test scores, further funding and encouraging them to operate for longer hours, using rushed curricula, and placing additional pressure on a student's success (Lee, 2011). Moreover, there is

a significant discrepancy between how international organizations view education and how Koreans perceive it. Lie (2015) speculates that Korea's education system is not as perfect as international organizations assume. According to Lie, the Korean education system does not correctly teach critical thinking skills to its students. Lie posits that students in Korea are trained to listen and accept their teachers' or elders' advice. Because of this uncritical acceptance, accidents like the Sewol Ferry tragedy, where a ship with primarily high school students sank, killing 304 people. Lie (2015) believes it could have been avoided if students were taught critical thinking skills. Lie writes, "It is incontrovertible that the students obediently followed an insane order to stay in the cabin while the ship was clearly capsizing" (Lie, 2015, p. 118). Lie (2015) speculates that the cram-for-testing pipeline is causing students to become too obedient and unwilling to think critically (Lie, 2015).

In South Korea, students attend hagwons for every subject. Students frequent math, English, and test preparation cram schools seven days a week. Lowe (2015) tries to answer a similar efficacy question. He writes that many of these private cram schools are difficult to research. One, they are mostly private companies. This means that due to business practices, they are unlikely to open their doors to research. Cram schools are businesses that rely on a promise of success. As such, they might not be willing to release actual data on their students' academic progress. Further, he writes that cram schools primarily function as places to assist in test preparation. Therefore, researchers argue over whether cram schools benefit students academically or merely prepare them for exams, only for students to forget the material the moment the exam period ends (Lowe, 2015). Lowe (2015) argues, however, that there are benefits to cram schools that warrant further exploration. Curriculum design, motivation, and student perceptions are potential areas of study that could change how we view these private institutions. In Taiwan, empirical evidence supports the claim that cram schools can have a positive long-term effect on a student's scholastic ability (Liu, 2012). Liu (2012) collected data

from the 2001 Taiwan Education Panel Survey and found that students who attend cram schools can increase their math scores by 0.063 per hour of study (Liu, 2012).

Motivation in Language Learning

Primarily, a student's success in any target language depends on their motivation. Lightbrown (2013) outlines the two aspects of motivation that might affect how well a student learns a target language. Both communication needs (instrumental motivation) and attitudes of the language community (integrative motivation) are determining factors (Lightbrown & Spada, 2013). Nevertheless, if a student lacks either of these two forms of motivation, they can still succeed in learning a target language; however, they might have more difficulty attaining native-like fluency.

With these forms of motivation in mind, how do we, as educators, create a climate where one or both of these forms of motivation are present? Lightbrown (2013) acknowledges that a teacher's role is to foster students' integrative motivation by building positive relationships with them. Teachers can create a curriculum that holds a student's interest and contains relevant information that is challenging and manageable (Lightbrown & Spada, 2013). This also involves seeing students as individuals. Teachers need to empathize and know their students' likes, dislikes, behaviors, and attitudes to create a personalized curriculum on the fly.

Content-based curricula build and maintain motivation (Lightbrown, 2013, 2014; VanPatten et al., 2020). In a study by Hae-Young Kim (2005), she worked with 100 Korean language learners. She noted that the students were driven to learn Korean to connect with their heritage and learn about Korean culture, not to become more financially stable, which contradicts many Korean language learners' goals. Often, learners are motivated to attend prestigious American universities, which are valid motivators nonetheless. In Hae-Young Kim's study, she taught a course on Korean culture and history. She writes that "[t]he students revealed immense satisfaction with both the cultural content of the class and the opportunities to read challenging texts and write about them" (Kim, 2005, p. 67). She notes that, while the core

of the class is a content-based approach, educators still need to incorporate language-learning tenets into their curriculum. For example, appropriate instructional feedback is necessary for students to make linguistic progress. Hae-Young Kim (2005) writes that the classes were informal conversations between students and instructors. By utilizing a less academically stressful curriculum, students will feel more at ease expressing themselves without fear of academic reprimand.

Elective creative writing projects have also been shown to increase students' and teachers' motivation. In Argentina, an action research-based study by Banegas (2021) concluded that researchers need to promote motivation in students, as motivation and engagement are essential for language learners achieving fluency in their target language (Banegas, 2021). By synthesizing data from three sets of teachers, Banegas and Lowe (2021) concluded that by looking at a group of 89 language learners, who did not find language learning motivating, creative writing assignments increased “attention and participation, learner-focused teachers' practices, creative writing for publication as an authentic activity for self-expression, and language development in terms of cohesion and coherence” (Banegas, 2021). The students were given journaling assignments in which they wrote about their concerns, difficulties, and language-learning victories. Teachers also expressed their excitement and feelings during lessons, and thus, they were more thrilled to teach their students the target language and goals. Students often feel stuck as they move through textbooks and modules in English-learning contexts. However, allowing them to use their target language in a more free-form activity will make students feel authentic in their self-expression. One student wrote, “I like these activities and the chance that we can write a poem or a story about what matters to me as a person, my feelings, or my concerns about the environment, for example. It's what I sometimes do in Spanish. I write things I don't show to anyone, or things I post on Instagram” (Banegas, 2021).

As mentioned, intrinsic and extrinsic motivators can determine a student's success in language learning. However, in the South Korean educational context, intelligence quotient (IQ) scores and grade point averages (GPAs) are often used to quantify success or motivation. Park (2004) compared the motivation and GPAs of adult military students in a Korean language learning program. Students with lower GPAs reported that they wished there were easier ways to learn Korean than attending class. This differs from the students with higher GPAs, who did not desire an easier way to learn Korean. Park (2004) also found that students with higher GPAs desired to learn Korean beyond the military requirements, compared with lower-level GPA students (Park, 2004). Anxiety levels were also lower among students with higher motivation scores for GPA. Park (2004) concludes that students with higher levels of anxiety generally have higher expectations of self. That is, they set personal goals and allow their anxiety to drive them in achieving their goals (Park, 2004). A further understanding of anxiety in language learning will be provided below.

Motivation is a very delicate aspect of a student’s learning journey. A student’s motivation depends on a teacher’s attitude or belief system. There are many areas of motivation in SLA that will hinder a student’s ability. For example, teacher talk is a speaking style teachers use that does not mimic the actual spoken target language. Lightbrown (2014) recalls the awkward conversations that native speakers and non-native speakers overhear. Often, people think that speaking louder to a non-native speaker will help them understand better. This, however, is not the case and often makes the non-native speaker feel ashamed or embarrassed (Lightbrown, 2014).

Another way teachers can understand and build motivation is to understand the grammar and pragmatics of the speaker's first language. This gives educators insight into the corrective measures they should take to help their students. For example, by understanding that Korean sentence order is subject → object → verb, a teacher could tailor lessons revolving around the target language’s word order. Further, teachers should not see mistakes as *bad*. If a

student says, “I goed to the park,” The teacher should recognize and celebrate that a student has internalized the past-tense marker “ed.” With this knowledge, they can make the appropriate changes to their lesson plans (Lightbrown, 2014).

Content-Based Learning Teaching (CBLT)

This section will present the varying ways CBLT has been used in the classrooms and how it has helped students build motivation and confidence in acquiring their target language. However, even the strong evidence mentions the importance of the teacher. Teachers can create an outstanding curriculum that meets their learners' needs, but if they are not present in the learning process, students will undoubtedly have a more difficult time achieving their goals. Teachers should look at learning alongside students in the spirit of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), a concept developed by Lev Vygotsky in the 1930s.

The first question is whether CBLT is more effective than traditional teaching methods. While both *can* be equally effective, “CBLT offers a ‘two for one’ approach [which] can increase students' time in contact with the new language without taking time away from their regular curriculum. In second language settings, students can continue to make progress in their academic subjects while they are still learning the new language” (Lightbrown, 2014, p. 23). Lightbrown (2014) further writes that CBLT can increase student motivation to understand that the areas of study (math, history, social studies) need to be learned. Thus, students are also more willing to engage with the material in a non-language course with language acquisition in mind than in a language-only classroom (Lightbrown, 2014). Also, students learn using grammar and an academic style that differ from those in a traditional language-learning course. CBLT can also help our students develop advanced proficiency. With this in mind, teachers must create a curriculum that encourages diverse access to the target language while adhering to the school-designated subject curriculum.

A content-based language program can follow any subject as long as there is strong attention to language teaching and feedback. In choosing an area of study, enthusiastic

teachers who can further motivate students to build intrinsic motivation teach the most effective courses. In a film-based Korean language course, Cheon (2007) had students watch and discuss Korean cinema. She structured her course with reading, writing, listening, and speaking in mind, while further noting that authentic Korean media gives students a look into Korean culture. It provides students with insight into the socio-political aspects of life in Korea while offering vocabulary and grammar slightly above their level, which supports language acquisition (Cheon, 2007). Finding a balance between an appropriate level of difficulty and remaining engaged is important in any learning context. Teachers should ensure their content is interesting and relevant to their age and ability level, the learning goals are challenging yet manageable and clear, and the atmosphere is supportive (Lightbrown & Spada, 2013).

As previously mentioned, motivation-building techniques are enhanced when teachers are excited. When a language-learning student sees that their teacher is excited about the subject, they are more likely to maintain proper levels of extrinsic motivation. Thus, the teacher must have first-hand knowledge when choosing a CBLT curriculum subject. Wu and Huang (2017) developed a video game-based curriculum that helped build motivation by leveraging the teachers' and students' interest in video games. They found that through student engagement and proper teaching methods, the students were able to maintain language acquisition goals. Wu and Huang (2017) recognize that games have an innate ability to create excitement and curiosity, and to use interactive features to build motivation and engage interest (Wu & Huang, 2017). It is a natural medium for building intrinsic motivation. They found that students who played a vocabulary-based video game performed better than those who did not. They also conclude that video games boost students' mindsets, which are shaped by competition, alongside their positive attitudes and satisfaction (Wu & Huang, 2017).

Teacher mediation is also crucial to language learners' success. Teachers who work in content-based classrooms must understand not only their students' target language level but also the curriculum being taught. In a science class about magnetism, Gibbons (2003) closely

measured a teacher's content-based English class. She notes that the teacher designed a curriculum that not only addressed the topic at hand but also included practical, everyday English terms the students would likely encounter. Gibbons (2003) writes that students learn through science, like a camera filter; they learn through the filter of science. Because of this, students are less nervous about speaking because they know they are not being assessed on their vocabulary or grammar. However, an observant teacher must note any linguistic issues the student may have and address them later. Further, Gibbons (2003) writes that teachers should use recasting and corrective feedback to help students reframe and recontextualize information.

Art-Based Learning in Language Education

Art-based approaches to learning have become very popular in recent years. Researchers and teachers find that students are more engaged in learning when elements of art are used in tandem with traditional teaching methods. However, despite a renaissance of art education in schools, some people still view the arts as “soft” skills. Because quantitative testing is lacking, the arts are seen as somewhat unserious. However, Whiteclaw (2017) sought to decouple the arts from assumptions about soft skills. Whiteclaw writes that teachers who approach the arts as a “hard” skill can help students develop a deeper understanding of other academic subjects, such as math, science, and language arts.

Often, language teachers are unaware of what art-based activities are appropriate for language learning. Goldberg (n.d.) states that students who are learning new languages often understand subject matter to a greater degree than their target-language vocabulary or confidence allows them to express. (Goldberg, n.d.). The Kennedy Center also offers advice for teachers who are unaware of the approaches to take. One activity that can help students is to have them rewrite song lyrics to match a lesson in class. For example, a student could write lyrics about the Roman Empire set to the tune of Mary Had a Little Lamb. Researchers at Johns Hopkins University explored the effects of music on learning tonal languages, specifically Mandarin Chinese. They found that incorporating music into language learning had a positive

impact on a student's pronunciation, cultural awareness, and memory (Howe, 2024). Mandarin was chosen for this study because it is considered one of the most difficult languages for native English speakers. Using music, they can create a nuanced understanding of the tonal differences in Mandarin Chinese. There is also much research on the brain areas involved in music and language processing that overlap with those involved in short-term memory (Howe, 2024).

Fossilization and Cognitive Factors

Language fossilization can create significant hurdles for learners in achieving native-like proficiency. Fossilization can occur when students are not given appropriate corrective feedback or goals that help them see mistakes or the differences between their target language and their native language (Lightbrown & Spada, 2013). However, teachers assessing linguistic fossilization should not assume that a student's language learning has completely halted. Evidence suggests that fossilization can occur even when a student's learning has not entirely stopped. Thus, fossilization can occur at any time in the learning stage (Fidler, 2006). Fiddler (2006) further notes the difficulty of studying fossilization, stating that, given the nature of research, it is difficult to conduct longer, longitudinal studies (Fidler, 2006, p. 407).

Regarding fossilization, one straightforward way a student can learn to "fix" their mistakes is to stay reticent and maintain a positive, curious mind. It can be challenging to create this environment in the classroom, which is why positive, empathetic teaching is essential to addressing issues of school motivation. Imai (2024) writes about the importance of maintaining positive relationships between teachers and students to help with fossilization errors. He states on his website that teachers need to encourage intrinsic motivation, which deserves much more attention if future studies about students' cognitive factors in language learning (Imai, 2024). Imai (2010) offers many ways teachers can help facilitate positive learning environments in their students, including group work, positive reinforcement, and a curriculum that avoids frustration or boredom.

Affective Factors in Language Acquisition

Affective factors in learning include feelings of anxiety, depression, confidence, and motivation. All these factors can have positive or negative effects on our students. As mentioned above, anxiety can actually have a positive effect on our students' learning. However, anxiety can also affect our students negatively. If language-learning students do not produce output (e.g., speaking and writing) in the target language, they are less likely to develop the language-learning skills needed for linguistic proficiency. MacIntyre (1995) writes about the effects anxiety has on our learning behavior, namely as it relates to social anxiety. MacIntyre expresses his thoughts on a student's "demand to answer a question in a second language class may cause a student to become anxious; anxiety leads to worry and rumination. Cognitive performance is diminished by divided attention; therefore, performance suffers, leading to negative self-evaluations and more self-deprecating cognition, further impairing performance, and so on (MacIntyre, 1995). He mentions that anxiety or low self-confidence can cause students to ruminate over potential phrases or grammar points. The connections among anxiety, behavior, and cognition significantly affect how our students learn target languages. "[L]anguage learning is a cognitive activity that relies on encoding, storage, and retrieval processes, and anxiety can interfere with each of these by creating a divided attention scenario for anxious students" (MacIntyre, 1995, p. 96). To help our students manage anxiety, we must be empathetic teachers or group leaders. By emphasizing positive, caring classrooms, we can potentially mitigate feelings of anxiety and judgment.

A growth mindset for language is an attitude that emphasizes the ability to improve language skills over time. Teachers are essential in sustaining a growth language mindset in their classrooms. In a study of 2,163 foreign-born Canadian students, Lou and Noels (2020) found that higher levels of self-assessed growth mindset positively affect a student's acquisition of the target language. Newly arrived students felt higher levels of anxiety, but when they were able to have a positive growth language mindset, their anxiety dissipated, and they were able to

obtain levels of fluency at a much quicker rate. Lou and Noels speculate that, as time passes and if a positive growth language mindset is not established, migrant students will be faced with the cyclical nature of anxiety, which leads them to avoid using the target language, which will delay proper levels of input and output, which are needed to achieve native-like fluency (Lou, 2020).

The Intersection of Motivation, Cognition, and Content-Based Instruction

In creating a divide between academic English and emotional aspects of language learning, Researchers in Poland set out to create an English journaling activity incorporating the natural world, or nature journaling. Nature journaling is a journaling activity where students write about their emotional responses to the nature around them. They are encouraged to talk about what they see, smell, and feel in nature (Mueller, 2023). They also stress the importance of removing students from the academic stresses they feel daily. As we face a climate disaster, Mueller and Pentón Herrera (2023) both acknowledged that a student's access to the natural world can be somewhat defined by their socioeconomic status. They even offer solutions for learners who do not have as easy access to the outdoors as others. Students who live in urban environments can still enjoy and write about the outdoors. The teacher should allow them to find joy in the outdoor areas available to learners. The students can even find excitement in drawing a leaf or describing the trees in a park. Mueller (2023) also mentions that when students can write or express themselves about what they already know about nature, this can open them up to the emotional aspects of nature journaling (Mueller, 2023).

Nature journaling not only takes an emotional approach to language learning, but it also incorporates science-based activities through a content-based approach. For example, students can observe tree growth in the park or talk about how the changing seasons affect the foliage. Further, giving students the tools to express themselves addresses three aspects of language learning: emotions, science, and their target language. Hannah Mueller and Luis Javier Pentón Herrera (2023) find that in nature journaling, "learners gained autonomy in writing, and shifted

attitudes toward more positive experiences in language learning by taking risks and paying attention to creative-aesthetic value" (Mueller, 2023, p. 3). By giving students access to the natural world, the nature connection allows them to reflect inwardly. Teachers can then emotionally and linguistically scaffold students' experiences. Teachers must have a keen understanding of linguistic developmental practices and an empathetic awareness of their students' needs.

Explorations at the intersection of social-emotional learning (SEL) and target language acquisition also play a significant role in our students' success. SEL is the practice of equipping your students with the skills to live an actualized life. It is also the practice of teaching critical thinking, emotional communication, and empathy. Now, more than ever, our students need to be equipped with critical thinking skills. Critical thinking is paramount for their success as our future unfolds and jobs continue to change and erode not only in an economic sense but also in a societal sense. Herrera (2020) identifies five competencies that students should acquire through an SEL-minded curriculum. They are as follows: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Herrera, 2020). These skills help our students in the classroom and their lives as siblings, neighbors, and community members. By utilizing Socratic-style instruction, Herrera allows his students to use their first language alongside their target language and to engage in semi-structured art projects. Some students who feel nervous about communicating would benefit from Herrera's approach, which allows them to give a final summative assessment in which they can express their emotions through art, writing, or speaking (Herrera, 2020). Educators have so many incredible tools at our disposal. To create meaningful educational experiences for our students, we must think on our feet and meet every student with empathy and an open ear.

Conclusion

Several facets of motivation and cognitive factors affecting students' language learning were presented. Motivation is a key factor in how well our students perform. By teaching

through other subjects in a target language, we can allow our students the opportunity to work with media or tools that they are unfamiliar with. However, this is no easy task. It requires a lot of planning, communication, and empathy from our teachers. Lessons must have clear, concise goals with room for deviation.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Students who attend private academies tend to lose motivation quickly. This is due to a litany of problems, including stress, lack of interest, and fossilization errors. Motivation can also decrease due to the societal understanding that private academies, or hagwons, are not *real* schools. Therefore, they do not need to focus too much energy on their work. My research aimed to answer the following question: How does creative self-expression through art and journaling influence student motivation in language learning?

Participants and Setting

The hagwon I worked at is in the high-SES neighborhood of Seocho, Gangnam, South Korea. There is an unspoken competition that many parents feel living in these neighborhoods. The parents want their students to look like they have been admitted into the area's most expensive, competitive hagwons. To keep ahead of high competition, hagwon owners will create a false narrative of success by turning down a high number of students, regardless of how they did on entrance exams or speaking assessments. One competitive hagwon owner told me the idea of competition alone is enough to raise school profits. Because of this competitive aspect, parents expect a lot from the hagwons and students. Numerous Korean television shows dramatize these competitive moms and hagwon schools. Such dramas include Green Mothers' Club (그린마더스클럽), Angry Mom (앵그리맘), and Crash Course in Romance (일타 스캔들). Most students attended Korea's public school system. My students' ages ranged from third grade to sixth grade. I had three girls and seven boys. My academy is in an office building in a highly urban setting.

Instruments and Data Collection Tools

Four data tools were used throughout the eight-week motivation project. Given the delicate nature of the Korean private academic system, I used collection tools that placed the least stress on my students. This is because I found the amount of homework my students had

to do at their regular schools and other hagwons to be high. I wanted to build motivation while still allowing them the freedom to be kids.

Student Journals

For the first four weeks of the research, I had them write whatever came to mind in a sketchbook. I chose a sketchbook so they could also create visual art as part of the study. As the study continued, I guided them in their writing by asking guided questions, including, “What English goals did you have this year?” “What activities and lessons helped you internalize English vocabulary and grammar points?” By allowing them the freedom to choose how to write in their journals, I was able to compare and contrast their journals from the beginning of the study to their later entries.

Exit Tickets

I had them participate in monthly exit tickets. I asked, "How do you feel today?", "What helped you learn best in class today?", "Was anything confusing or difficult today? What could we do differently next time?", "Is there anything you wish we did more (or less) of in class?", and "How do you feel about school this week?" I asked them to write about what they enjoyed about the class and what they wished we could incorporate into the learning environment. Because a hagwon was very structured, not all of their requests could be added to the class. However, I tried my best to improve my students' learning environment.

Motivation Scales

I administered a small motivation questionnaire to my students at the beginning of the new semester. Students scored their motivation to learn English on a scale of 1 to 5 or using smiley and frowny faces. Questions included: “I enjoy learning new vocabulary. I enjoy reading English books for fun. I feel good when I do well on a writing assignment. I feel excited to learn new words, even when it is difficult.” The questionnaire assessed their motivation to study, read, write, and speak English, as well as their enjoyment of learning in extracurricular activities. I

staggered the motivation scales and exit tickets to avoid giving them too much assessment at once.

Vocabulary Quizzes

My students took weekly vocabulary quizzes on a scale of 1 to 25. Their scores were recorded and analyzed for improvement. I compared class trends individually and with the class as a whole. Further, because I could not implement my art-based learning approach across all my classes, I compared the vocabulary scores of the other classes with those of my art-based learning group.

Procedures - 8 Weeks

I collected the students' journals at the beginning of every class to make copies for review. I returned the notebooks before the end of the day. The following table shows what I did for the research weeks.

Table 1

8-Week Project Timetable

Week 1	Week 2 `	Week 3	Week 4
Free-Writing Exit TIcket	Free-Art	Free-Writing Motivation Scale	Free-Art Exit Ticket
Week 5	**Week 6**	**Week 7**	**Week 8**
Guided-Art	Guided-Art Exit Ticket	Guided-Writing Motivation Scale	Guided-art Exit TIcket

Week 1 - In-Class, Free-Journaling

The first week, I introduced the journals and distributed them to the students. I ensured the journals lacked lines, as students would color, draw, or paint on the pages; a sketch notebook was preferred. The first four weeks' assignments were all free writing activities. Many students had difficulty free-writing, so the first four weeks primed them for more directed

free-writing assignments. If they were still unsure what to write about, I suggested writing about their experiences in class and any difficulties they encountered with English language learning. Students were not graded on grammar or spelling. I also mentioned that the following week students would begin working on visual art in the journal they used for free-writing. To introduce the activities, I showed examples of art that could be included in the journals. The students could use any medium they wanted to express themselves. If the students could not access art supplies, I provided them with a box of colored pencils or watercolors.

Week 2 - In-Class, Free Art

I received the students' notebooks and scanned any pages for future reference. I then introduced the art aspect of the weekly journal assignment. The students had a chance to express themselves using art. If they were unsure what to write in their journals, I could provide examples, e.g., their families, pets, and favorite parks to visit. I also provided a few examples of art they could create. I expected my students to work on the journals for thirty minutes outside of class, unless they wanted to spend more time on their work.

Week 3 - In-Class, Free-Journaling

I collected the art journals and made copies of the journals. The students were encouraged to talk about their art pieces in front of the class. I then assigned the last free-writing activity. Also, I began to introduce next week's writing activity. I explained that they were moving away from free-writing activities and into slightly more structured writing activities about their English learning journey. I also administered their first motivation questionnaire.

Week 4 - In-Class, Free Art

The students had their final free art journal project for week four. Starting in week six, they had some prompts to follow as they created art. I gave a brief explanation to prime the students for a slight change in direction. I also gave the students an exit ticket.

Week 5 - In-Class, Guided-Journaling

After I copied their writing assignment, I let them know that for the writing assignment

due the following week, they would answer a series of slightly more guided writing prompts. Before I assigned the questions, the students and I discussed the concepts, so the students were confident in answering them.

They could answer one or all of the following questions.

- Why might language learning be useful?
- What are your favorite aspects of learning a new language?
- What aspects of the Korean language do you find exciting?
- How do language and culture overlap?

Also, I gave the students a class motivation scale to return the following week.

Week 6 - In-Class, Guided Art

After making copies of their written work, the students were encouraged to speak about what they wrote in front of the class. Even if they did not want to read what they wrote, they were encouraged to have a loose conversation about the topics. I gave the students loose prompts for this week's art project. Before I assigned the questions, the students and I discussed the concepts, so the students were confident in answering them.

They could work with one or all of the following art directions.

- Show a time you were excited about learning a language
- Show us how Korean culture and language are connected
- Show us what it feels like to learn new words in another language

Week 7 - In-Class, Guided-Journaling

Students were encouraged to talk about their art assignment. If a few students wanted to speak about their experiences, I led a short guided conversation about the obstacles in creating an art piece about language learning. I assigned the guided-writing activity.

They could answer one or all of the following questions.

- How did you overcome challenges in learning a new language?
- Describe a time when your second language unexpectedly helped you.

- What advice would you give to someone learning a new language?

Week 8 - In-Class, Guided Art

After making copies of their written work, the students were encouraged to speak about what they wrote in front of the class. Even if they did not want to read what they wrote, they were encouraged to have a loose conversation about the topics. I gave the students loose prompts for this week's art project.

They could work with any of the following art directions.

- Show us somewhere you want to visit that has a culture different from Korea's.
- Show us a word or idea in English that was hard to learn.
- What is in your language-learning toolbox?

Data Analysis

This study aimed to find ways for teachers to build and maintain student motivation. I used subjective and objective understandings of their students' work and attitudes as expressed in their exit tickets, motivation scales, and journals.

Student Journals

The student journals were thematically analyzed based on the written themes in the journals. I observed certain instances of qualitative wording, e.g., positive words (happy, excited, curious) and critical words (sad, frustrating, hard, difficult). By organizing the words into charts, I was able to analyze word instances and see changes over the eight weeks. Further, as art was a large component of this project, I thematically coded their work as positive or negative artistic themes. As students talked about their art, I transcribed their conversations and coded their language into different groupings.

Exit Tickets

Similarly to the student journals, I conducted a thematic analysis of students' word choices or suggestions for classroom schedules. Exit tickets were analyzed to determine whether their vocabulary changed over the course of the project.

Motivation Scales

The motivation scales were quantitatively measured using averages. They had eight questions, each with five smiley faces, from sad to happy. I analyzed them on a scale of 1-5, with sad being one and happy being five. The two motivation scales were averaged for the class as a whole and for each individual.

Quizzes

The vocabulary test scores were examined weekly; therefore, they should have helped me quantitatively understand the students' motivation. While I understood that certain vocabulary sets might have had more difficult words, there should have been a fairly straightforward quantitative analysis, as the vocabulary tests were always twenty-five questions, scored out of one hundred percent. I used averages over the eight weeks and created a correlation based on their vocabulary test scores.

Conclusion

This research had quantitative and qualitative analyses of the students' work. Further, I offered my own opinion on the students' work after the eight weeks. By analyzing the exit tickets and student journals using thematic analysis, I confidently assessed their work and overall emotional state as English language learners. For example, if Student A wrote their first journal entry using discouraging words, such as confusing, hard, difficult, or annoying, Student A's language was measured against their later journal entries, using thematic coding. Further, I looked at their art through a thematic lens. While art was entirely subjective, I tried to measure the emotions of their work. I provided examples of their work in chapter four. By comparing their language, mood, and test scores, I felt confident in my judgment of the art-based journaling activities related to building motivation and sustaining language learning. To adopt a thematic understanding of their journals, I asked my colleagues for help and asked them to analyze the students' journal entries. The results of the procedures were presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this research project was to determine whether self-expression through art and free-journaling projects builds and/or sustains motivation. The question for this research project was, "What role does creative self-expression through art and journaling play in sustaining student motivation in language learning?" The project followed an eight-week schedule where written and art tasks were alternated. The first four weeks of the project allowed the students to write about and draw whatever they liked. The following four weeks included guided responses to gauge their enjoyment of learning languages and to examine the motivating factors behind their studies. The tools consisted of motivation scales, exit tickets, self-directed writing and art projects, and guided writing and art projects.

Exit Tickets

Over the eight weeks of the study, students completed five different takeaways that measured their overall feelings about the class. Two questions were simple faces to express their feelings about class that week. The smiley faces were assessed quantitatively. The written questions asked them how they felt about class that week and how the teacher could assist them further. The exit tickets also ask them what their favorite aspect of the class that week was.

Over the eight-week project, students completed three exit tickets (see Appendix A). While their self-reported positive feelings peaked in the second exit ticket, this satisfaction declined in the last exit ticket. The first exit ticket was administered on the first day of journal introduction. They were administered on a Thursday before heading home for the day. The students had recently gone outside for an activity, and many of the sentiments in their written statements expressed excitement about going outside. The first question, “How do you feel today?”, had an average of 4.11 out of 5, as shown in Appendix A. The second question, “How do you feel about school this week?”, had a lower score with an average of 3.75.

The second exit ticket was administered on Friday afternoon in week four. Both responses had higher scores of 4.27 and 4.18, respectively. However, the third exit ticket showed a decline, with an average score for “How do you feel today?” dropping to 3.09, and “How do you feel about school this week?” falling to 3.73. The following exit tickets were not administered on Friday afternoons, as I was worried their excitement to go home for the weekend might have skewed their responses.

As for the written responses, when students were asked, "What helped you learn the best in class today?", three students mentioned that the teacher helped them learn the most. In the second exit ticket, all mentions of the teacher disappeared, and art became the dominant theme. They wanted to work on more art projects in class. Further, in week four, students mentioned that playing games helped them learn well in class. Earlier in the lesson, I played a vocabulary game with a kinesthetic element.

In week one, regarding the questions "Was anything confusing or hard today? What could we do differently next time?", the dominant sentiment was that nothing was wrong or confusing. Many students simply wrote, “Nothing” or “No.” However, in week four, many students expressed frustration with "The Secret Garden," a novel we recently started reading.

Finally, the last question on the exit ticket was, “Is there anything you wish we did more (or less) of in class?” The first week’s responses had no dominant theme. Some students said “Nothing,” while others said “Everything,” meaning they wanted less of all the homework in class (e.g., “I want less of everything”). The fourth week's exit ticket had more instances of positive expressions of the class protocols, wherein they stated that nothing more was needed in class. Also, three students mentioned that they wished they could play more in class. As previously mentioned, we had just finished playing a vocabulary game.

The third exit ticket showed lower levels of class satisfaction for both questions. Further, two students wrote their own smiley faces that were lower, or sadder, than the saddest face. The dominant theme across all tickets was a desire to play more games in class. Students

rushed through the final exit ticket. For the questions asking how I could improve the class environment, many wrote “No” or “Nothing.” Interestingly, there was also a higher reporting of “bad” and “not-good” responses in their journals. However, when compared to week one’s journaling project, which had a similar level of “not-good” responses, it is hard to make a connection since their week one exit tickets showed higher class satisfaction.

Motivation Scales

I gave my students two motivation scales throughout the eight-week project (see Appendix B). The data shows their motivation was relatively high on every question except for enjoying English media outside of class. The first motivation scale was given in their third week of the journaling project. The first motivation scale showed fairly high results for all questions. The question with the fewest positive responses was “I enjoy reading books or stories in English for fun.” The question with the highest standard deviation in week one was the first question, "I enjoy the challenge of learning English." The second motivation scale showed higher responses in all areas except for question seven, "I enjoy listening to music or watching shows in English outside of class." The class average increased from 3.82 on the first motivation scale to 4.07 on the second motivation scale.

Thematic Analysis of Journal Entries

Thematic analysis of their journal entries was used to assess their emotions throughout the course (see Appendix C). The data show general growth and sustained use of positive language throughout the eight weeks. The first two journaling activities had no prompting, so students could write whatever they wanted. Many students wrote about what they had done over the weekend. One student wrote, "This weekend, I am going to my grandparents' house and to an art academy, and I'm excited to see my grandparents." Many of the students have extracurricular activities on the weekend and lament having to go. Many students wrote about video games outside of school. Two brothers wrote about a Pokémon Go event they attended. “I went out to play with my brother. Before that, my brother left early because he wanted to do the

new Groudon raids. I told him that there would be no people. Minutes after he left, I called him to check if he was still at the raid. When I called him, he told me that seven people were there, so I used my remote raid to join." His brother expressed similar excitement about the event. Other students talked about playing Roblox and Minecraft.

I thematically assessed their journals by categorizing their words, emotions, and sentiments as "Bad," "Not-Good," "Good," and "Amazing." The first week of free-response journaling showed a fairly even split of positive and negative responses. The first week's positive responses (e.g., Good and Amazing) constituted 48.8%. However, the following week, there was a significant increase in positive responses, reaching 77.8%. The fifth week's journaling activity involved guided questions for them to answer. Surprisingly, the positive response rate stayed in line with their week 3 responses, at 86.8%.

In week 5, they were prompted to journal with the following questions. "How do you think language and culture are connected? Why might language learning be useful in your life? What are your favorite parts of learning a new language? What parts of the English language do you find exciting or beautiful?" The dominant theme in the week five journals was about making friends. Many students expressed joy at being able to communicate with people from other countries. One student wrote, "It is useful because I can communicate with foreign people, learn about their beliefs and cultures, and understand other countries better." Other students wrote that they feel proud when they can successfully communicate with English speakers and read street signs. "My favorite part of learning a new language is when you finish learning it and you can understand it and read the things on the road. It makes you proud that you know a lot of languages."

The instances of "bad" and "not-good" coding came from one student who expressed their frustration with learning in a loud classroom. Specifically, "I don't like [Student] doing "re, re." It is kind of annoying to me." Another student only wrote, "Learning English is important there should be no Korean."

Week seven showed even more “not-good” coded language. They were prompted with, “What advice would you give to someone just starting to learn a new language?
How did you overcome challenges in learning a new language? (For example, feeling shy, difficulty with grammar, or remembering words). Describe a time when your second language unexpectedly helped you.” Students once again wrote about friendship as the dominant, positively-coded theme. They frequently mentioned that to overcome certain challenges, they should rely on friends. One student wrote, “When I was learning English in my old school, I was very nervous that I had to do a speech contest. But my friends and teachers helped me to memorize the speech, so I became an English lover, and I like to talk with Americans.”

In week seven, many students also advised other language learners. While there was no central theme to their advice, the overarching sentiment was to keep trying no matter what. One student wrote about not worrying about your accent while you speak, “just focus on speaking because the person that you are talking to will still understand what you are saying. If you just focus on the accent then you can't remember the words.” Another student wrote, “The advice that I will give to someone else is to try hard. Learning a new language is actually very entertaining and fun. I learned Korean, English, Chinese, and Japanese.” After we finished our week seven activity, the student mentioned that they preferred using the journal for free-writing. They felt the guided-writing activities were too limiting.

Sentiment Analysis of Visual Data

The assessment of the themes within their art projects followed a similar schematic to the written aspect of their journaling projects (see Appendix E). The data shows a decline in positive language, and a sharp increase of negative language following the introduction of the guided-art projects. I qualitatively assessed the emotional value within each piece using the same scale as the journal: Bad, Not-Good, Good, Amazing. During the assessment, if a particular art piece drew contradicting emotions, I would ask a co-teacher to help assess. In the case we were both confused, I would speak to the student themselves. This was particularly

useful for a self-portrait of my student looking at a text message conversation with a confused face and a sunset with a particularly self-deprecating statement (see Appendix F)

The first two art assignments showed similar themes throughout the class. Many students drew pictures of their apartment complexes or neighborhoods. The two brothers, who love Pokémon, drew several pages of Pokémon they had caught over the weekend. They even apologized for drawing so much, but said they got caught up in the art. The only thematically negative response I got in the first two art activities (see Appendix D) was an image of an angry face yelling, “Do Homework.” The student's soccer-watching schedule is shown in the image. The first shows my student pointing at a Pokémon raid, surrounded by his two favorite Pokémon. The second drawing is the student’s soccer viewing schedule (see Appendix D) and an angry face yelling, “Do HomeW[ork]”

Starting in week six of the project, they were asked a specific art prompt. They were asked to create art with one of the following statements. “Show a time you were excited about learning a language. Show us how Korean culture and language are connected. Show us what it feels like to learn a new word in another language.” Students were also asked to use a medium other than a pencil. (e.g., crayons, markers, colored pencils, watercolors.)

Three of the responses included drawings unrelated to any of the above prompts: a soccer match, a dog, and a drawing from the anime "Demon Slayer." One student drew a picture of themselves looking at a cellphone, with a confused face, in an unknown language. The student later described this drawing as fun and curious, depicting what it feels like to learn a language. I chose to code this drawing as “good.” Another student drew a picture of a sunset (see Appendix F) with the text, "My learning is going down like the sun is rising." When I asked them what they meant by this sentiment, they responded with, "Just." ("Just" is a typical response for English language learners in English to express an ambivalent position.) I, however, chose not to code this drawing in a positive light, as I see frustration in this student

when they cannot express themselves in English, and they can in Korean. Week six had the largest percentage of negatively coded art at 80% (see Appendix E, Section 2)

The students' week eight art activity continued to be guided with the following single prompt. "Think about a recent time you had to communicate in English. Show how you felt at that moment." Students were encouraged to express more abstract feelings. Four students drew abstract swirls of colors, letters, and shapes (see Figure 1). Of the four, only one of the drawings was explicitly "bad," as per the student's explanation. It shows a girl encircled by swirls and circles, with the caption "Nervous." The other students spoke about the "swirling confusion" that happens in their minds as they try to speak, translate, and define on the fly in English. Yet, their motifs were presented as positive, curious emotions (see Appendix G).

Figure 1

Nervous Emotions

In week eight, two students drew self-portraits, shown in Appendix H. One student, the same student who described their learning as “going down,” drew a picture of themselves in English class with the caption “English feels relaxed and it is fun!” Another student drew a picture of themselves interacting with American students, being asked whether they were from North or South Korea. However, the student described that experience as “very fun.” Overall, the two guided-art projects, in weeks six and eight, yielded a negative percentage of 68.6% (see Appendix E, Section 3) and a positive outcome of 31.5%.

Weekly Quizzes

Students took three vocabulary quizzes over the eight-week research period (see Appendix I). The data show an increase in scores on the second quiz, followed by a sharp decrease on the last quiz. The first quiz showed an average score of 50.43%. The first week had a large score range, from 80% to 15%. The second quiz showed a significant increase in score. The second quiz's average was 71%, with a high score of 100% and a low score of 37%. Finally, in preparation for a midterm exam, I gave my students a practice test. The scores had a substantial drop. After peaking at 71%, the quiz score average dropped by almost 17 percentage points to 54.45%, with a median score of 49%. The highest score was 90% and the lowest score was 30%. While designing their quizzes, I tried to be as consistent as possible, avoiding making them more difficult than others. However, because their quiz three content covered a larger area of knowledge, it could have also been slightly more challenging for the students.

Conclusion

After eight weeks, the students’ motivation rating increased; however, their final test scores decreased significantly. Further, after the introduction of the guided art and journaling projects, the emergence of “not-good” or “bad” themes within their art and journaling increased. After speaking with my students, it was clear that the “bad” themes stemmed from their inability to be silly in their writing and from having to confront the uncomfortable truth of language

learning: language learning is difficult. Using art as a form of expression could make them more truthful than when they write. While they enjoyed the guided journal projects, they noted they had to confront the uncomfortable truths of language learning, e.g., shyness, vocabulary, grammar, and writing.

Chapter 5: Reflections

The purpose of this research project was to determine whether self-expression through art and free-journaling projects builds and/or sustains motivation. The question for this research project is, "What role does creative self-expression through art and journaling play in sustaining student motivation in language learning?" The following chapter will validate the evidence that supports my knowledge claim.

Knowledge Claim

Based on this study, I have not drawn any concrete conclusions to answer my initial question: whether journaling and self-expression through art directly affect the motivation of my particular group of English language learners. While motivation increased over the eight-week study, their test scores did not reflect this increase. However, there were some fascinating trends in the emotional coding of words depending on the media of expression the student utilized. “Bad” themes were more prevalent in their later art projects, which contradicts my claim that self-expression through journaling and art projects will produce more positive emotions in my students. This discovery, however, raises interesting questions about whether students feel more “free” to express themselves through art.

The difference between their free- and guided-response answers challenged my assumptions about my initial research question. When my students were given their journals initially, they were free to write about whatever they wanted. They generally wrote about their daily schedules or homework assignments they were working on. These journal entries mirrored an activity log that could suggest “academic freedom” to write could be seen as an unknown production task, especially when hagwon students are generally required to repeat information. Possibly, for future students, I can call their journals “thought notebooks” to invoke a different association with the physical writing tool (e.g., their journal). This might prime them to change the way they approach the activities. However, because many students were not previously familiar with free-writing, I allowed them early freedom in what they wrote, as learning to

free-write is a valuable asset for self-expression. And much like a musical instrument, journaling takes practice to become confident in putting thoughts on paper.

I further noticed that the *guided* writing activities yielded interesting results. They were far more positive in their language when guided by my questions, whereas their guided art projects prompted more negative themes. This was evident when you compared the lines of questioning in the art and journaling projects; they were very similar. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, the South Korean education system adheres to rigid perceptions of authority. Lie (2015) posits that students are encouraged to appease elders by not questioning systems. My findings on their positively coded writing directly support Lie's hypothesis about the hierarchy in the Korean education system; they might have used positive words to show their acceptance of the system, while reserving their more negative feelings for a "safer" medium of art. My data support this claim. 65% of the coded language during their guided journaling projects was positive (see Appendix C, Section 1), whereas 31.5% of the coded art during their guided art projects was positive. This sharp difference supports Goldberg's (n.d.) assertion that art can help students convey ideas out of their linguistic reach. However, my findings add nuance to Banegas and Lowe's (2021) research. Banegas and Lowe refer to creative writing as a means of supporting authentic expression, yet my research asserts that art is an even more genuine form of expression.

On the other hand, art is a safer space to be oneself. A qualitative understanding of their artwork could offer a more "real" look into the emotions associated with language learning. My students might feel more comfortable being *honest* about their negative feelings associated with language learning. My data support this, which showed that 68.6% of the guided art projects revealed negative analysis (see Appendix E, Section 3), suggesting that they are more comfortable confronting the uncomfortable truths in language learning; i.e., it is difficult and frustrating at times. When primed with an abstract understanding of different art movements, many students chose to mimic the swirling motions of a Van Gogh and the abstract walls of

color akin to a Rothko. There was a small light that I observed click on in my students as I showed them that art can be anything. I further leaned into this “light” by teaching them to use expressions of the mind as tools to paint or draw with. Their abstract realizations were beautiful to see in person. I loved watching my students’ eyes light up as they put their art media on their papers. And while they did show more negative themes in their later art projects, I wanted to emphasize to my students that those emotions are valid and, in fact, very normal for language learners. Often, awareness of these emotions is a first step toward mitigating negative emotions in any task. I am profoundly proud of my students for looking inward for this project.

Reflections

My original study was planned for ten weeks, but due to time-management issues at my hagwon, I was unable to start it on the original start date. Therefore, I was only able to perform the research for eight weeks. However, another two weeks of data collection would have made no significant difference in their motivation. In fact, their motivation was contingent on other, non-time-related factors. For example, during some lessons, the topics discussed in class were more engaging, and thus, they were better prepared for their vocabulary tests and expressed more positive thoughts in their journals that week. For example, in week four, after we had started reading The Secret Garden, one student mentioned in an exit ticket that they wanted to spend less time on the book. This is because the English in The Secret Garden is written to convey a Yorkshire accent, which is very different from the Standard American English spoken in class. This suggests that The Secret Garden is beyond the students’ current linguistic understanding, which fails to support Krashen’s (1981) i + 1 monitor theory.

Material constraints also posed significant challenges in this research. As I mentioned in chapter three, I did not want to overwhelm my students by giving them a large amount of exit tickets and motivation scales, since they are already inundated with homework from their numerous hagwons and schools. Because of this, I only gave them the three exit tickets and

three motivation scales. Future research will benefit from more quantitative data collection. This also includes a rubric-based quantitative understanding of their essay writing.

Other aspects of the classroom environment also yielded key findings that helped me test my assumptions about the intersection of motivation and self-reflection. For example, I noticed differences in how they responded to questionnaires depending on the day of the week. On Fridays, they were much more eager to go home than on Thursdays, so they responded more quickly to the questions, often answering “Nothing” when asked about any complicated or confusing concepts in class that day. On our second exit ticket, I distinctly remember having to remind my students to finish it several times. If this happens in future research, I will add a sixth option in the quantitative analysis, N.A., for when I can see they did not spend the time to reflect on the question. Also, I will distribute the exit tickets and motivation scales on a fixed day to not sway the results.

While introducing the eight-week project to my students, I covered all its aspects, except for my original research question and its expected outcome. This included details about their writing being used as data for my thesis project, as well as an example length and content base for the journaling and art projects. They were excited to learn that the journaling assignments would not be used in any final. I later noticed that because they knew the activity was not graded, they were less pressed to finish it in detail. (e.g., They prioritized the homework from their other hagwons and school over the journal). I would potentially consider including future journaling projects as a graded assignment. It would be interesting to explore the emotional coding of words by comparing results from two separate classes: one graded and one non-graded.

I also observed that to gain deeper insight into my students' language-learning journey, it benefited their expressivity to be physically present with them as they wrote. When I helped them define questions or brainstorm, they were able to create more detailed responses to my prompts. This directly supports Gibbons’ (2003) assertions about teacher mediation, in which

teachers can help students bridge knowledge from their independent level. However, I worked hard not to include any of my own ideas during the brainstorming process, but I worry that other students' words influenced what they decided to write about. For example, there are two artworks featuring characters from the Korean, Roman, and Japanese alphabets (see Appendix G). During their reflection time, these two students were sitting directly next to each other.

Finally, my project reflection has ultimately led me to want to have spent more time discussing different art forms and techniques. The students' reliance on concrete representations in art, such as stick figures, limited my understanding of their emotions. This suggests that, much like not knowing the vocabulary for a work, they do not have the "visual vocabulary" to express the emotional nuance in language learning. Also, although the students had access to various art media (I bought them markers, pens, colored pencils, and watercolors), they mainly used pencils. It was not until week six, when I told them they were required to use different media, that they stopped using pencils. This requirement changed how they approached their art projects. Their week six and eight art projects were much more detailed and expressed a deeper understanding of their emotions. I also gave them a short lesson on different historical art movements from Rembrandt to Duchamp.

Next Steps

I will explore how I can incorporate art and self-expression into all future subjects I teach. As per my chapter two, there is a concrete reason to believe that art and self-expression directly correlate to higher class satisfaction. And while I may not have seen huge improvements in my students' test scores, I can say that all of my students loved journaling, even if they wrote just a sentence or two. However, as I continue exploring self-reflection in language learning, I will approach the specific assignment prompts differently. For example, instead of asking them directly how they feel about learning a language, I can ask them to write about the more nuanced aspects of schooling. For example, if I have prior knowledge of a big quiz, I could have them journal about an unrelated subject directly following the quiz. There was a drastic

dichotomy between negatively coded words and positive attributes to the importance of English. Many students expressed the need for English to further their careers, yet they talked negatively about feeling shy or frustrated while studying. By approaching their journals through a CBLT lens, I can bypass their assumptions about English and learn their real intentions for language learning.

Moreover, I will build future academic connections with the entire staff, including administrative staff, at my hagwon to improve cohesion between lessons and educational goals. Hagwons rarely treat grammar and speaking/writing classes as equals. Many hagwon owners and managers believe that grammar is too complex to teach in the target language, so they have Korean-speaking teachers teach grammar lessons in Korean. This creates a dichotomy in how students perceive different subject teachers and the importance they attach to them. As Lightbrown (2014) argues, this type of learning hurts linguistic acquisition. Both grammar and communicative meaning are needed for language acquisition. Learning is a team effort that requires the support of all staff, students, and parents. Entire schools would benefit from creating lessons in tandem. This can also help newer teachers learn different pedagogical approaches to lessons. Teaching techniques should not be kept as a secret. Hoarding teaching techniques helps no one and, in fact, causes more harm than good. As I mentioned in chapter two, many newly-hired teachers in Korea rarely have teaching experience. Because of this, the first two or three years of teaching in Korea for foreign staff members are difficult and unpleasant. Stronger staff cohesion and communication can reduce the amount of time spent wondering how to teach a lesson. Instead, new teachers can wonder how to create meaningful connections with their students so students can grow to their full academic potential.

Allowing students to write their thoughts in their first or preferred language would provide a different perspective on this project. Limiting my students to use their target language yielded different results. This is due to the subtleties of vocabulary that students might not be able to express with a limited understanding of the target language. While using a target language

might not negatively affect results, the results will vary depending on the language used. Scaffolding their first and target language would also yield fascinating results. As cognitive processing for speaking different languages is fluid, the results would be thrilling.

As I mentioned in my reflection, training in art conventions could also reveal many of the coded emotions in their art. If they had the “tools” to work with different art media, the students could feel more comfortable expressing their feelings. For example, there may be limitations in the hand-eye coordination required for drawing, and thus photography might be better suited for students. Also, because art is not a heavily invested subject, color theory, shape, and other art conventions could influence how students approach an activity.

Conclusion

My final research conclusion did not answer my initial question, "What role does creative self-expression through art and journaling play in sustaining student motivation in language learning?" Yet, my findings about the dichotomy between expression through journaling and art are exciting. When comparing guided-art projects to guided-writing projects, students tend to be more truthful in expressing the varied emotions associated with language learning when using visual art.

Time constraints were the largest deterrent to a definitive answer to my initial question. While I did see a slight uptick in motivation after eight weeks, their quiz scores did not reflect that increase. Toward the end of the eight weeks, all of my students reported enjoying the self-expression activities. Many students were excited to create art as homework. One student even apologized, saying they had gotten carried away with the drawing for the journaling project. I am happy to give my students more activities where they are not graded on English conventions and instead praised for connecting with themselves. While I was unable to prove that self-expression could raise their quiz scores, I am thrilled to hear that they enjoyed that aspect of the journaling project. Students are not mere numbers on a graph; thus, to build

excitement in even one student is a win. I plan to continue building this enjoyment of learning for years to come.

Language learning is a complex interplay of motivation, effort, resources, and time, among other puzzle pieces that interact. There are many issues that Korean hagwons fail to offer their students. One such failure is an inability to consider different types of learners. Not all students do well in memorizing words ad nauseam. One future hope is to work with co-teachers and administrative staff to understand that there should be systematic changes in the way hagwons approach language learning. While there might be small, systematic changes we can make at the school level, the larger, more entrenched belief that English should be the lingua franca might be more difficult to dismantle. While I would love to live in a world where we can all communicate with one another, the dissolution of other languages and cultures that follow is a terrifying alternative that I hope does not come to fruition. I understand that dismantling Western ideals of success is unlikely to happen in my lifetime. So, I plan to build and sustain intrinsic motivation in my students so they see their worth beyond what is expected of them in the current global economic status quo. Small community building will always remain my number one goal moving forward as a teacher and researcher.

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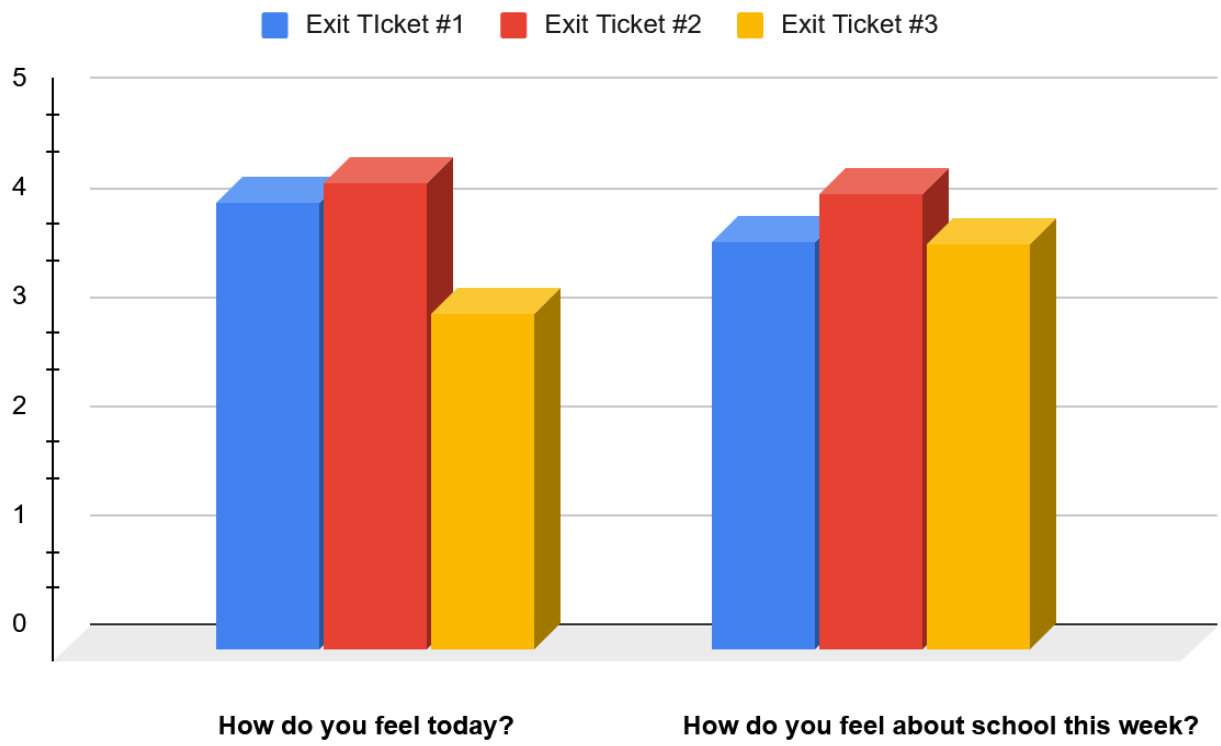
Appendices

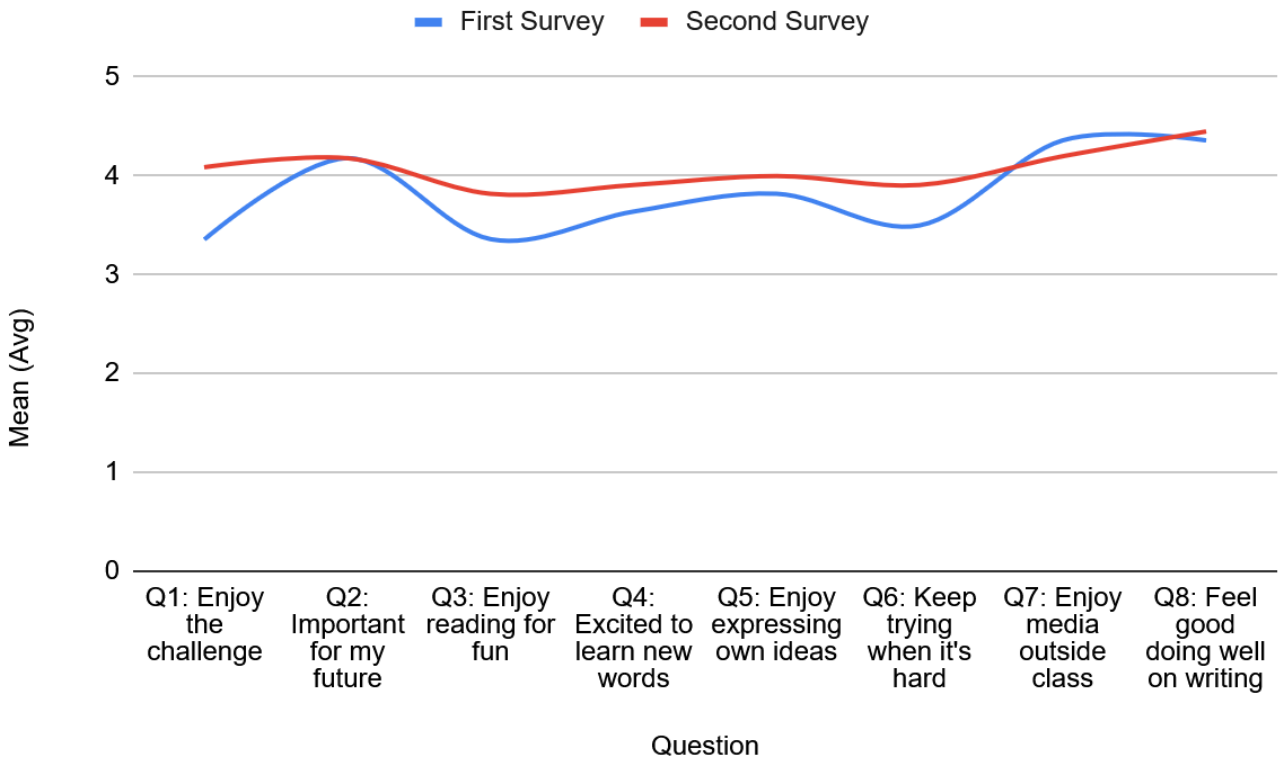
Appendix A

Exit Tickets



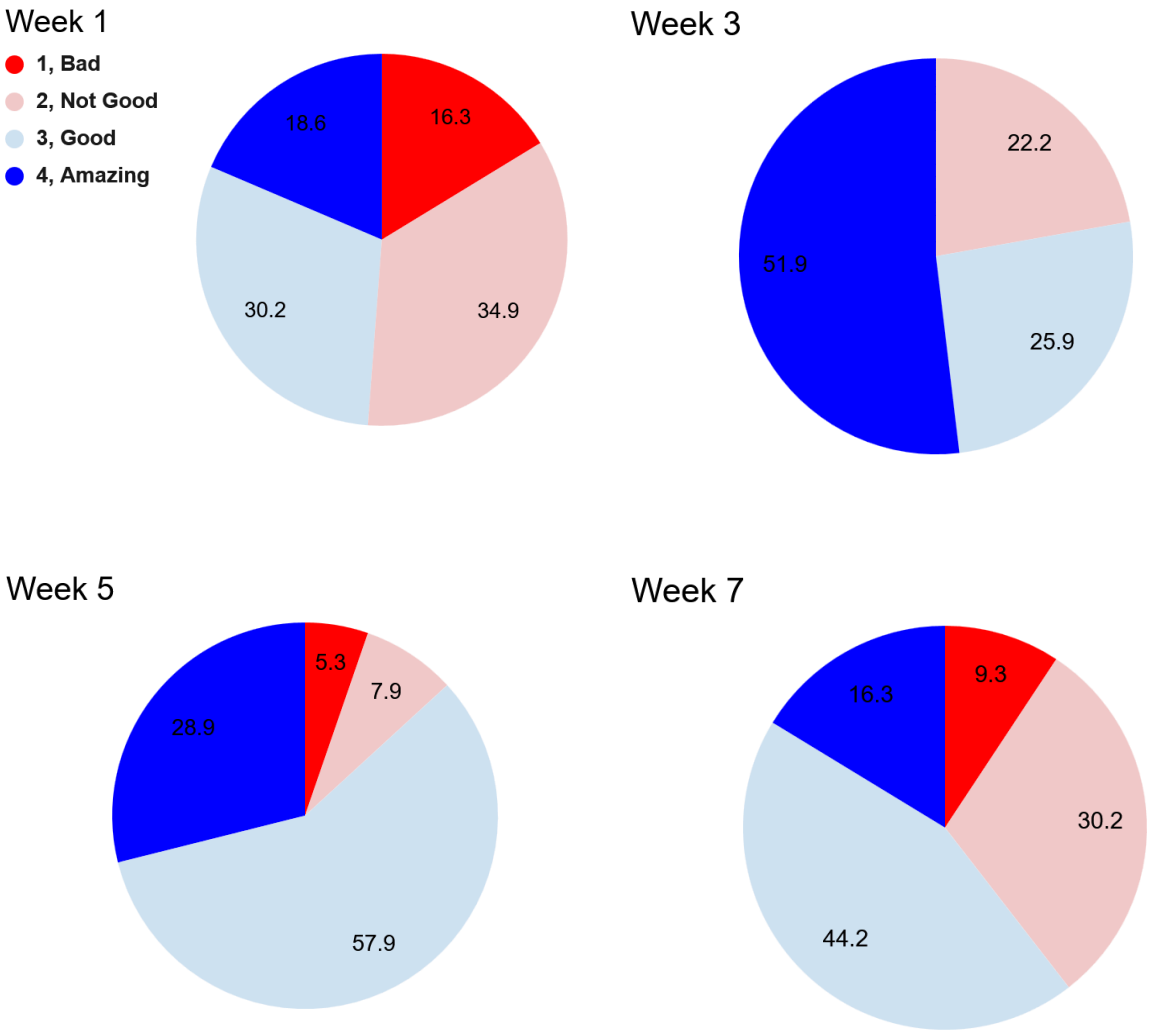
Appendix B

Motivation Survey



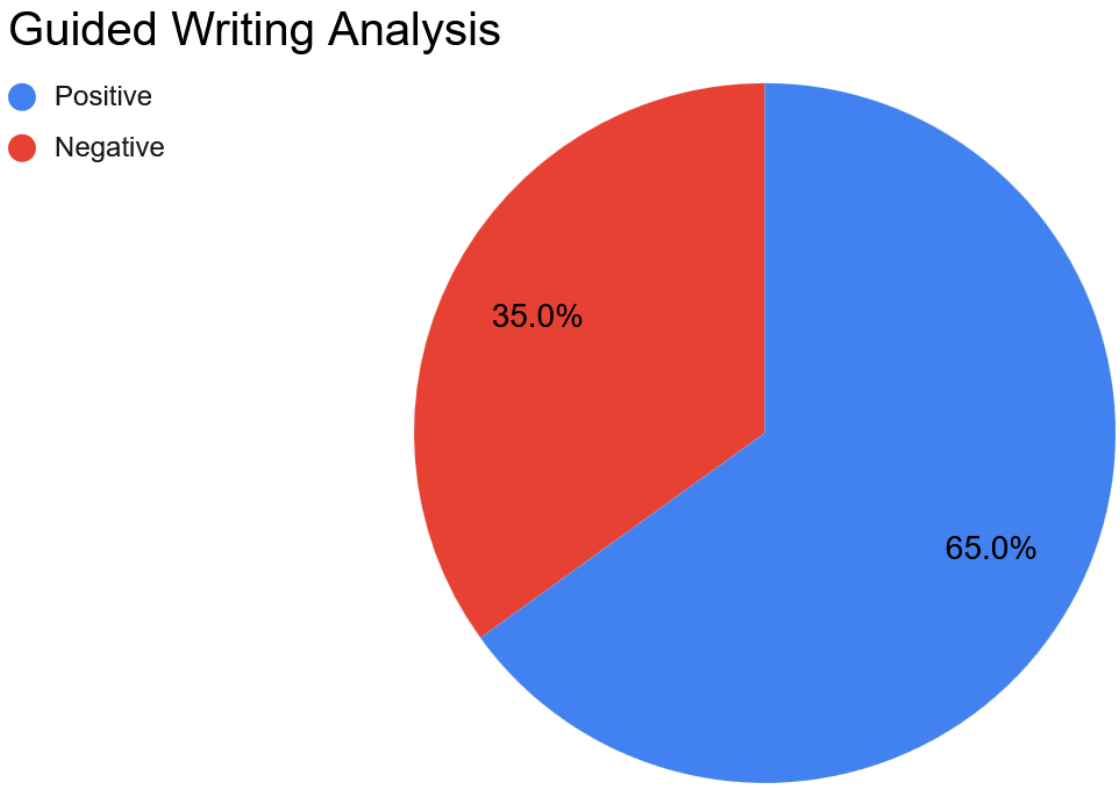
Appendix C,

Section 1: *Thematic Analysis of Journal Entries*



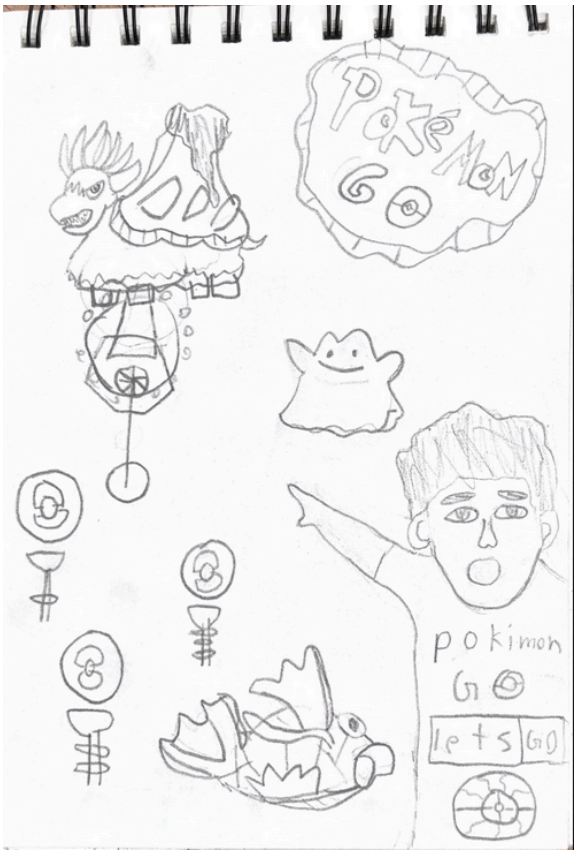
Appendix C

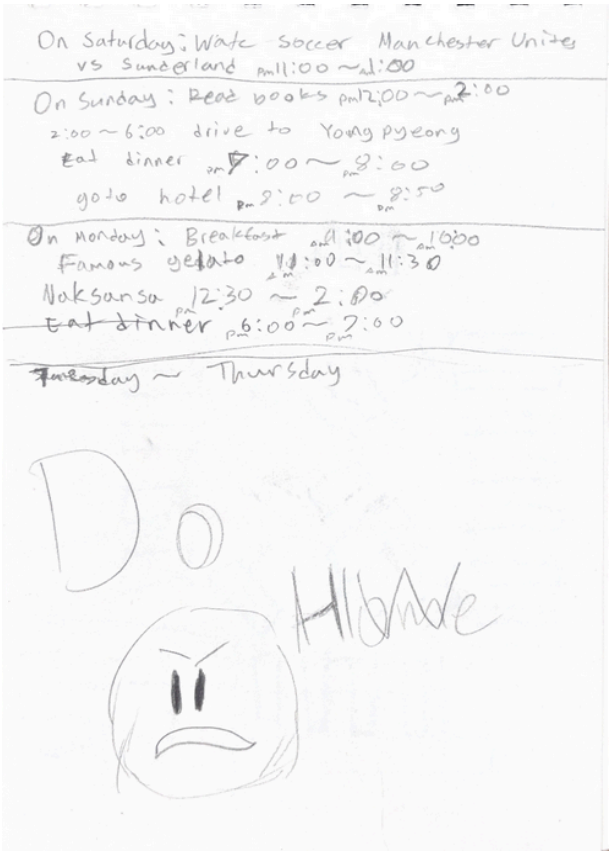
Section 2: *Thematic Analysis of Journal Entries, Guided Journaling*



Appendix D

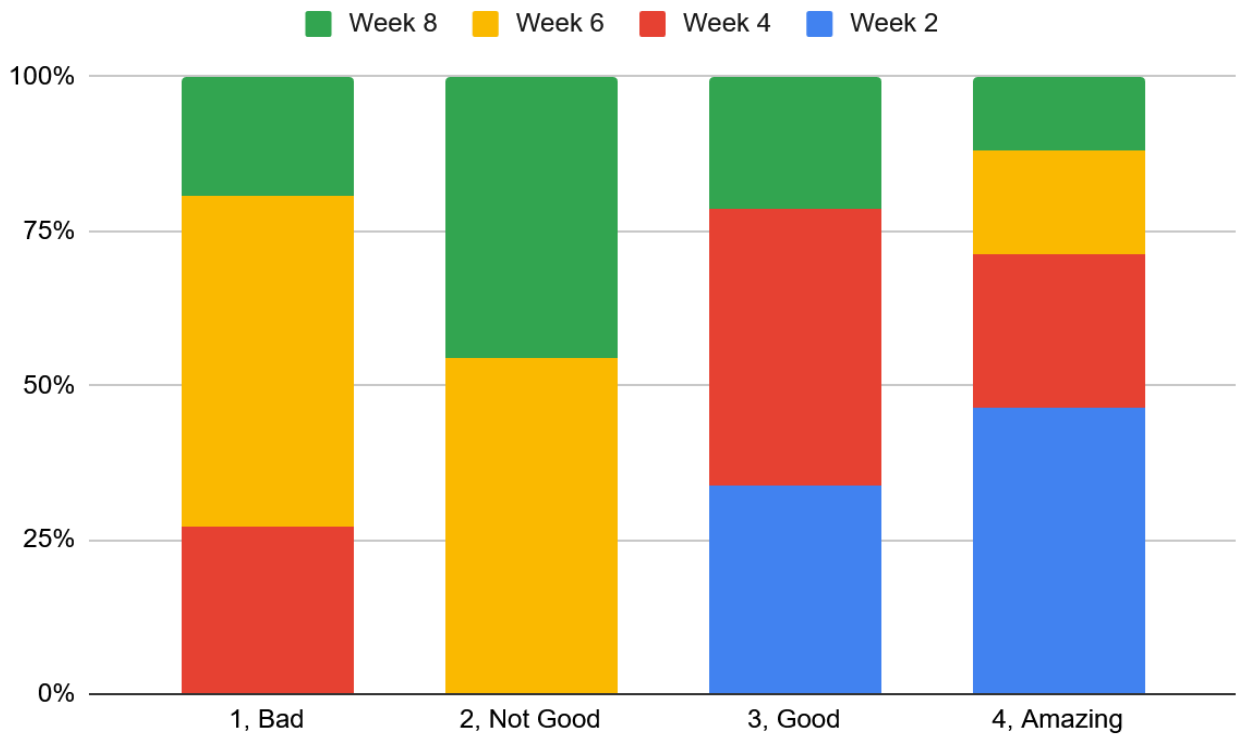
Week Two Art Entries





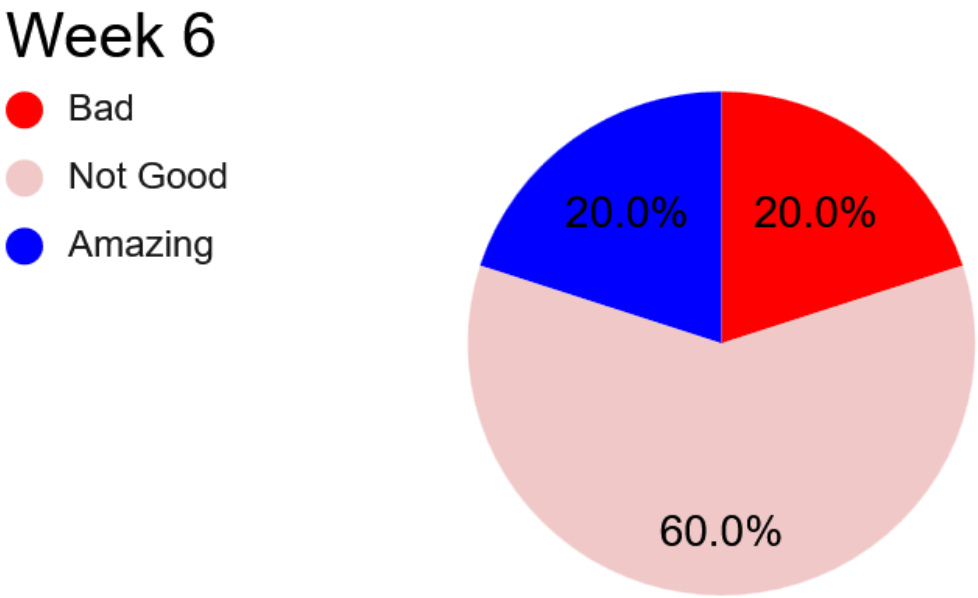
Appendix E

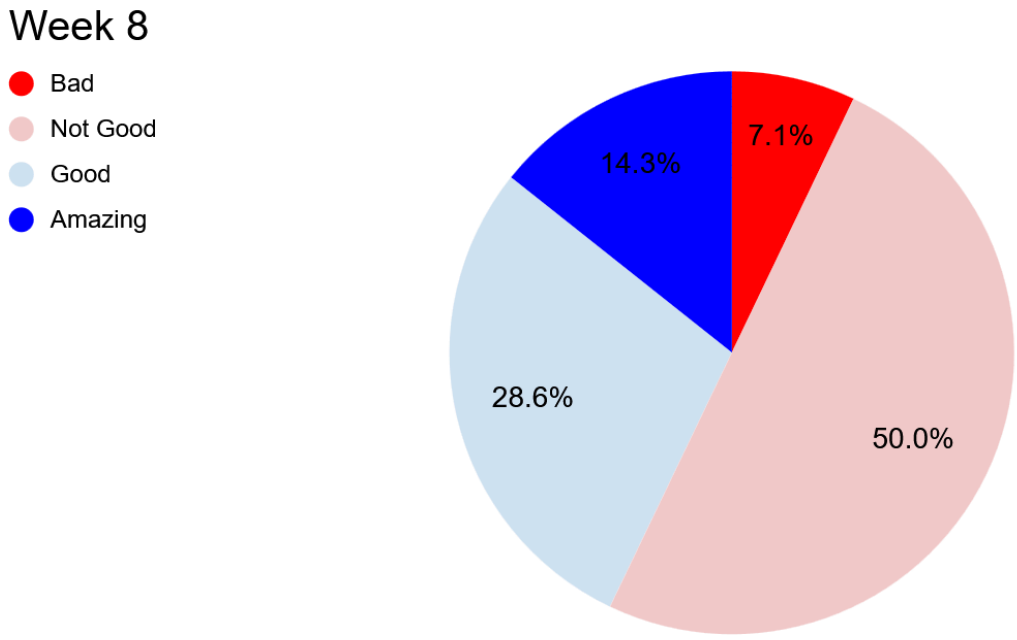
Section 1: *Sentiment Analysis of Visual Data*



Appendix E

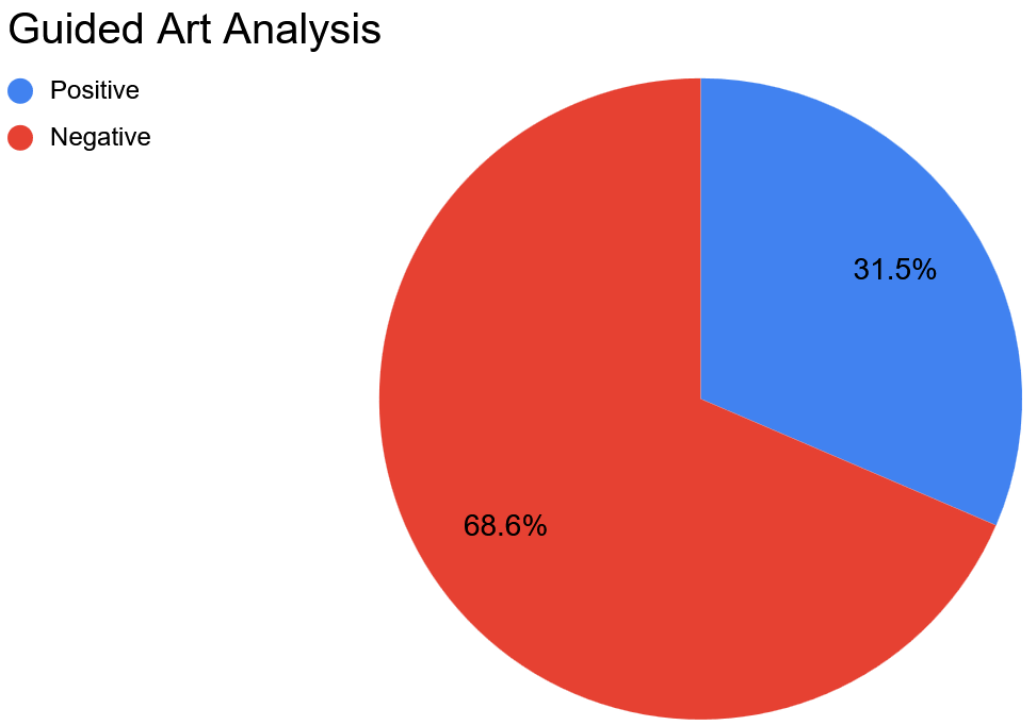
Section 2: *Sentiment Analysis of Visual Data, Guided Art*





Appendix E

Section 3: *Sentiment Analysis of Visual Data, Guided Art*

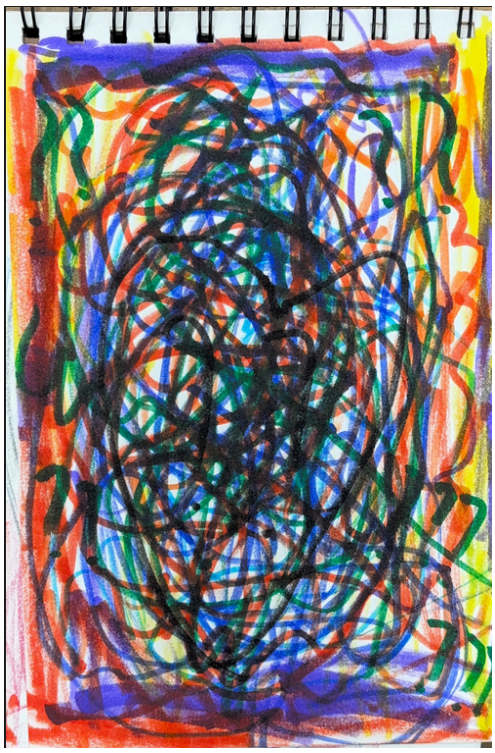


Appendix F

Week Six Art Entries

Appendix G

Week Six Art Entries



Appendix H

Week Six Art Entries

Appendix I

Quiz Score Averages