



# University Students' Perceptions of Enjoyment in Participating in Constructive Controversy

Tomoko Hashimoto

Tokyo Future University

Yushi Kashimura

Meiji University, Graduate School

## Reference Data:

Hashimoto, T., & Kashimura, Y. (2024). University students' perceptions of enjoyment in participating in constructive controversy. In B. Lacy, R. P. Lege, & P. Ferguson (Eds.), *Growth Mindset in Language Education*. JALT. <https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTPCP2023-36>

This study focuses on university students' perceptions of enjoyment in participating in carefully orchestrated, constructive controversy activities in EFL classrooms. Analysis of student feedback indicated that 81% of participants appreciated the experience. Students valued constructive controversy for its ability to enhance English proficiency, broaden global competence, and increase their language skills. However, challenges arose when students felt their language abilities might lead to misunderstandings or superficial discussions, detracting from their enjoyment. Teacher intervention was crucial in mitigating these concerns, suggesting that supportive guidance could enhance the effectiveness of constructive controversy. The findings underscored the role of teachers in fostering a conducive environment by selecting appropriate discussion topics, establishing frameworks for participation, and considering students' varying language competencies within heterogeneous groups. This study highlighted the potential of constructive controversy as a pedagogical tool and emphasized the educator's role in optimizing its benefits in EFL education.

本研究は学生が英語の授業で構造的討論に参加することで楽しさを感じる可能性について探求した。学生の意見を収集しデータを分析した結果、参加者の81%がこの経験を高く評価していることがわかった。評価されたのは、構造的討論が英語力の向上やグローバル力の拡充、言語スキルの上達に寄与する点であった。一方で一部の学生は自身の英語力に不安を感じ、誤解や浅い討論が楽しさを損なうと感じることも明らかになった。研究結果から、構造的討論を実施するには教師による適

切なテーマの選定や参加の枠組みの確立、異なる言語能力を考慮した異質なグループの形成が重要であることが示された。また、教師の介入が活動の成功には不可欠であり、支援的な指導が構造的討論の有効性を最大化する可能性も明らかになった。本研究から、構造的討論は教育の有力な手段として潜在的な可能性を持ち、効果的に実施するためには教師の役割が重要であることが示唆された。

This study focuses on the extent to which university students perceive a sense of enjoyment in carrying out carefully planned constructive controversy in EFL classrooms. Constructive controversy is a style of cooperative learning that fosters an individual's problem-solving and logical thinking skills by deliberately engaging in conflict (Johnson, 2015; Smith et al., 2015). Although conflict may often be regarded as negative, it can motivate and energize individuals to research, study diligently, and work with vigor for long hours if managed constructively (Tjosvold et al., 2019; Yi, 2004). Furthermore, cooperative learning produces more positive outcomes, such as better retention of knowledge and skills, and a higher level of proficiency than individualistic or competitive classroom styles (Johnson & Johnson, 2018; Johnson et al., 1991). Hence, constructive controversy fosters deeper comprehension, sparks creativity, and enhances problem-solving abilities by urging participants to explore various perspectives (Hashimoto, 2022; Johnson & Johnson, 2014). However, in many cases, teachers may be uneasy about introducing conflict in formal educational settings. One reason could be because “implementing structured academic controversies is not easy” (Johnson, 2015, p. 152). Moreover, a reason unique to Japan may be the value placed on group unity. This is identified as *wa*, or the formation and preservation of harmonious unification in a group. Within *wa*, group gains precede personal interest (Hirata & Warschauer, 2014). Nonetheless, it is possible that students do not hold negative perceptions about constructive controversy, or at least to the extent that teachers believe. It is important, then, to further investigate constructive controversy, especially students' perceptions of it, and to gain a better understanding of its effects in classroom practice. Therefore, the aim of this study was to investigate to what extent university students perceive a sense of enjoyment in carrying out carefully planned constructive controversy activities in EFL classrooms.



## Constructive Controversy and Enjoyment

### Constructive Controversy

Constructive controversy allows students to achieve higher levels of cognitive reasoning when completing a task, stimulates the frequency and accuracy of perspective-taking, fosters greater creativity, encourages divergent thinking, and cultivates more positive student relationships (Johnson, 2015; Tjosvold et al., 2019). The concept underlying constructive controversy is Structure-Process-Outcome Theory. This theory proposed that the composition of a situation determines how interaction occurs, which in turn affects the outcomes such as the attitudes and behaviors of those involved (Johnson & Johnson, 2018). According to Johnson (2015), conflict between group members can be organized on a continuum with controversy on one end and concurrence-seeking on the other end. Concurrence-seeking involves avoiding disagreement within a group when one's ideas are incompatible with someone else's (Johnson & Johnson, 2015). How conflict is structured contributes to a specific process of interaction between individuals.

Constructive controversy is structured in steps. Initially, a cooperative environment is created. Then, the constructive controversy process is explained to students. Following this, a discussion topic is chosen. Next, students are paired up, and then put into groups of four. One pair is given the “pro” position on the topic, and the other, the “con” position (Johnson, 2015). Then, students follow a five-step process. First, they investigate their assigned position and prepare an argument to defend it. It is suggested that pairs share their notes with other pairs from different groups who have been assigned the same positions. Second, pairs take turns advocating their viewpoint to the opposing pair in their group. The opposing pair listens with great care, takes notes, and asks questions to clarify ambiguous points. Third, groups openly discuss the topic, countering the opposite position while defending their own argument. Fourth, students switch perspectives and advocate for their newly assigned position, adding new information if possible. Here, students take the side they were arguing against, while also striving to consider the topic from both sides. Finally, all students drop their positions, merge data and ideas, and form a joint opinion that everyone agrees with. This joint opinion can be shared in the form of a report or presentation, or their knowledge may be tested individually in the form of a test. They may also discuss how well they functioned as a group (Johnson, 2015; Johnson et al., 2000).

An instructional method that is similar to constructive controversy is debate. In a structured debate, each participant is assigned a specific position and must present the

strongest possible case for that standing. An authority then evaluates the presentations and declares the winner based on the effectiveness of their arguments (Johnson & Johnson, 2015). The difference between debate and constructive controversy is that in debate, students do not switch and argue from the opposing side. Furthermore, there is a winner and a loser, which means students do not try to reach a consensus by discussion as in constructive controversy (Johnson, 2015).

Other than concurrence-seeking and debate, individualistic learning is another form of structured conflict. Individualistic learning entails individuals working on their own to accomplish a goal independent of other individuals (Johnson & Johnson, 2015). Out of concurrence-seeking, debate, and constructive controversy, an investigation showed that constructive controversy yields the most beneficial results. A meta-analysis of research comparing constructive controversy studies to other forms of structured conflict showed that constructive controversy led to more skills being acquired and a greater mastery of the material than debate (effect size  $[ES] = 0.62$ ), concurrence-seeking ( $ES = .70$ ), or individualistic learning ( $ES = .76$ ) (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Among other things, it is known to make recalling information easier, cause more skillful adaptation of this knowledge to other novel situations, and greater universalization of the concepts to other areas (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Johnson et al., 2014). Furthermore, constructive controversy acts favorably on open-mindedness, perspective-taking, creativity, self-esteem, psychological health, and social support (Johnson, 2015; Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

Constructive controversy in education has been predominantly implemented in elementary and secondary school settings, with some application at university level (Johnson, 2015). One example is its application in an engineering school, in which Smith et al. (2015) introduced constructive controversy in undergraduate, master's, and faculty development engineering programs. Results showed that student groups approached constructive controversy in three different ways: “consensus and combination”, “forcing and following”, and “confrontation and synthesis”. Out of these methods, “confrontation and synthesis” yielded the most integrated solutions and the highest self-reported improvements in the majority of learning outcomes. In contrast, “consensus and combination” fostered harmonious inter-team relationships and achieved the highest self-perceived learning gains in cooperatively solving problems (Smith et al., 2015). Another constructive controversy study conducted in higher education is Xiang et al. (2019). This study identified factors influencing MBA students' individual ambidexterity using a questionnaire. Individual ambidexterity is when an individual exploits existing capabilities, while also exploring new alternatives (Mom et al., 2009). Mom et al. (2009) hypothesized that goal orientation is related to individual ambidexterity, and



that perceived constructive controversy and cooperative goal interdependence would moderate this relationship. Outcomes of Xiang et al.'s (2019) study showed that two types of goal orientations were positively and significantly related to individual ambidexterity. Furthermore, it was confirmed that constructive controversy and perceived cooperative goal interdependence moderated this relationship. The positive findings suggested that constructive controversy should be encouraged among individuals (Xiang et al., 2019).

In the context of Japan, constructive controversy has been used in English language university classrooms. Hirose (2020) researched 16 first-year university students by engaging them in constructive controversy for one semester in an English course. She conducted a questionnaire before, in the middle, and at the end of the study. Findings indicated an increase in learners' confidence in several areas of their English abilities (Hirose, 2020). Hashimoto (2023) also conducted constructive controversy on EFL university students. Using the theoretical framework of self-determination theory, the researcher investigated the effects of constructive controversy on motivation by examining whether and how this could satisfy students' basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Results pointed to the possibility that constructive controversy could affect students' motivation positively by fulfilling the three basic psychological needs.

## Enjoyment

For the current study, enjoyment was measured in the context of constructive controversy, because of its positive effects on a student's psychological well-being. According to Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), "(e)njoyment is a key part of the family of emotions that surround the core emotion of joy" (p. 242). Furthermore, Reeve (1989) stated that enjoyment is what pushes one to persist in an activity, or what drives the continuation of intrinsic motivation. Enjoyment is often associated with intrinsic motivation, although there is a difference between the two. Intrinsic motivation "refers to engagement in behavior that is inherently satisfying or enjoyable" (Legault, 2016). When an individual is intrinsically motivated, an activity is conducted because of its internal attraction (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Intrinsic motivation is probably the most well-known in relation to self-determination theory, a theory of motivation proposed by Ryan and Deci (2017). One of the mini-theories within self-determination theory, basic psychological needs theory, suggested that humans have three basic psychological needs which, if satisfied, increase intrinsic motivation. These are autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to being able to choose one's actions. Competence concerns the sense of mastery. Relatedness is one's feeling of being connected to others

(Ryan & Deci, 2020). Intrinsically motivated individuals take part in an activity "for its self-sustaining pleasurable rewards of enjoyment, interest, challenge, or skill and knowledge development" (Ushioda, 2008, p. 21). Previous studies have researched the link between learning achievement and intrinsic motivation, and have found that intrinsic motivation and success at learning a language are positively correlated (e.g. Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Gardner, 1985; Mega et al., 2014). Teachers often attempt to intrinsically motivate their students, and try to make them enjoy taking part in classroom activities. This is because they know that although systematic teaching may be able to produce good test scores, this does not "inspire a lifelong commitment to the subject matter" (Dörnyei & Muir, 2019, p. 720).

Earlier investigations have explored enjoyment in foreign language contexts. For instance, Zhang et al. (2024) examined how an individual's foreign language enjoyment relates to willingness to communicate. Results from studying data of Chinese undergraduate students revealed that foreign language enjoyment positively predicted willingness to communicate through motivation and confidence. Furthermore, there was a positive connection between foreign language enjoyment and confidence in communication. In another study, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2024) examined the influence that foreign language enjoyment and foreign language classroom anxiety have on an individual's experience of flow. It was found that foreign language enjoyment was able to better predict the frequency of flow experience (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2024). However, although enjoyment has been investigated in foreign language studies, it has yet to be explored in the context of constructive controversy. The aim of the current research was to address this gap.

## Method

### Participants

This study measured students' perceived enjoyment of constructive controversy in an EFL context after engaging in constructive controversy activities in a mandatory English class. Participants of the study were 42 first-year undergraduate students ( $N = 42$ ) of a four-year university program in Japan composed of two classes. Students' overall English levels were CEFR A2-B1, on average, as determined by the lead investigator. However, their speaking ability was A2, based on the results of assignments given during the course. Lessons were held once a week for 90 minutes each, covering the four skills of English comprehensively. Both classes engaged in identical constructive controversy activities, following the same structure and timetable. The activities were both taught by the principal researcher of this study.



## Procedure

Students engaged in two constructive controversy activities in a formal classroom setting, each with a duration of one lesson. Both cooperative learning procedures and constructive controversy steps were followed. For example, before engaging in constructive controversy, the lead investigator taught students the five principles of cooperative learning by Johnson and Johnson (2018). These are positive interdependence, individual and group accountability, interpersonal and small group skills, face-to-face promotive interaction, and group processing. These principles are considered to be essential when working in groups.

Both constructive controversy activities were chosen based on student relatability and the previous experiences of the principal researcher. The first topic concerned the method of payment for everyday goods. Students were asked to discuss whether or not cash was a better form of payment than credit cards. In the second topic, students presented the pros and cons of mandatory school uniforms. For the two activities, the teacher prepared reading materials needed for students to formulate their arguments. In addition, students were free to investigate their position further by using the internet and talking to classmates who were supporting the same position. These were strongly encouraged to deepen students' understanding of their position and strengthen their arguments.

Groups were created by the instructor keeping in mind heterogeneity, employing students' level of English, biological gender, and graduating high school. In Class 1, 23 students were enrolled, but two were absent, so 21 students participated in the task. In Class 2, 24 students were enrolled, but three were absent, hence, 21 students participated. For the two classes, students were put into groups of two, and then into groups of four, so there were five groups in both classes. The extra student in each class acted as an observer for the first activity, then switched with another student in the group for the second activity, meaning all students who were present in Classes 1 and 2 had a chance to engage in constructive controversy.

At the end of the two activities, a representative from each group presented their group's discussion to the entire class. Following these presentations, the class shared their thoughts and opinions collectively. Finally, the students were asked to write in English about whether they enjoyed participating in constructive controversy.

## Informed Consent

Although participation in constructive controversy activities was mandatory as part of the course, students had the option to opt out of the study. Ethical considerations were verbally explained to students. For example, they were told that the data would be used for research purposes only, pseudonyms would be used if they were quoted, and they could choose not to participate in the research at any time by telling the researcher. It was emphasized that choosing not to take part in the investigation would not affect their evaluation of the course in any way. Institutional clearance was also obtained. The students knew each other's faces as they had been in the same cohort since the previous semester so could recognize each other although mask-wearing was still mandatory at the university.

## Analysis

For examination of the data, Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis was employed. Reflexive thematic analysis highlights the active role that the researcher takes in understanding facts (Braun & Clarke, 2019). It reflects how the investigator interprets the findings discovered at the crossing of the data, the theoretical framework used to analyze the information, and the researcher's analytical knowledge and skills (Braun & Clarke, 2022, Braun et al., 2023). In this study, the lead investigator aimed to examine the data for patterns, recognizing that the analysis would be subjective. This subjectivity stemmed from her dual role as both the teacher and researcher, fully engaged in the students' experiences of constructive controversy. Given these circumstances, an objective investigation was deemed difficult. Furthermore, the study focused on constructive controversy within classroom practice, with findings likely more applicable to classroom settings rather than individual student interactions. Therefore, investigating patterns and creating themes was considered appropriate. Under these conditions, reflexive thematic analysis was chosen as the suitable method.

Reflexive thematic analysis consists of six phases. In phase 1, it is necessary to familiarize oneself with the data, which involves reading and re-reading the data critically while taking notes on any analytical insights or ideas. In phase 2, data is systematically and thoroughly coded and labeled. In reflexive thematic analysis, only data relevant to the research question should be coded, and single-person coding is standard practice (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022). Two types of codes were created: semantic codes, which explore meaning at the surface level, and latent codes, which focus on implicit meanings. Phase 3 involves actively creating initial themes by compiling codes that share similar





ideas into candidate themes. Phase 4 involves assessing and developing these themes, examining relationships between them, exploring how they are practiced in one's field of research, and positioning them within a broader context. In phase 5, themes are refined, interpreted, and named. For this study, the second investigator was consulted to check the validity and feasibility of the codes at this stage. Braun and Clarke (2022) encouraged not sticking to a linear model, but rather revisiting earlier phases to reanalyze codes and themes. They also suggested creating a thematic map, which visually depicts the themes and their relationships. A thematic map was created for this investigation. Finally, in phase 6, the findings are written up.

Student comments were labeled in alphabetical order by family name, from one to 42. This method facilitated easy identification of students and allowed for analysis of how group composition or interpersonal communication might have influenced their perceptions. For example, a student whose name is third from the top of the list would be tagged S3 (S = student). Spelling and grammatical errors were not amended when used as quotes in this manuscript, because data authenticity was believed to be important to reflect the true nature of students' situations and perspectives.

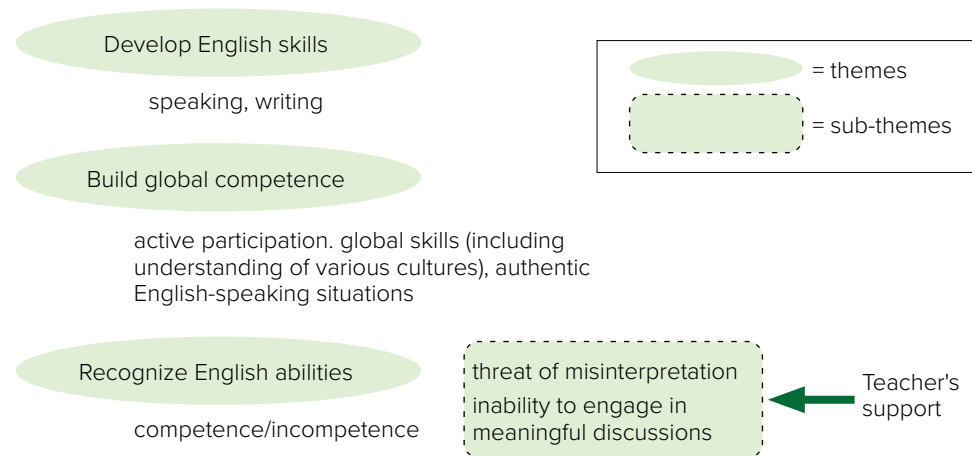
## Results and Discussion

A total of 13,105 words ( $n = 13,105$ ) were composed by the students ( $M = 297.84$ ,  $SD = 11.69$ ). An independent sample  $t$ -test was conducted to see whether there was a difference between the two classes regarding the number of words they had written. There was no significant difference between the two classes: (Class 1:  $M = 302.82$ ,  $SD = 71.71$ ; Class 2:  $M = 292.86$ ,  $SD = 84.34$ ,  $t(42) = .42$ ,  $p = .68$ ). The two classes participated in identical constructive controversy activities, adhering to the same sequence and schedule as previously described. Comments for the two classes were analyzed collectively following the six steps of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Results showed that 81.0% of the students answered they enjoyed conducting constructive controversy in EFL classrooms. The study focused on accounts related to English language learning and global competence, as it aimed to investigate the effects of constructive controversy within the specific context of English language learning. The frequency of data was not mentioned, as Braun and Clarke (2022) emphasized that the importance of a theme is not necessarily tied to its frequency, but rather to its relevance in addressing the research question and providing meaningful insights into the data. Additionally, a thematic map was created to focus on the richness and depth of the students' comments. This map was reassessed multiple times to ensure the best themes were generated. The final thematic map, shown in Figure 1, identified three

main themes and two sub-themes: develop English skills, build global competence, and recognize English abilities. The two sub-themes that were recognized were, threat of misinterpretation, and inability to engage in meaningful discussions (Figure 1).

Figure 1

*Thematic Map of Answers Pertaining to English and Global Competence*



### Develop English Skills

Students who said they enjoyed engaging in constructive controversy mentioned that it develops English speaking skills. Students appear to have recognized that opportunities to speak English are rare in Japan. One student made the following comment.

In Japan, there is less opportunity to speak English in our daily life. Modern society is still characterized by the fact that if you don't want to speak English, you don't have to...Even if you want to speak English, it is difficult to have the courage to try and create an environment in which you can speak. However, by providing a place to speak English as a discussion in class, these difficulties can be solved. (S7)

This student's comment demonstrated an awareness that practice will be limited without actively seeking opportunities to speak in English. Nevertheless, she recognized that engaging in constructive controversies in classrooms compelled her to articulate and defend her viewpoints. Some may argue that speaking activities are already conducted



in English classes, so there is no need to conduct constructive controversy. However, it appears that not all classrooms offer time for students to speak in English. “In Japan, there are few opportunities to speak English in class, which is why many people can read it, but cannot speak it (S13)”, a student said. In a Japanese high school class, there are typically around 40 students, and each lesson usually lasts 50 minutes (MEXT, 2010). Since these classes need to prepare students for college entrance examinations, which heavily emphasize reading and writing, the time allocated to speaking is likely limited. Alternatively, this student’s comment could also suggest that even if students are given in-class time for oral development, they are yearning for more.

In addition, for students learning English in a foreign language environment, it is common for them to write down what they plan to say beforehand to prepare for speeches. As one student put it, “(i)n general, people cannot speak English without writing English sentences (S10).” The lead investigator observed students transcribing their arguments before presenting them in class. Thus, a reason why some students enjoyed constructive controversy could also be because they felt this increased their English writing skills.

### Build Global Competence

Global competence is “a multi-dimensional construct that requires a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values successfully applied to global issues or intercultural situations” (OECD, 2019, p. 166). The global issues referred to here are problems that affect all individuals and are meaningful in the present and the future. Intercultural situations signify various human encounters (e.g. virtual or physical) between individuals of diverse backgrounds (OECD, 2019). The theme of global competence was seen in students’ comments. For example, some students mentioned that active participation in class aids in creating global citizens. One said, “since people who can clearly express their opinions in English are in demand against the backdrop of globalization, English discussions should be actively held as a training ground for such people (S12).” In a similar vein, other students mentioned that constructive controversy helps build a meaningful understanding of various cultures, especially for EFL students. One account read, “(d)iscussions can help to promote intercultural understanding, as students are exposed to different perspectives and experiences. This can be especially valuable for EFL learners who may be interested in exploring the cultures of the countries where English is spoken (S27).” Moreover, students also perceived that experiencing authentic English-speaking situations is essential for cultivating an international mindset. Although there are various definitions of authenticity, students in

this study interpreted it as “a depiction and reflection of reality” (Trabelsi, 2016, p. 147). In other words, “real communication used for social purposes as enacted in our daily life between real speakers or users of language” (Trabelsi, 2016, p. 148). The following is an excerpt from a student who emphasized that constructive controversy is meaningful because it provides an authentic environment.

In real life conversation, there’s no space and time to be quiet and think about what you say next when you have a chat with a native English speaker. They don’t wait for minutes for your next words, because there’s a specific rhythm atmosphere of talking...In discussions, same things can be said. The more passionate we become for the discussions, the stronger the rhythm becomes. Thus, we naturally improve the fluency of speaking English and step into the native speaker’s world (S40).

Opportunities to use English in real-life situations are rare in EFL environments, which underscored the significance of constructive controversy for this student.

### Recognize English Abilities

It could be seen in the comments that some students perceived constructive controversy activities as a chance to recognize their English abilities. An illustration of this can be found in the following excerpt.

...we can learn a lot about our own English skills by talking each other. As a language of another country, there will inevitably be expressions that cannot be conveyed well and words that are unfamiliar. At the time, we should try to find a way to communicate and study to be able to speak better. I think this kind of realization is more likely to occur during discussions than in reading or writing. In fact, I realized that my English skills were not good enough...which made me feel the need to study English. In this way, discussions are also great way to motivate students. I think this is very important because many students find it hard to learn foreign language (S11).

Constructive controversy allowed this student to assess his English proficiency, leading him to recognize his limitations in the language. This realization served as a positive motivator, prompting him to intensify his studies. However, acknowledging one’s English abilities can also act as a negative catalyst. Some students expressed discomfort with constructive controversy, which hindered their willingness to engage in meaningful discussions due to fears of misinterpretation or an inability to contribute effectively. These two were categorized as sub-themes in the thematic map (Figure 1). Students commented, “(i)f the topic is too difficult, it will be difficult to express opinions (S3).”



Although constructive controversy can be conducted in “almost any subject area, any age student, and any topic being studied” (Johnson & Johnson, 2014, p. 426), the difficulty of the topic cannot be left unrecognized (Johnson, 2015). The majority of students in this study perceived the chosen topic as suitable, as evidenced by their enjoyment levels. However, a few may have held a different opinion. Additionally, students who did not enjoy constructive controversy indicated that teacher support is needed when students’ English proficiency is low and when they are not participating in meaningful discussions. Constructive controversy “would be more effective if teachers helped more to continue talking (S13)”, recommended one student. Another wrote, “it is a good idea to give students some tips that help them keep talking even when they are at a loss what to talk about (S12).” There was also a comment that read, “speakers might hurt the others if they use words with strong meanings (S5)” suggesting that some may fear disrupting the group *wa*, which may be alleviated with the teacher’s aid.

These statements imply that teachers can assist students in engaging in meaningful constructive controversy. One way to achieve this is by being sensitive to individual students’ needs. Additionally, both students and teachers should be active participants during the activities, with teachers remaining alert to potential opportunities for intervention.

### Limitations

There are four limitations to this study. First, the topic. Results may have varied if different topics were used. People have individual differences, meaning people have different tastes (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Students who did not like discussing school uniforms may not have enjoyed the lesson solely due to their dislike for the topic. Second, treating enjoyment as a dichotomy. Had students been asked to rate their level of enjoyment on a scale, the results could have been used to categorize students into several groups, allowing for a deeper analysis. Third, a deeper reflection of students’ experiences with constructive controversy might have been obtained if they had written in Japanese, their native tongue. Lastly, feedback was not collected anonymously. Although students were assured that their perceptions would not affect their grades, they may still have been reluctant to express their emotions. In addition, Japanese individuals often give polite, positive feedback. Thus, the percentage of students who reported enjoying constructive controversy might have been lower if anonymity had been ensured. Despite these limitations, it is believed that the study’s findings have significant practical implications.

### Conclusion

This study focused on the extent to which university students perceive a sense of enjoyment in participating in carefully orchestrated constructive controversy in EFL classrooms. Analysis of comments written by students revealed that 81% appreciated the opportunity to participate in such tasks. The reasons for this were that they felt constructive controversy 1) advanced their English skills, 2) increased their global competence, and 3) allowed them to recognize their level of English. However, some students did not welcome engaging in constructive controversy, because they became aware of their low level of English competence. These individuals felt that incompetence could lead to misinterpretation and insignificant discussions, contributing to their lack of enjoyment in participating in such activities. Additionally, it appears that students believed the negative aspects of constructive controversy could be mitigated by their teacher’s assistance. This implies that teachers may have the ability to improve a non-functioning constructive controversy through timely and active support. Furthermore, findings suggest that teachers can potentially become a valuable resource to intrinsically motivate and assist students in enjoying constructive controversy in EFL classrooms. They can do so by choosing appropriate discussion topics, providing students with a framework to work within, and being mindful of various English proficiency levels when forming heterogeneous groups.

### Bio Data

**Tomoko Hashimoto** is an associate professor at Tokyo Future University in Tokyo, Japan. She is interested in the psychology of language learning at various stages of human development, especially in the context of groups, and believes in the importance of linking theory to practice. <hashimoto-tomoko@tokyomirai.jp>

**Yushi Kashimura** is a graduate student at Meiji University in Tokyo. His research interests include individual differences (e.g., motivation, engagement, anxiety) in language learning and research synthesis, especially meta-analysis. <yushi.kashimura@gmail.com>



## References

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589–597.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE.
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., Hayfield, N., Davey, L., & Jenkinson, E. (2023). Doing reflexive thematic analysis. In S. Bager-Charleson & A. McBeath (Eds.), *Supporting research in counselling and psychotherapy*. Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13942-0\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13942-0_2)
- Dörnyei, Z., & Muir, C. (2019). Creating a motivating classroom environment. In X. Gao (Ed.), *Second handbook of English language teaching* (pp. 719–736). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02899-2\\_36](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02899-2_36)
- Dewaele, J., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2014). The two faces of Janus? Anxiety and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 4(2), 237–274. <https://doi.org/10.14746/sslt.2014.4.2.5>
- Dewaele, J., & MacIntyre, P. (2024). “You can’t start a fire without a spark”. Enjoyment, anxiety, and the emergence of flow in foreign language classrooms. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 15(2), 403–426. <https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2021-0123>
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ryan, S. (2015). *The psychology of the language learner revisited*. Routledge.
- Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social psychology and second language learning*. Edward Arnold.
- Hashimoto, T. (2022). *Motivational effects of variations in sequence of cooperative learning activities* (Publication No. 32682-1067) [Doctoral dissertation, Meiji University]. Meiji Repository.
- Hashimoto, T. (2023). The effects of constructive controversy on motivation. *OnCUE Journal*, 15.1, 3–22.
- Hirata, K., & Warschauer, M. (2014). *Japan: The Paradox of Harmony*. Yale University Press.
- Hirose, K. (2020). Effects of English language teaching incorporating cooperative group learning on Japanese university students. *Annual Review of English Language Education in Japan*, 31, 225–240. [https://doi.org/10.20581/arele.31.0\\_225](https://doi.org/10.20581/arele.31.0_225)
- Johnson, D. W. (2015). *Constructive controversy: Theory, research, practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2009). Energizing learning: The instructional power of conflict. *Educational Researcher*, 38(1), 37–51. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X08330540>
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2015). Constructive controversy: Teaching students how to think creatively. In A. Vollmer, D., Michael & T. Wehner (Eds.), *Konstruktive Kontroverse in Organisationen* (pp. 59–87). Springer Gabler.
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2014). Constructive controversy as a means of teaching citizens how to engage in political discourse. *Policy Futures in Education*, 12(3), 417–430. <https://doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2014.12.3.4>
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2018). Cooperative learning: The foundation for active learning. In S. M. Brito (Ed.), *Active Learning – Beyond the Future* (pp. 1–10). IntechOpen.
- Johnson, D.W., Johnson, R.T., & Smith, K.A. (1991). *Active learning: Cooperation in the college classroom*. Interaction.
- Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Smith, K. A. (2000). Constructive controversy: The educative power of intellectual conflict. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 32(1), 28–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00091380009602706>
- Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Smith, K. A. (2014). Cooperative learning: Improving university instruction by basing practice on validated theory. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 25(3&4), 85–118.
- Legault, L. (2016). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In V. Zeigler-Hall, & T. K. Shackelford (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of personality and individual differences* (pp. 1–4). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-28099-8\\_1139-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-28099-8_1139-1)
- Mega, C., Ronconi, L., & Beni, R. D. (2014). What makes a good student? How emotions, self-regulated learning, and motivation contribute to academic achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 106, 121–131. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033546>
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2010). *Gakkyu hensei oyobi kyoushokuin teiin ni kansuru shiryō (kouritsu koutougakkou kankei)* [Statistics on class organization and number of faculty members (Public high schools)] [https://www.mext.go.jp/b\\_menu/shingi/chousa/shotou/029/shiryō/05072002/002.pdf](https://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chousa/shotou/029/shiryō/05072002/002.pdf)
- Mom, T.J., Van Den Bosch, F.A., & Volberda, H.W. (2009). Understanding variation in managers’ ambidexterity: investigating direct and interaction effects of formal structural and personal coordination mechanisms, *Organization Science*, 2(4), 812–828. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25614694>
- OECD. (2019). *PISA 2018 Assessment and Analytical Framework*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/b25efab8-en>.
- Reeve, J. (1989). The interest-enjoyment distinction in intrinsic motivation. *Motivation and Emotion*, 13, 83–103.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. Guilford Publishing.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 61(3), 101860.





- Smith, K. A., Matusovich, H., & Zou, T. X. P. (2015). Constructive controversy in engineering undergraduate, masters, doctorate, and professional settings. In A. Vollmer, M., M. Dick, & T. Wehner (Eds.), *Konstruktive Kontroverse in Organisationen* (pp. 109–130). [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-00263-3\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-00263-3_6)
- Tjosvold, D., Wong, A., & Chen, N. (2019). Managing Conflict for Effective Leadership and Organizations. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Business and Management*. Retrieved 26 Jun. 2024, from <https://oxfordre.com/business/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190224851.001.0001/acrefore-9780190224851-e-240>.
- Trabelsi, S. (2016). Authenticity in materials development. In M. Azarnoosh, M. Zeraatpishe, A. Faravani, & H. R. Kargozari (Eds.), *Issues in materials development*, (pp. 145–158). Sense. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6300-432-9\\_13](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6300-432-9_13)
- Ushioda, E. (2008). Motivation and good language learners. In C. Griffiths (Ed.), *Lessons from Good Language Learners* (pp. 19–34). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511497667.004>
- Xiang, S., Chen, G., Liy, W., Zhou, Q., & Xing, S. (2019). An empirical study of the impact of goal orientation on individual ambidexterity – moderating roles of goal interdependence and constructive controversy. *Nankai Business Review International*, 10(3), 465–484. <https://doi.org/10.1108/NBRI-11-2018-0070>
- Yi, C. (2004). Potential applications of the constructive controversy theory in EFL contexts. *Taiwan Journal of TESOL*, 1.1, 27–57.
- Zhang, Q., Song, Y., & Zhao, C. (2024). Foreign language enjoyment and willingness to communicate: The mediating roles of communication confidence and motivation. *System*, 125, 103346. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2024.103346>