Enhancing Capacity to Speak through Scaffolding and Task Repetition in Japanese EFL Classrooms

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This study explores students' Capacity to Speak (CTS), an extension of Willingness to Communicate (WTC), focusing on the correlation between CTS and speaking task scaffolding. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research identifies a correlation between students' CTS and the complexity of activities. Notably, activities perceived as low complexity, such as reading aloud and pair conversations, corresponded to higher CTS, except answering simple questions from the instructor, which resulted in the lowest perceived CTS for students, possibly due to fear of negative evaluation and social anxiety. This study reveals students' perceptions of different speaking tasks and emphasizes the importance of the Task-Supported Language Teaching (TSLT) approach in enhancing communicative competence and classroom interaction. The findings have implications for the design of language learning tasks, particularly in activating students' schemata through task repetition, fostering teacher-student relationships through small talk, and enhancing group dynamics in group-based activities.

本研究は、コミュニケーション意欲（Willingness to Communicate）の延長線上にある学生の話す能力（Capacity to Speak、以下CTS）に焦点化し、CTSとスピーキング・タスクにおける足場作りとの関連性を調査するものである。混合研究法を用い、学生のCTSとアクティビティの複雑さとの間に相関関係があることを見いだした。特に、音読やペアでの会話のような複雑性が低いと認識されるアクティビティは、学生のCTSが高い傾向にあるが、教師からの簡単な質問に回答するアクティビティは、否定的な評価への恐れや社交不安が要因となり、最も低いCTSを示す結果となった。本研究は、様々なスピーキング・タスクに対する学生の認識を明らかにし、日本の大学におけるコミュニケーション能力の発達とクラスでの相互交流を強調する。加えて、サポートやタスク支援型言語教育、タスクの反復とCTS、教師と学生の関係促進、グループベースの活動におけるグループ・ダイナミクスの強化にも示唆を与えるものである。

In Japan, students' reluctance to speak in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes has been an increasing concern. Although the government initiatives aimed at improving speaking skills, silence in EFL classes still remains a severe issue (Kikuchi & Browne, 2009). To address this issue, a newer concept, the Capacity to Speak (CTS), has emerged as a more contextually appropriate measure for Japanese EFL classrooms. CTS focuses on classroom situations that either encourage communication or lead to silence (Humphries et al., 2015). Recognizing the need for practical and applicable interventions, this study explores the relationship between CTS and task complexity, examining whether proper scaffolding can enhance CTS in a Japanese university EFL classroom. This study was conducted at a Japanese private university, where the observed challenges in fostering student participation in English classes prompted the need for targeted interventions. The decision to implement this intervention was driven by the desire to create a more engaging and supportive classroom environment that encourages students to actively use English, thereby addressing the persistent issue of classroom silence.

Literature Review

Capacity to Speak

CTS, as defined by Humphries et al. (2015), refers to students' perceptions of their ability to speak English in various classroom situations. This concept has gained attention for its potential to address classroom silence in EFL settings. Research shows that EFL classrooms often follow a teacher-centered approach (Littlewood, 2007), where teacher talk dominates class time (Thornbury, 1996), leading to few student-initiated interactions, especially in Japan. This power imbalance can result in issues such as silence, uneven speaking turns, and reluctance to participate (Nakane, 2007). King (2013) notes that non-participation is often considered normal in EFL classes. Given that CTS emerged in Japan, most research on CTS has been done within Japan. Humphries et al. (2015) identified factors that enhance CTS in Japanese high school English classrooms, including pair and group work, a supportive environment, using L2 as the language of

instruction, and sufficient preparation time. Conversely, CTS diminishes when students are required to speak L2 in front of the class, face negative peer influences, encounter tasks with high cognitive demands, or have insufficient preparation time. Silence in Japanese classrooms is often associated with cultural characteristics (Turner & Hiraga, 1996, as cited in Liu & Littlewood, 1997), and Japan ranks lower in English proficiency compared to neighboring countries (Educational Testing Service [ETS], 2018). Understanding CTS is crucial for overcoming communication barriers in EFL contexts, particularly in higher education.

CTS is rooted in the concept of Willingness to Communicate (WTC), introduced by McCroskey and Richmond (1990), which defines an individual's inclination to initiate communication when given the opportunity. While WTC is a stable trait in one's first language (L1), its application in EFL settings is more complex. In L2 learning, factors such as language proficiency and communicative competence are crucial in shaping WTC (MacIntyre et al., 2003). However, not all learners naturally possess WTC, especially in EFL environments with limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Warden & Lin, 2000). This study explores CTS as a more context-sensitive variable than WTC for understanding communication behaviors in EFL classrooms. While WTC provides a theoretical foundation, CTS offers a practical perspective on how linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural factors influence students' ability and willingness to speak English. Linguistic challenges, L2 anxiety, and cultural values like subordination to authority can inhibit interaction and contribute to reluctance to speak (Seiko, 2011; King & Smith, 2017).

Scaffolding

Task-Supported Language Teaching as a Means of Scaffolding

The use of tasks provides opportunities and an environment for language practice and development (Ellis, 2012; Long, 2015). Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has played an essential role in both pedagogy and research on L2 learning and teaching. However, TBLT has been criticized for an impoverished use of language with little acquisition value (Seedhouse, 1999). More recent research has responded to Seedhouse's (1999) critique. For instance, TBLT lacks theoretical and empirical support (Bruton, 2002; Long, 2016; Swan, 2005); and adequate focus on form (Harris, 2018; Swan, 2005). An emerging approach, TSLT, considered more applicable to L2 classrooms, has been introduced as a complement to TBLT. In TSLT, specific linguistic forms are taught explicitly prior to the adoption of tasks to practice language use under authentic operational conditions (Li et al., 2016). TSLT is supported by skill-based learning theory, which asserts that practice allows for the proceduralization and automation of declarative knowledge.Thus, TSLT requires meticulous task design and structuring. Teachers must provide clear guidance, set realistic expectations, and anticipate potential challenges that students may face during task execution (Ellis, 2012). This approach emphasizes the importance of creating tasks that are not only linguistically appropriate but also cognitively engaging, allowing students to apply the target language in meaningful contexts. TSLT that facilitates the deployment of the goals and objectives of instruction in unplanned language use is likely to serve as a means of scaffolding in EFL contexts (Li et al., 2016).

Task Repetition as a Means of Scaffolding

In formal learning settings, scaffolding plays a crucial role in helping students complete tasks and reach learning goals (Hmelo-Silver et al., 2007). Sandoval and Reiser (2004) highlight the dual nature of scaffolding, involving structuring tasks (offering guidance and explicit instruction) and addressing subject matter challenges (defining problems and guiding classroom mediation). Research on task repetition as a form of scaffolding has demonstrated positive effects on L2 production and EFL learning achievement (Aubrey, 2017; Bygate, 2001). While previous studies mainly focus on repeating the same task and its impact on language output (accuracy, complexity, and fluency), Lambert et al. (2021) suggest that aural-oral same task repetition leads to immediate gains in L2 fluency. Beyond repeating the same task, there is a growing recognition of the significance of procedural task repetition. Procedural task repetition involves repeating the same or similar task types with different content (Kim, 2013). Kim and Tracy-Ventura (2013) argue that procedural task repetition is more effective than repeating the exact task in enhancing the accuracy of language production. This type of repetition allows learners to rely on previously understood task content and activates recently used linguistic constructions, reducing the cognitive demands of processing and encoding information simultaneously.

Group Discussion as a Means of Scaffolding

The use of group discussion in L2 classes has long been supported by sound pedagogical arguments (Aufa & Storch, 2021; Long & Porter, 1985; Tarone & Swain, 1995). Arco-Tirado et al. (2011) argue that in a cooperative learning situation, learners are capable of helping one another through peer scaffolding. Learners are highly likely to accomplish tasks beyond learners' current level of language proficiency in cooperative

group tasks (Aufa & Storch, 2021). Long and Porter (1985) summarize the pedagogical importance of group discussion: (1) group discussion increases opportunities for language practice; (2) group discussion improves the quality of student talk; (3) group discussion contributes to individualized instruction; (4) group discussion contributes to a positive classroom climate. Allowing learners to work in cooperative learning groups before completing individual speaking tasks contributes to facilitating learners' confidence levels (Larson & Harmon, 2007; Mitchell, 2010). Once students are more comfortable with the discussion format, the instructor can assign group tasks more frequently to enhance learners' confidence in sharing different perspectives (Mitchell, 2010).

Methodology

The study aimed to investigate students' CTS in EFL classrooms and assess whether scaffolding is an influential variable in enhancing CTS. To achieve this, the study posed three research questions:

RQ1. What types of communicative activities have students experienced in EFL classrooms at a Japanese university?

RQ2. In which communicative activities do students perceive higher or lower CTS in EFL classrooms at a Japanese university?

RQ3. Does scaffolding foster students' perceptions of CTS over a short period?

Participants

The participants were undergraduate students from a Japanese private university, all with elementary English proficiency (TOEIC scores between 285 and 395). Initially, 55 students participated in the study. Of these, 16 continued to the task intervention phase, 8 completed the post-task questionnaire, and 5 participated in follow-up interviews. The study received approval from the university's Institutional Review Board and all participants' informed consent.

Procedure

Phase 1: Initial Survey

A quantitative survey was administered to nine English classes to gather baseline data on participants' experiences with various communicative activities in their EFL classrooms and their self-assessed CTS during these activities. The survey included questions about specific activities like pair discussions, group discussions, and impromptu speeches, and asked participants to rate their CTS in each scenario on a scale of 1 to 6. Initially, 55 students participated in the survey. However, the number of participants significantly decreased in the subsequent phases due to voluntary withdrawal and scheduling conflicts, which were not accounted for in the initial planning of the study.

Phase 2: Task Intervention

Over four weeks, 16 students participated in a task intervention designed to improve their CTS through eight 90-min lessons. The intervention incorporated TSLT and task repetition in group-based speaking activities (e.g., role-plays, small talk, debates with per-task preparation, problem-solving tasks with deliberate language support). Each class included 20 to 30 minutes of TSLT tasks (see Appendix A for sample instructions), where students were provided with a list of useful expressions and phrases to support their spoken interactions (adapted from Asakawa et al., 2016). Additionally, three 90-minute sessions, referred to as "Speaking Days," focused on practicing specific communicative skills through repeated procedural tasks (see Appendix B for sample instructions). These sessions included pre-reading questions, reading comprehension tasks, discussion skills teaching, and guided discussions. The intervention aimed to scaffold students' learning by providing structured support and opportunities for repeated practice in a controlled environment. In this study, an instructor who was open to and willing to implement the TSLT approach volunteered to participate in the task intervention, which was therefore conducted in a single English class. The instructor consistently utilized the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in the curriculum, offering students ample opportunities to use English both in the classroom and in real-life contexts. Students were also actively engaged in the in-class activities. To ensure the task intervention seamlessly integrated with existing teaching practices and the classroom atmosphere, the topics and procedures of the tasks were carefully negotiated with the instructor. This collaboration complemented and enhanced the regular instructional approach, fostering an environment where students could effectively develop their CTS within a supportive and familiar setting. Upon completion of all the tasks, the questionnaire from the first phase of the study was administered again to assess whether the tasks provided sufficient scaffolding and how the successful learning experiences influenced students' perceptions of their CTS. Eight students voluntarily completed the second questionnaire.

Phase 3: Follow-up Interviews

Five students who participated in the task intervention and completed the post-task intervention questionnaire agreed to provide additional qualitative data through semi-structured interviews. These interviews aimed to explore their perceptions of the in-class communicative tasks, the scaffolding provided, and any changes in their CTS. The semi-structured format allowed participants to share their thoughts on the effectiveness of the intervention and discuss any challenges they encountered during the tasks. The significant drop in participant numbers between phases, particularly the reduction to five participants in the final phase, was due to the voluntary nature of participation. This reduction in numbers may have impacted the generalizability of the findings, which is acknowledged as a limitation of the study. The semi-structured format allowed participants to share their thoughts on the effectiveness of the intervention and discuss any challenges they encountered during the tasks.

Results

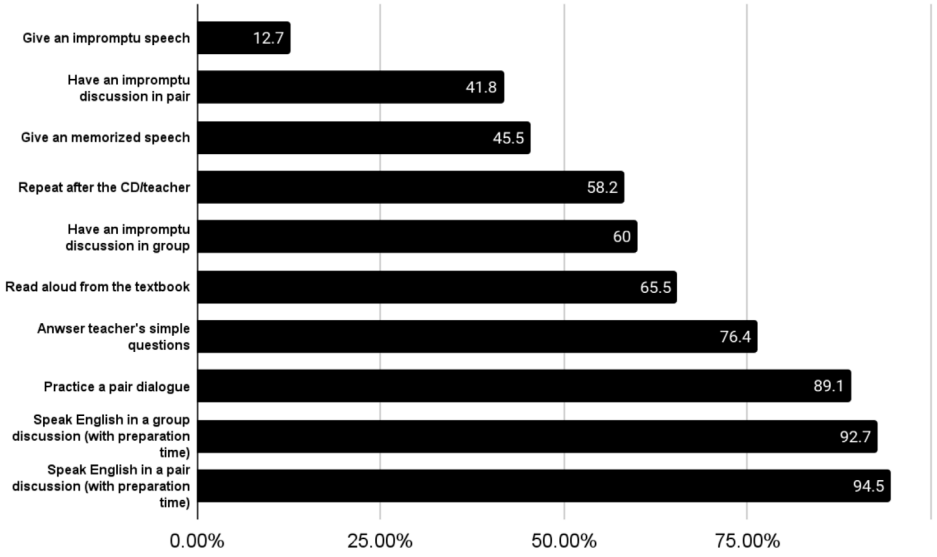
Results from Quantitative Data

The initial quantitative data from the questionnaire highlighted participants' engagement in various EFL communicative activities and their CTS in English during these activities. Figure 1 illustrates the prevalence of different activities in Japanese university classrooms. Pair discussions were experienced by 94.5% of participants, and 92.7% engaged in group discussions. Notably, impromptu pair discussions and group discussions, which involve limited preparation time, were experienced by 41.8% and 60% of participants, respectively. Answering teachers' simple questions was a common activity, with a participation rate of 76.4%. While drilling, emphasizing language mastery through repetition, is a traditional approach, only 58.20% of participants reported experiencing it. Additionally, a minority (12.8%) engaged in impromptu speeches in class.

The initial questionnaire also explored students' perceptions of their CTS across activities with varying cognitive demands. Skehan (1998) suggests that higher cognitive demands in tasks may negatively impact learners' oral language production in terms of accuracy, fluency, and complexity. Figure 2 illustrates an inverse relationship between perceived CTS and cognitive task demands. Participants reported higher CTS in less cognitively demanding tasks, such as repeating after the CD/teacher and pair-dialogue practice. Conversely, CTS was lower in time-limited and cognitively complex tasks involving impromptu discussions or speeches. Students felt more confident when given time to prepare before engaging in discussions or speeches. Additionally, participants expressed slightly higher CTS in paired discussions compared to group discussions. Interestingly, despite the low cognitive demand, students perceived the lowest CTS in activities involving answering teachers' simple questions (e.g., "How are you?").

Figure 1

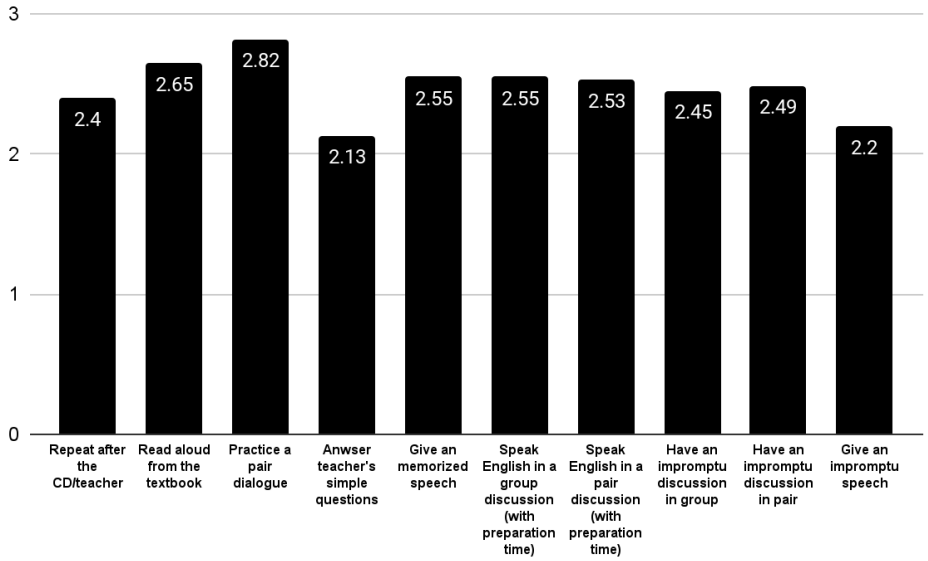
Percentage of Students Who Have Experienced Each Classroom Communicative Activity



Note: This figure displays the percentage of students who have experienced various communicative activities in the classroom. Activities involving pair discussions and group discussions with preparation are the most commonly experienced, with over 90% of students having participated. In contrast, more spontaneous tasks, such as giving an impromptu speech, were experienced by a much smaller percentage of students, indicating a potential gap in opportunities for practicing spontaneous speaking in the classroom setting.

Figure 2

Mean Scores of Students' Perceptions of Their CTS in Different Activities



Note: Figure 2 shows the mean scores of students' perceptions of their Capacity to Speak (CTS) across different classroom activities. The data suggests that students felt most confident in tasks such as practicing a pair dialogue, with a mean CTS score of 2.82. Conversely, activities that typically involve higher cognitive demands or spontaneity received lower mean scores, indicating that students may perceive these tasks as more challenging in terms of their CTS. Despite the variation, all mean scores are below the midpoint of 3 on a 6-point scale, suggesting a general need for enhanced support to build students' CTS across all activities.

Eight participants engaged in a 4-week task intervention and completed a follow-up questionnaire after the intervention. The tasks implemented during the intervention aimed to foster collaboration and interaction, supported by scaffolding to enhance successful learning experiences and improve students' perceptions of CTS. The initial data analysis plan involved comparing participants' pre-task and post-task intervention questionnaire data using a paired-sample t-test. However, due to the small sample size, the statistical power of the paired-sample t-test is limited, potentially affecting the reliability and generalizability of the results. To address this limitation, a qualitative data analysis was conducted to complement the quantitative findings.

Results from Qualitative Data

To obtain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions of the task intervention and to investigate the role of scaffolding in influencing students' CTS, five students who participated in the in-class task intervention were interviewed individually. In the following sections of interview results, letter codes are used to ensure the confidentiality of learners' information.

Students' Perceptions of In-class Communicative Tasks

All five interviewees enjoyed and found relevance in the in-class communicative tasks. Four students felt their needs were met, while Student B expressed interest but uncertainty about needs being fulfilled. Regarding task instructions, all interviewees found them clear. Student C, though occasionally unsure, clarified with her partner during a pair-based task. Participants considered their experience successful and valued English-speaking opportunities in pairs. For instance, Student B appreciated the allocated speaking time, Student C found pair discussions beneficial for language practice, Student D valued talking with friends in English, and Student E saw the task as a chance to learn vocabulary and grammar. Student A highlighted the success of learning, linking class content to real-life applications. When implementing TSLT, the instructor and the researcher carefully designed tasks that closely mimic real-life situations where students would likely use the target language. For example, one task involved asking students to design and present a one-day excursion route for foreign exchange students. In this task, students were required to justify their decisions by highlighting the unique features of each attraction and incorporating typical Japanese culture. Additionally, they had to ensure the route's efficiency, avoiding unnecessary expenses by minimizing redundant travel and optimizing the use of transportation. Throughout this task, explicit language teaching was integrated to support students' language development. Key vocabulary, phrases, and sentence structures necessary for describing locations, justifying choices, and providing clear directions were taught and practiced before students engaged in the task. This task not only encouraged students to use the target language in a practical context but also fostered critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as they needed to balance cultural representation with logistical considerations. By simulating authentic, real-world scenarios, the task aimed to enhance students' ability to apply their

language skills in meaningful ways, thereby strengthening their CTS in contexts they are likely to encounter outside the classroom.

Students' Perceptions of the Scaffolding Provided in Communicative Tasks

Interview data highlighted the importance learners placed on teacher scaffolding, encompassing linguistic guidance in TSLT tasks, task repetition, group cooperation, and modeling. Some participants expressed the need for additional preparation time to enhance task completion. Student B noted, "I found the guidance valuable, but there were instances where I felt the preparation time was insufficient." Student C also desired more time for activities but acknowledged the opportunity to verify answers with peers, considering the preparation time reasonable in that context.

The Effects of Scaffolding

At the task intervention outset, a list of phrases (adapted from Asakawa et al., 2016) supporting spoken interaction was distributed. The instructor also explicitly taught some discussion skills from the list in class. While all participants found the list of interactional expressions helpful, its impact on enhancing communicative competence was limited for most due to difficulties in memorization. In terms of confidence in English-speaking skills with the list, opinions varied. Student C credited the list for significantly boosting confidence, particularly in areas she struggled with. Conversely, Student B and Student E felt minor effects on confidence, while Student A and Student D perceived little difference. In the EFL context, where there is less urgency to use English outside the classroom, reinforcement of discussion skills may lack real-life applicability. Student D attributed the lack of confidence to limited vocabulary and simple grammar use, emphasizing the link between linguistic proficiency and confidence in speaking English.

The Effects of Task Repetition on CTS

The task intervention included three English-speaking days dedicated to practicing communicative skills, encompassing activities like pre-reading questions, reading passages, comprehension questions, post-reading questions, discussion skills, preparation, and discussion questions—all following a consistent format. This structure aimed to activate students' schemata and enhance syntactic complexity. Interview data highlighted that the structure contributed to student comfort and active participation. According to Student A and Student D, the format offered clarity and step-by-step guidance, preventing confusion. Student B and Student C also expressed appreciation for the familiarity, and feeling secure during these tasks. Concerning the impact of task repetition on CTS, four interviewees perceived positive effects. Student A, for example, found it beneficial for organizing information and anticipating class development. Repetition, especially in procedural tasks like passage reading and paired discussions, provided clues for discussions and activated schemata. Student C noted improved English skills through careful speaking and reading, resulting in enhanced understanding and gradual improvement. Similarly, Student D attributed exposure to diverse opinions for the enhancement of speaking skills, emphasizing the positive influence of scaffolding in repeated communicative tasks on speaking abilities.

Group Dynamic

The interview data revealed a preference among most participants for pair discussions over group discussions. Student D expressed difficulty in larger groups, especially during online discussions, finding it easier to talk in pairs. Student E concurred, finding pair discussions more manageable and providing more opportunities for English practice than group discussions. Student C, however, had a nuanced view, suggesting that discussing challenging topics with a few classmates is beneficial, while pair discussions are suitable for less complex topics. Student C considered the quality of relationships between group members and the complexity of the task as crucial factors influencing her preference for group discussions. The positive classroom environment was noted to enhance comfort in group communication. Participants highlighted several positive aspects of pair discussions, such as openness to different opinions, improved quality of student talk, and enhanced linguistic proficiency.

Discussion

Research Question #1: What types of communicative activities have students experienced in EFL classrooms at a Japanese university?

Based on the quantitative questionnaire data collection, the majority of participants have experienced pair discussion and group discussion in EFL classes at a Japanese university. The finding revealed the emphasis on the development of communicative competence and the promotion of classroom interactions at the Japanese university. Although pair discussion and group discussion are popular in EFL classrooms, students are usually provided preparation time before discussing. Impromptu discussions occur less frequently in class, possibly because learners may feel that they lack the linguistic proficiency to speak without preparation (Humphries et al., 2015). In addition, the task

of impromptu speech rarely occurs in English classrooms. Delivering an impromptu speech requires a high level of language proficiency and strong improvisational skills, which could be a demanding activity for elementary and intermediate students. Answering teachers' simple questions is also an activity that frequently occurs in EFL classrooms, which may indicate that interaction between teachers and students is valued in EFL classes at the Japanese university.

Research Question #2: In what communicative activities do students perceive higher or lower CTS in EFL classrooms at a Japanese university?

Generally, participants did not perceive high CTS in the activities examined. The activity with the highest CTS was practicing a pair-work dialogue, with a score of 2.82 out of 6, indicating relatively low confidence. This aligns with Uchihara and Harada's (2018) findings, suggesting students lack confidence in productive language skills, particularly in speaking. Activities with lower complexity, such as reading aloud, repeating after the teacher/CD, and practicing a pair-work dialogue, tended to correspond to higher CTS for students. An exception was answering simple questions from the teacher, considered low-complexity but resulting in the lowest perceived CTS. Potential reasons for this included fear of negative evaluation and social variables. Fear of negative evaluation, a significant barrier in Japanese EFL classrooms, is heightened by the continuous teacher evaluation. King and Smith (2017) highlight how these factors can lead to silence in the classroom, especially in hierarchical educational environments like those in Japan. The pressure to perform well in front of authority figures, combined with the cultural emphasis on maintaining face, may inhibit students from speaking even in seemingly simple situations. Similarly, Holliday (2003) identifies invisible walls hindering Japanese students' speaking, linking it to the pressure of teacher-evaluated oral interaction and cultural factors. To address these barriers, the current study will suggest implementing targeted pedagogical strategies, including task repetition as a means of scaffolding, to foster a more supportive and interactive classroom environment.

Activities perceived with higher CTS were those Robinson (2005) classified as low complexity. In contrast, activities with higher complexity and cognitive demand, like pair and group discussions, impromptu discussions, and impromptu speeches, resulted in lower CTS. Discussion with preparation time increased CTS, consistent with Humphries et al. (2015). Pair discussions were preferred over group discussions due to more equitable participation, ease of cooperation, and increased engagement, aligning with Qin (2011) and addressing the pluralistic-ignorance phenomenon in group discussions. Interviews supported students' preference for pair discussions, emphasizing increased speaking opportunities and more active interaction with partners.

Research Question #3: Does scaffolding foster students' perceptions of CTS in a short period of time?

This study highlights the positive impact of scaffolding on learners' CTS by providing meaningful learning experiences. Scaffolding plays a crucial role in helping students bridge the gap between their current abilities and learning objectives through structured support (Etkina et al., 2010; Hmelo-Silver et al., 2007). In this research, the TSLT approach was pivotal, with the researcher offering a list of useful expressions (e.g., making requests, asking for opinions) and explicitly teaching task-related vocabulary and grammar (e.g., 'if' second conditional sentences for survival games). While students found these expressions helpful, memorization challenges limited their effectiveness. Teachers can address this by customizing expression lists based on teaching content and students' proficiency levels, using resources like https://www.englishclub.com.

The deliberate teaching approach, functioning as scaffolding, proved effective in achieving instructional goals, aligning with Li et al.'s (2016) findings. Pre-task linguistic preparation, including explicit instruction, enables learners to engage more confidently in tasks. The '4/3/2' technique proposed by Nation (2013) further supports fluency development by having students repeat the same talk with different partners in decreasing time intervals, improving accuracy and fluency.

Task repetition also served as a scaffolding method, enhancing students' CTS by deepening their understanding of discussion topics and activating related schemata. This approach improved comprehension and organization of thoughts, consistent with Aubrey's (2017) findings on its positive impact on L2 production and EFL learning. The '4/3/2' activities could become regular practices in EFL classrooms, with varying discussion topics. Clear instructions and specific sample answers should accompany new tasks to help students grasp the goals and expectations.

Implications

This exploration of students' CTS and the role of scaffolding provides valuable insights for educators, teacher trainers, and professional developers. The TSLT approach, with its emphasis on explicit instruction before task implementation, proves effective in EFL classrooms. Pre-task practice in TSLT helps students internalize declarative knowledge, facilitating successful task completion and meaningful learning experiences (Li et al., 2016; Hmelo-Silver et al., 2007). Unlike the grammar-translation approach, TSLT demands careful task structuring, requiring teachers to provide clear guidance and anticipate challenges (Ellis, 2012). Task repetition is highlighted as a useful scaffolding

tool to enhance students' CTS in classroom activities. Research supports the positive effects of procedural task repetition on L2 production and EFL learning (Bygate, 2001; Aubrey, 2017). It prepares students for discussions, activates schemata, and improves language use. Teachers can use this technique to reinforce connections between lessons, ensuring coherence and consistency in task implementation (Ellis, 2000).

The study also uncovers a paradox: answering simple questions, despite their lower cognitive demand, results in the lowest perceived CTS among students, likely due to fear of negative evaluation and social anxiety rooted in cultural values. Classroom support is crucial for enhancing CTS, emphasizing the need for a positive, supportive environment (Humphries et al., 2020). Teachers should create a friendly atmosphere, initiate small talk to build rapport, and be mindful of sensitive topics to reduce anxiety and foster meaningful interactions (Edge & Garton, 2009; King & Smith, 2017). For small talk topics, teachers can use resources like http://iteslj.org/questions/, which offers a range of topics. However, teachers should be sensitive to students' feelings, avoiding potentially uncomfortable subjects like family or disasters. When designing the small talk component of the task intervention, topics were deliberately chosen to focus on neutral and broadly engaging themes. These included discussions on hobbies, favorite foods, weekend activities, as well as current trends such as MBTI types and university cultural festivals. By fostering an enjoyable communication environment and increasing teacher-student interactions, students' anxiety and fear of negative evaluation may decrease, leading to a higher perceived CTS.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between Japanese university students' perceptions of their CTS and the influence of scaffolding and successful learning experiences on CTS enhancement. The results indicate that students exhibit higher CTS in activities of lower complexity, with the exception of answering simple questions from the teacher, which appears to be hindered by a fear of negative evaluation. The analysis reveals that effective scaffolding strategies, including task repetition and structured preparation time, play an essential role in improving students' CTS across various communicative activities. This research underscores the importance of these pedagogical approaches in creating a supportive classroom environment that encourages active participation and the development of communicative competence. The central argument presented is that targeted scaffolding techniques, particularly TSLT and task repetition, are essential in addressing communication challenges within Japanese EFL contexts. By enhancing CTS, these strategies contribute to more effective language instruction and improved learning outcomes. The findings provide valuable implications for educators, teacher trainers, and curriculum developers seeking to optimize language teaching practices in similar educational settings.

Bio Data

Yi Lin is currently pursuing her Ph.D. at Soka University, where she has been employed since 2022. Residing in Tokyo, her research interests focus on the CTS in EFL contexts and Self-Directed Learning (SDL) at Self-Access Centers (SACs). Yi Lin is dedicated to enhancing students' SDL and CTS in various learning environments <linyi@soka.ac.jp>.

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Appendix A

Sample Instructions

Sample Instructions of the Activities in Task Intervention

Activity 1.1:

Find similarities and differences

Students are paired to find similarities and differences between their partners and themselves. The following linguistic forms can be used as a reference. You can inquire about your hobbies, experiences, opinions, etc

Linguistic scaffolding:

Hobbies

E.g.,

- Do you like...?
- Which sports do you like...?
- What is your favorite song...?

Experiences

E.g.,

- Have you ever...?
- Did you try ...?
- Have you been to ...?

Opinions

E.g.,

- What do you think about ...?
- What is your opinion towards...?
- Do you think ...?
- Do you agree ...?

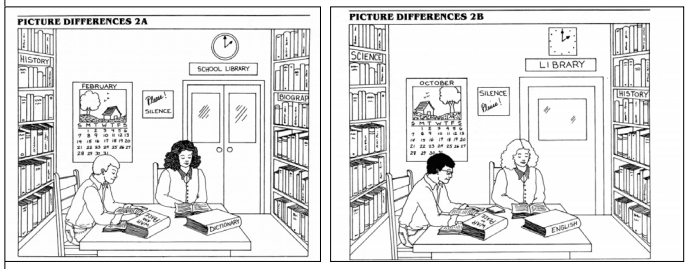
E.g.,

- Do you prefer to..?
- Which do you prefer, xx or xx?
- Which xx do you prefer?

Can you think of more questions? :)

Activity 1.2 :

Spot the differences between two pictures



Adapted from *Talk-A-Tivities* (2002)

Pair students received picture A and picture B with similarities and differences.

Students need to do the following things:

1. Describe your picture to your partner(s).
2. Identify differences by asking and answering questions in English. When you agree on a difference, circle it on your pictures.

Linguistic scaffolding:

For discussion:

- Is there/ Are there.....?
- Is she/her doing.....? Are they doing.....?
- Does he/she have.....?
- What is in/on/at (location)?
- How many xx are there?

For pointing out the differences and similarities:

- Both pictures .....
- A similarity in the pictures is .....
- A difference between the two pictures is .....
- The pictures are different because .....
- There is/are different ..... in the two pictures.
- Picture A..... Picture B.....

Appendix B

Sample Instructions and handout of Speaking Day Activities

Students and Pressure

Pre-Reading Question

- Have you ever felt any kind of pressure at university?

Reading

1. Many people believe that going to university is one of the best times of their lives. However, for many students it can also be very stressful. University students today face many different kinds of social pressure, such as pressure from parents, peer pressure, academic pressure, and financial pressure. Students have to study, spend time with friends, and prepare to find a full-time job. Therefore, it is important for them to manage social pressures so that they can reach their goals.
2. One of the most common types of pressure that students feel is pressure to get good grades at university. Graduating from a famous university makes it easier to find a good job. Therefore, many parents send their children to cram schools to study subjects that will help them find a job with a good salary.
3. Kaoru is a first-year university student. Her parents paid for her to go to a cram school and to study with a private tutor. She studies law because her parents are both successful lawyers. When she was a child, they said that Kaoru should become a lawyer – they never asked her what job she wanted to do. However, she is now thinking about what job she would like to do. She has taken some introductory law courses but is more interested in other subjects.
4. Because Kaoru doesn't know what to study, she wants to take a year off from university to think about her future. However, she is afraid to tell her parents about this plan. Her parents want her to become a lawyer because this job is respected and earns a good salary. Kaoru understands her parents' point of view. "I think about it every day, and I'm not happy with university life. I feel like I'm wasting my time, but I don't want to disappoint my parents. I've been really stressed out," she says.
5. Pressure from peers can also cause problems for students. Sometimes university students feel that they need to think or act similarly to their peers. There are many different types of peer pressure, such as pressure to be fashionable, pressure to

drink, and pressure to get good grades. One of the biggest types of peer pressure is pressure to socialize with friends.

6. Balancing private time and time with university friends was a big problem for Keita, a third-year university student. He joined a university club when he was a first-year student and quickly made friends. However, his new friends enjoyed partying and staying out late after club meetings. Because he wanted to build good relationships, Keita always joined them. But sometimes he didn't want to go. At the end of his first year, Keita got frustrated with this situation and quit the club. He says, "I didn't like the peer pressure at the club. I was under a lot of stress because I couldn't say 'no' to my friends."
7. Keita solved his pressure problems by focusing more on his studies than on his social life. Kaoru, however, is still carefully thinking about what to do. The important thing is that Kaoru is trying to solve her issues. Many students become very stressed by social pressure. They must think carefully about how to become happier and to discuss their thoughts and feelings with people around them.

Comprehension Question

- What does Kaoru want to do?

Discussion Questions from the Reading

- What should Kaoru do? What is your suggestion for Kaoru?

Discussion Skills

- Responses when you are not sure about the answer

- I am sorry, but I am not familiar with the topic/ I don't know.
- I have no idea. (I need some more time to think).
- Sorry, I don't understand/I didn't get you. (Could you please tell me what you mean by ...?)
- I am not sure...

Sample Conversation:

A: B, are you familiar with 21st century skills?

B: _____.

A: Hi, B! Do you know when we will know the scores of December's TOEIC test?

B: _____.

A: B, do you know which is the second highest mountain in Japan?

B: _____.

A: B, do you know when it will be possible to travel to Korea?

B: _____.

Discussion Preparation

Part A. What are the most serious kinds of pressure for you? Rank the pressures from 1 (the most serious) to 6 (the least serious).

Pressure	Ranking
1. Pressure to wear fashionable clothes	#
2. Pressure to do club activities	#
3. Pressure to have many friends	#
4. Pressure to earn money and be independent	#
5. Pressure to get good grades and pass exams	#
6. Pressure to think about career choices	#

Part B. Below are ideas for how to manage stress. Which ones do you use? Which one do you want to try?

Exercise

1. Meditation — doing now / want to try / not interested
2. Talking to Someone — doing now / want to try / not interested
3. Getting Enough Sleep — doing now / want to try / not interested
4. Eating something delicious — doing now / want to try / not interested
5. Doing physical exercise — doing now / want to try / not interested
6. Listening to music/watching movies — doing now / want to try / not interested
7. Playing games — doing now / want to try / not interested

Part C. Below are four opinions about pressure. For each opinion, decide if you agree or disagree.

A: I think pressure can lead to negative health of students, such as lack of sleep, anxiety.
(agree / disagree)

B: In my opinion, pressure can improve learning and decision-making skills.
(agree / disagree)

C: I think pressure helps to keep positive habits and attitudes.
(agree / disagree)

D: From my point of view, pressure is harmful. It can reduce self-confidence.
(agree / disagree)

E: I think pressure can push me to study harder and get better grades.
(agree / disagree)

Discussion

- What kind of pressure do students face?
- How do you deal with pressure?
- Is pressure good or bad for students?

Discussion Goals

Fluency

- Did you respond to your classmate quickly without too much silence?

Accuracy

- Did you speak with grammar and pronunciation your classmate can understand?

Complexity

- Did you challenge yourself to speak a lot with your classmate in detail?

Engagement

- Did you actively talk with your classmate?

Sample Handout of Speaking Day Activities

Students' Handout: Unit 10 Students and Pressure

Asking for Opinions

- What's your opinion, [name]?
- What do you think (about...)?
- What does everyone (else) think?

Giving Opinions

- In my opinion,...
- I'm not sure, but I think...
- I (partly/totally) agree with you. I think...
- I'm sorry, but I disagree. I think...

Asking for reasons

- Why do you think so?
- How come?

- Can you tell me why?

Giving Reasons

- It's mainly because...
- One reason is...
- Another reason is...

Confirmation

- You mean...? Do you mean...?
- Is it alright / ok?
- I wonder if I'm right...

Making requests / Asking for permission

- Could you speak louder, (please)?/ Would you mind speaking louder?
- Could you repeat that, (please)? I beg your pardon (but would you repeat what you said)?
- Could you speak more slowly, (please)?/Would you mind speaking more slowly?

Pre-Reading Question

- Have you ever felt any kind of pressure at university?
  (club activities, academic pressure, test anxiety, living arrangements, social pressure, money worries/financial stress, career choices in the future, time management, peer pressure...)

Reading

1. Cram school: cram schools are specialized schools that train their students to meet particular goals such as achieving good marks or passing the entrance examinations of high schools or universities.

2. Introductory (adjective) /ˌɪntrəˈdʌktəri/**:**
   a. providing basic information about a subject;
   b. providing information about someone who is about to speak, perform, etc., or something that is about to begin

3. Socialize (verb)/ˈsoʊʃəˌlaɪz/: to talk to and do things with other people in a friendly way

4. Frustrate (verb)/ˈfrʌˌstreɪt/ : to cause (someone) to feel angry, discouraged, or upset because of not being able to do something.

Comprehension Questions

- What does Kaoru want to do?

Discussion Questions from the Reading

What should Kaoru do? What is your suggestion for Kaoru? (Textbook P.125)

Grammar: Modals (*could, ought to, should, must*); *have to*

Make suggestions	Give advice	Express obligation
You **could** stop smoking.	You **should/ought to** stop smoking.	You **must/have to** stop smoking.
! gentle	!! strong	!!! very strong

- I think Kaoru could ...
- I think Kaoru should/ought to...
- I think Kaoru must/have to ...

Discussion Skills

*Remember no one is perfect, and everyone has gaps in their knowledge. It is perfectly normal not to have answers to all questions. Silence is not always a good way to deal with the problem. You can use the following expressions when you do not understand the question or do not know the answer.

- I am sorry, but I am not familiar with the topic/ I don't know.
- I have no idea. (I need some more time to think).
- Sorry, I don't understand/I didn't get you. (Could you please tell me what you mean by ...?)
- I am not sure...

Discussion Preparation

Meditation (noun)/ˌmɛdəˈteɪʃən/:the act or process of spending time in quiet thought.

Discussion

- What kind of pressure do students face?
- How do you deal with pressure?
- Is pressure good or bad for students?