Reflections and New Perspectives: The 2021 GALE SIG Forum Report

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This paper provides a summary report of the 2021 GALE SIG Forum, which focused on gender awareness in relation to the conference theme, reflections and new perspectives. Anna Walker shared her pilot study on a neglected area of research: sexual harassment in Japan's conversation schools. Carey Finn offered her narrative of returning to full-time teaching during a global pandemic, highlighting the importance of expressing vulnerability and humor while negotiating emergency remote teaching and the return to face-to-face classes. Jackson Koon Yat Lee described his work toward diversity and equity in his local JALT Chapter, and as Chair of JALTs Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee, calling for action within JALT and in the language-teaching profession.

JALT GALE 研究部会のフォーラムでは、JALT 2021大会のテーマである「省察と新たな視点」について、ジェンダーの観点から発表が行われた。本稿はフォーラムに参加した三名の発表内容をまとめたものである。ウォーカーは、日本の英会話学校におけるセクシャルハラスメントという、これまであまり研究されてこなかった分野の試験的な調査について発表した。フィンは、世界的なパンデミック時にフルタイムの常勤講師として復帰した際のエピソードを紹介し、緊急遠隔授業と対面授業への復帰を交渉する際に、脆弱性とユーモアを表現することの重要性を強調した。リーは、JALTの多様性・公平性・包括性委員会の委員長として、多様性・公平性の確保に取り組んでいることを紹介し、JALTや語学教育界にアクションを起こすよう呼びかけた。

The 2021 GALE SIG Forum, Reflections and New Perspectives on Gender Awareness at the online JALT International Conference, focused on current research by SIG members. It is a matter of principle and pride that GALE SIG, while focusing on gender awareness, also emphasizes giving voice to a wide range of educators and researchers in our field. Thus, we note that the three sections of this paper are submitted by forum speakers from a range of professional contexts: *eikaiwa* (English conversation) schools, secondary, and tertiary education. In addition, each speaker used a different research methodology. Anna Walker begins this article by sharing her quantitative pilot study of a neglected area of research: sexual harassment in Japan's English conversation schools. Next, Carey Finn offers her narrative of returning to full-time teaching during a global pandemic, highlighting the importance of ng vulnerability and humor while negotiating emergency remote teaching and the return to face-to-face classes. Finally, Jackson Koon Yat Lee describes his work toward increasing diversity and equity in his local JALT Chapter, and as Chair of JALT's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee, concluding this article with a call for concrete action within JALT and in the language-teaching profession as a whole.

Sexual Harassment in *Eikaiwa* Schools

Anna Walker

Background

Sexual harassment is "behavior that derogates, humiliates or coerces a person(s) based on sex" (Berdahl & Battacharyya, 2021, p. 478), and is rooted in dominance. There are three dimensions of sexual harassment: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion. According to Fitzgerald and Cortina (2018), gender harassment "expresses insulting, degrading attitudes; its essence is contempt and hostility" (p. 217) based on gender, whereas unwanted sexual attention includes "sexual advances that are uninvited, unwanted and unreciprocated" (p.218). Sexual coercion is rare and involves "offering or implying a promotion in exchange for sexual favors [or] threatening termination unless sexual demands are met" (p.218).

Sexual harassment has been mentioned throughout the literature in ELT in Japan, but there are very few studies dedicated to sexual harassment (see Creaser, 2007, 2011; McCandie, 2021). Research about sexual harassment is almost nonexistent in *eikaiwa* schools, with awareness of this issue illuminated in both news articles (Currie-Robson, 2014; McCrostie, 2014) and an internal study by the General Union (2014), which found that just 28% of teachers surveyed (43% male and 13% female) had *not* experienced sexual harassment by students in the workplace. O'Mochain (2019) noted this gap and called for more empirical research on sexual harassment in conversation schools. This paper, based on my presentation at the 2021 GALE SIG Forum, presents data from a pilot study on sexual harassment in *eikaiwa* schools.

Methodology

In order to understand the experiences of sexual harassment in *eikaiwa* schools, a questionnaire was adapted from the sexual experiences questionnaire (SEQ), first developed by Fitzgerald et al. (1988) and distributed online using Jisc. While the SEQ covers the three dimensions of sexual harassment (gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion), recent literature suggests that gender harassment itself has several subdimensions (Fitzgerald & Cortina, 2018). Thus, three subdimensions of gender harassment were developed and included in this study as follows: sexist hostility, sexual hostility, and gender policing. Sexist hostility is rooted in sexism and "includes jokes, insults, and sexist comments" (Karami et al., 2019, p.2), whereas sexual hostility is based in sexuality and may include crude remarks about body parts or displays of pornography in the workplace. Lastly, gender policing, which is harassment based on violations of stereotypical gender norms, includes actions such as men being criticized for wanting to stay home with their children or women being expected to clean up after work events.

Overall, there were five questions for each dimension or subdimension (sexist hostility, sexual hostility, gender policing, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion) for a total of 25 questions. Respondents were asked how often they had experienced or witnessed each behavior in the past 24 months (*never, rarely, sometimes, often, frequently*); those who indicated that they had experienced a particular behavior received a prompt to answer an additional question: *Who did you experience this behavior from? Select all that apply.* Options included: students, coworkers, supervisors/management, or admin/other staff. Lastly, respondents had the opportunity to expand on their answers in an open-ended question. Before starting the questionnaire, participants were asked to sign an informed consent agreement and full ethical approval was received by the University of Nottingham. The questionnaire was distributed on Facebook and Reddit and was available for a period of two days.

Results and Discussion

Demographics

There were 63 valid responses to the questionnaire (male n = 39, 61.90%; female n = 24, 38.10%). Women were more represented in this sample than estimated in other ELT contexts in Japan. For example, around 73% of JALT members are male compared to 26% in TESOL International (Appleby, 2013, p.18). The higher proportion of female respondents in this sample could be reflecting questionnaire self-selection bias or, alternatively, there might truly be a higher proportion of female teachers in *eikaiwa* schools compared to other Japanese teaching contexts.

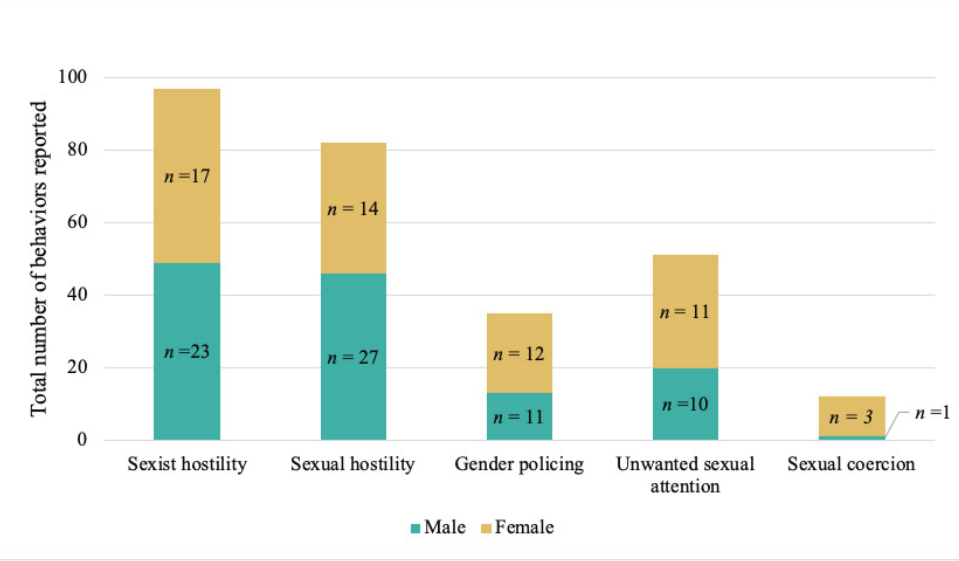
Respondents were mostly younger professionals, with 84.13% (n = 53) under the age of 40. Just under half (n = 30, 48.39%) worked in large chain *eikaiwa* schools, whereas 17.74% (n = 11) and 33.87% (n = 21) worked in small chains or independent schools, respectively. The sample lacked diversity across country of origin, first language, and race: only 8.20% (n = 5) of respondents were from non-inner circle countries whereas 50.82% (n = 31) were from the United States. The vast majority spoke English as an L1 (98.36%, n = 61), and 90.47% self-identified as white (n = 57).

Gender Distribution of Responses

Just 23.81% (*n* = 15) of respondents answered that they had never experienced or witnessed any of the 25 sexual harassment behaviors. This is similar to the 28% figure reported by General Union (2014). The other 76.19% (*n* = 48) had experiences with at least one of the sexual harassment behaviors in the past 24 months. In total, 277 behaviors were reported by the 48 respondents, as each person was able to report experiencing each of the 25 behaviors. Though the experiences were roughly divided among men (*n* = 30, 46.57%) and women (*n* = 18, 53.43%), where fewer women accounted for a greater proportion of these experiences, the women in this sample experienced more sexual harassment than men. Within the five sexual harassment dimensions, women experienced more sexual coercion than men, as well as more gender policing and unwanted sexual attention (see Figure 1). Sexual hostility was experienced by more men in the sample, which could be a reflection of toxic workplace banter (see Appleby, 2014; McCandie, 2021; McCandie & Mulvey, 2018).

Figure 1

Gender Differences among the 277 Reported Behaviors of each Sexual Harassment Dimension

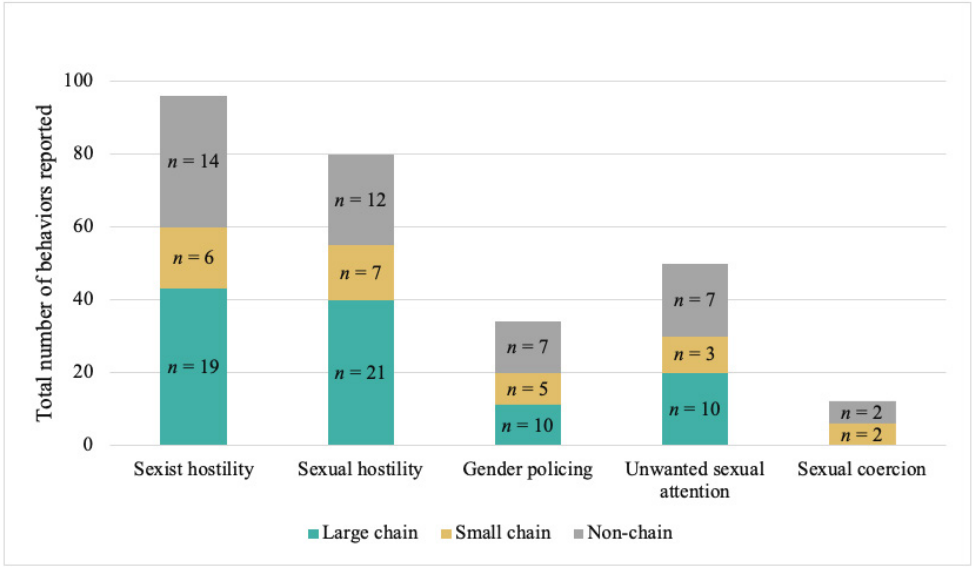


Reported Sexual Harassment Behavior According to School Type

Although large chain *eikaiwa* schools have a poor reputation, school type did not appear to be a factor when reporting experiences of harassment, as small chains and independent schools were well represented in this sample (see Figure 2). In fact, there were no reports of sexual coercion in the data for large chain schools. Large chain *eikaiwa* schools might actually protect against certain types of sexual harassment as they have the infrastructure for human resources departments and likely have formal sexual harassment policies in place.

Figure 2

Differences in 277 Reported Sexual Harassment Behaviors among School Type



Perpetrators of Reported Sexual Harassment Behavior

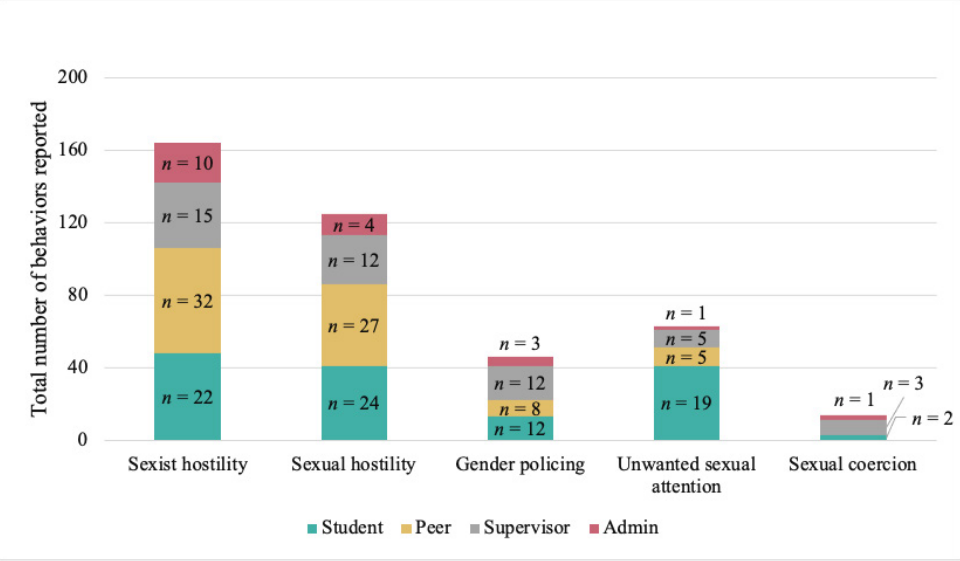
The respondents (*n* = 48) were able to select more than one person from whom they had experienced the 277 behaviors, resulting in 412 total recorded experiences. Overall, students were implicated in the largest share of these experiences (35.44%). Whereas the

media (Currie-Robson, 2014; McCrostie, 2014) has focused on sexual harassment from students, in this sample, the remaining 64.56% of sexual harassment observations were attributed to other actors: 29.61% to coworkers, 24.27% to supervisors, and 10.68% to administrative staff.

The data were further analyzed by sexual harassment dimension to determine if certain types of sexual harassment were attributed more often to students, peers, supervisors, or administrators (see Figure 3). Peers were not responsible for any sexual coercion as they lack the power to offer promotions or threats. Unwanted sexual attention (n = 19; 65.08%), was largely attributed to students, which supports media reports of this nature (Currie-Robson, 2014; McCrostie, 2014). Supervisors were named responsible for the majority of the gender policing incidents (n = 12, 41.30%). Sexist (n = 32, 35.37%) and sexual (n = 27, 21.60%) hostility were mostly attributed to peers, which again supports the idea of boys' club banter, although students were also implicated in these behaviors.

Figure 3

Distribution of Sexual Harassment Perpetrators across Dimension

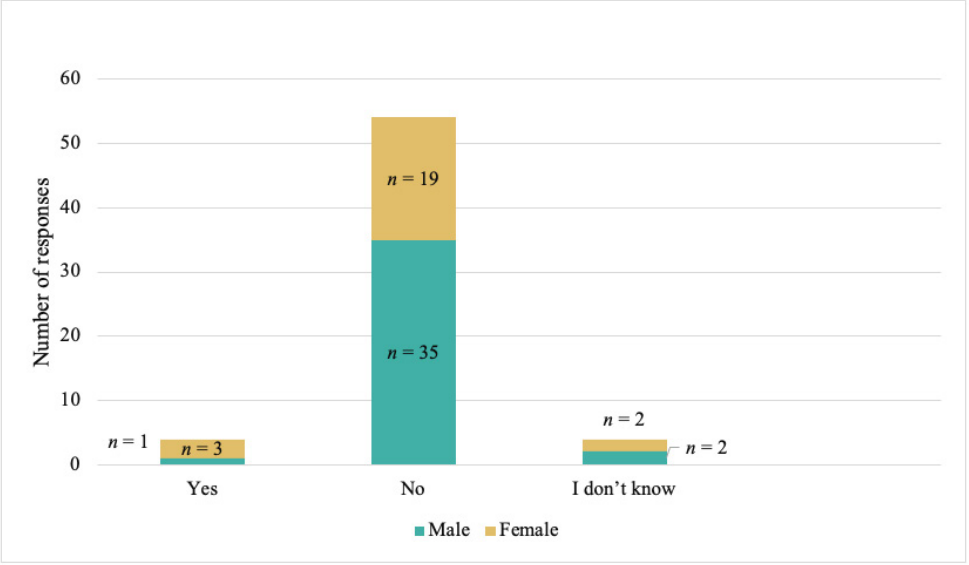


Results of Open-Ended Questions

At the end of the SEQ, respondents were asked if they had experienced sexual harassment in the past 24 months. Aside from in the initial informed consent section of the questionnaire, the words *sexual harassment* had not been used as an attempt to reduce biased responses from participants (see Fitzgerald et al., 1997). Compared to the 76.19% (n = 48) of participants who indicated that they had experienced or witnessed at least one of the 25 sexual harassment behaviors, just 6.35% (n = 4) believed that they had been sexually harassed, whereas another 6.35% (n = 4) were not sure if their experiences constituted sexual harassment (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Respondent Beliefs about having been Sexually Harassed at their Eikaiwa Workplaces within the Past 24 Months



Responses from the open-ended question helped understand the discrepancy between respondents' beliefs and experiences of sexual harassment. In one excerpt, a male respondent described a workplace rife with behavior consistent with sexist hostility,

though he did not believe he had experienced sexual harassment himself:

> *Every instance of sexually inappropriate comments or suggestions came from foreign coworkers. They aren't directed at anyone in particular. Just offensive jokes, rude comments and other offensive comments. The majority of these comments continue because other foreign coworkers don't want the hassle of dealing with the offensive people, and the Japanese staff either doesn't know how to deal with them, are too insecure to deal with them or just don't want the hassle involved. (Respondent 34, Nov. 2, 2021)*

Another respondent described his own victimization as follows:

> *In the past 24 months, A [sic] student asked me if I was circumcised during our first lesson. Another student was really interested in my sex life. Outside of that, I have felt like I had to flirt with students so they wouldn't quit. Especially younger women. I've had one student try to get me to marry her daughter. Another student asked me to get her pregnant, and that I didn't have to be around to raise the child. (Respondent 57, Nov. 3, 2021)*

Despite his detailed response, Respondent 57 answered, "I don't know" when asked if he had been sexually harassed, though both sexual hostility and unwanted sexual attention are evident in his description. In both of these cases, it is possible that the respondents do not have a clear understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment. As even witnessing harassment may contribute to teacher burnout, turnover, and decreased job satisfaction (Cortina, 2008), validating the experiences of respondent 34 is crucial. While this study is largely quantitative in nature, more qualitative research would allow better insight into this discrepancy.

Conclusion

In this sample, experiences of sexual harassment were common and not limited by gender or type of school. Students were responsible for the largest proportion of sexual harassment overall, though the majority of sexual harassment experiences were attributed to those working alongside teachers as peers, supervisors, or administrators. There is a large discrepancy between the experiences recorded and teachers' beliefs about sexual harassment, as respondents may be unaware of the definition of sexual harassment.

As data on the *eikaiwa* teaching context is lacking in general, further studies on any aspect of this would contribute to understanding the professional lives of *eikaiwa* teachers and illuminate issues particular to this context. A qualitative exploration of this phenomenon would be particularly valuable. Considering the preliminary nature of the results of this research, it is clear that there is much more work to be done on sexual harassment in *eikaiwa*.

Using humor and vulnerability to cope, motivate and manage in the pandemic-era classroom

Carey Finn

I had been "out" of the English-language classroom for three years when I suddenly found myself re-entering it right in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic. Humor and (after a good deal of discomfort) vulnerability became two pillars on which I redeveloped my pedagogical philosophy and started to rebuild my teaching career. Based on my presentation at the 2021 GALE SIG Forum, this paper offers a reflection on how and why this came to be.

After spending nearly seven years teaching EFL in Japan, first at a public high school and then at a private university, I returned to my birth country. For the next three years, I taught journalism and writing at a university, coordinated teaching EFL courses, and did writing, editing, and marketing work on a freelance basis. Over time, the writing and editing work, which had a strong travel focus, started taking up more and more of my daylight hours, and I eventually went back into it full time. It was this work that brought me back to Japan at the end of 2019, just before the pandemic shut down the world.

As the case numbers climbed and lockdown measures intensified, it became increasingly difficult to hold onto my job, and I realized it was time for a change. Though I had long been interested in revisiting language teaching, I had not expected my return to the classroom to be quite so rapid. Almost overnight, I found myself teaching English to university students again, this time, 100% online.

At first, I was optimistic about the professional and personal opportunities afforded by remote learning: I could effortlessly deploy educational technology tools like Kahoot! and Quizlet, without worrying whether my students had access to the requisite devices and Wi-Fi connection; they were, after all, already online, at least in theory. Additionally, there was no commute to drain my energy, and only half of a suit needed to be ironed for work in the new "staffroom". I was also excited about what felt like an unlimited supply of professional development opportunities. I could connect with other teachers across the country and in other parts of the world during lunch or after classes thanks to online conferences, seminars, and the like.

However, I quickly discovered the dark side to remote learning. I was not confident that my online lessons were delivering the knowledge and skills they were intended to teach, nor I was certain that my students were engaged at all, a concern expressed by numerous other teachers I spoke with. It was also difficult not to be overwhelmed by the huge number of professional development seminars and networking opportunities taking place at any given moment. However, the challenges of re-entering the EFL workforce during the pandemic gave rise to several key realizations, which ultimately strengthened my outlook and output as an educator as I transitioned back to full-time mainly in-person teaching at a different institution.

The first of these realizations was a harsh but necessary reminder that teachers, like students, are only human. The virtual classroom was a great equalizer; there was no more front or back of the classroom, just an online space in which we all struggled, at different times and to different degrees, to manage the mute button, the screen-sharing functions, the background interruptions from delivery people and well-intended relatives, and the sudden appearance of cats or children on screen. To me, all of this highlighted our vulnerability, something which I believe is often hidden by and from students and teachers alike.

Though I understood this vulnerability to be a critical component of a feminist pedagogy, I was unsure what to do with it until I hit upon the idea of humor, my default response to just about any situation that elicits feelings of awkwardness. At first, I used humor as a coping mechanism to deal with the general madness of pandemic life, including the way it changed education. Then I began to use it as a tool for both learner motivation and classroom management. My cats were an obvious starting point. I would reward my students for completing in-class tasks by showing them the felines and sharing brief, humorous stories about them, which also served to function as listening practice. Disruptions or lags in a lesson could result in less story time, which was not desirable for the students. Distractions outside the house, for example noisy motorbikes or trucks going by, also provided fodder for impromptu engagements; I would occasionally tell the class I was in a different place, such as a racetrack or bus depot in another country, and see what they said. Though they never believed me, they did try to ascertain where I really was each time.

In my research on the classroom applications of humor, I came across the suggestion that teachers, in personalizing their classrooms, strive for "at least one good laugh each day with students" and that they cultivate the "capability of laughing at and accepting one's mistakes" (Dutton, 1976, p. 79). I would argue that this combination of humor and humility allows us to connect with our students, and relate to each other in a way that builds a sense of community, a key tenet of feminist pedagogy which ultimately facilitates more effective learning (Onufer & Munoz Rojas, 2019).

Adopting Dutton's (1976) suggestion as a kind of mantra, I began to use humor more strategically, though also gently and carefully where the opportunity arose. One example was when my cats would leap onto my desk or start squawking mid-lesson; I would simply introduce them deadpan as my teaching assistants, and ask the students to follow their instructions. This kind of thing improved learner rapport and engagement. Students would type messages in the group chat to comment on the cats, ask questions or share about their own pets; in some cases, they would even unmute to do this vocally. Afterwards, the overall class responsiveness to textbook and task-related questions that I posed would be better, with what seemed to be a greater number of students answering compared to classes that proceeded without this kind of "interruption."

In a 2017 podcast, Michelle Pacansky-Brock, creator and instructor of the Humanizing Online Learning course at California State University at Channel Islands, makes a strong case for leaving the armor off camera and allowing ourselves, and in so doing our students, to be a little more vulnerable online, linking this to the building of trust. She asks why class conversations have to be "flawless and polished", observing that they do not actually happen that way, but require a degree of spontaneity (Young, 2017).

After a semester of online lessons, my key takeaway was that online learning, like in-person learning, offers a small window into our personal lives, and that by avoiding the urge to slam it shut and be "ultra-professional" at all times, we teachers have a powerful opportunity to be vulnerable and real within our classrooms. These are ways of being that are, I would argue, at the heart of a pedagogy that is engaged (Berry, 2010) and feminist (Onufer & Munoz Rojas, 2019) in nature. Light yet formative moments like the ones described above can, over time, give rise to classroom spaces that allow for deeper connection, sharing, and co-learning.

Equilibrating Diversity Representation in ELT

Jackson Koon Yat Lee

As the former chair of JALT's DEI Committee, diversity and representation have been my main professional focus for the past few years. They are also common interests I share with old and new colleagues when discussing the state of the language education sector in Japan. One would hope that the significant increase of conversations about gender equality in recent years has contributed to a significant force of allyship not only

for individuals of any gender, as well as those of different races, ethnicities, and abilities. However, the road is still long because the issues lie not only in a lack of awareness or an absence of action, but also include direct, active opposition to equitable representation.

At the 2021 GALE SIG Forum, I had the privilege of sharing my experience of serving as President of JALT's Gifu Chapter between 2019 and 2021. The chapter endeavored from March 2019 to have a female-majority lineup of presenters at our events for the remainder of the year. The speakers were found mostly through the Equity ELT Japan website and their list of women presenters (McCandie, 2018). The purpose was to provide a platform for female speakers, who were often underrepresented as speakers at chapter events. Furthermore, another goal was to demonstrate that representation for the marginalized could be achieved while maintaining or even elevating the quality of the events. This was a direct response to the commonly expressed reason and/or excuse that organizers could not find female experts on the proposed topics.

Brent Simmonds was the Program Chair of the chapter who suggested and orchestrated this movement, and it was he who first helped me recognize various equity issues in language teaching in Japan. Regarding our endeavor to increase the number of female speakers, he one day informed me of an anonymous criticism the chapter had received for not inviting male presenters. Meanwhile, we observed at the time that many other events within and outside of JALT were male-dominated.

Starting from March 2019, the year concluded with 11 female speakers and four male speakers who co-presented with two female speakers. They presented on a vast range of topics related to English language teaching in Japan. Besides the one criticism, we also received positive feedback, encouraging us to continue our effort in raising awareness through action. As a small chapter, at that time we considered this proud achievement a drop of ink in a large bucket of water. The ink disperses and disappears in gender imbalance at a national level, but the action of dropping the ink will hopefully inspire others to recognize the reasons and meaning behind our actions.

In 2020, Gifu Chapter worked with Nagoya and Toyohashi Chapters on a new October Grand Forum event. Together we decided to include the following affirmative action statement on the call for papers, which was shared on social media platforms: "To combat the inequality in our field, gender, race, and native-language equity measures will influence speaker selection. We prioritize equal representation and equal access to opportunity for all people, and promise to assemble as diverse a range of presenters as possible."

While the purpose of this event was to achieve equal representation and diversity, there was yet another criticism, one made publicly on social media. The open message from this individual, a white male, questioned whether he and others like him would have their proposals rejected simply because enough people of their gender or ethnicity were already selected to speak. An officer in the organizing group suggested we remove it out of fear of attracting more hostility towards this new event, but we decided ultimately to keep it in order to demonstrate our support for equal representation at events. If a member from the dominant group was worried about being rejected because of his identity, imagine responding to the call for papers as someone from a commonly marginalized group. Imagine being used to not seeing people of your group represented at events or holding officer positions. Imagine experiencing rejection not for your credentials, but for your identity. Imagine being accepted for an event or selected for an important role when you are obviously being used for tokenism. In the end, we responded by stating that we believed in our mission. We added that while this was found to be the best approach to support diversity and equity, we were open to learning about other effective methods as well.

As Gifu Chapter's president at the time, I greatly respected my colleagues and the actions we took, but found the above two incidents of resistance problematic. The chapter's mission for equity seemed like common sense to our officers, but even then some rejected it. On the other hand, recognizing the ongoing opposition increased our collective resolve to continue on our mission.

The two experiences helped me to form the following beliefs that guided me as the chair of the DEI Committee:

1. If the mission is just and important, we cannot back down upon being confronted, specifically when the confrontation comes from those perpetuating the problem.
2. The fight against underrepresentation requires involvement and support from everyone, and the best way to avoid criticism is when changes are proposed and supported by a diverse group standing together.
3. Efforts made to equilibrate representation should not be criticized as overcompensation, as such efforts are meant to bring equal representation rather than overrepresentation.
4. Spreading awareness about diversity issues and teaching about privilege are essential for fundamental and sustainable changes in the language teaching community.
5. Each action might be merely a drop of ink in a large bucket of water, but if the drop can inspire others to contribute their own drops, the color in the bucket will eventually begin to change. Therefore, every drop is meaningful.

In conclusion, I was grateful and humbled by the opportunity to share these experiences at the 2021 GALE SIG Forum. With the hope that the presentation and this report have encouraged even more people to support the cause for diverse and equitable representation, only by working together can we create a community of educators that is better not just for some, but for every person involved.

Conclusion

Quenby Hoffman Aoki

GALE SIG thanks these three speakers for demonstrating that gender awareness in the language teaching profession applies not only to a range of teaching contexts but can also draw upon a range of research methodologies. The first report employed quantitative data to shed light upon a serious problem in an area of our field that has rarely been explored, and is clearly in need of further inquiry. The second report offered a professional narrative of teacher development in the context of a global crisis. Finally, the last report described ways that practical action can be taken within a large professional organization and emphasized the need to work toward the goals of diversity and equity, in other words to "walk our talk."

Overall, this forum provided an excellent opportunity to showcase the work of GALE SIG members, not only to increase awareness of gender and other inequalities within our profession, but hopefully to encourage further interest and involvement in the valuable, groundbreaking work of this robust, passionate group of researchers and educators.

Bio Data

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