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In this month's issue . . .

This issue features two thought-provoking articles. First, **Anthony Disorbo** from the University of Birmingham evaluates Japanese elementary school English textbooks, examining the balance between form-focused and meaning-focused activities. His findings reveal a strong tendency toward form-focused tasks, potentially limiting students' opportunities for authentic communication. This study highlights the need for adjustments to better align teaching materials with communicative objectives.

In our second article, **Satomi Shinohe** from Hokkaido University presents an exploratory study on Japanese EFL learners' past communication experiences and their impact on willingness to communicate and self-perceived English proficiency. She introduces the ESUC Scale, a tool designed to quantify both successful and unsuccessful communication experiences, offering valuable insights into motivation and confidence in language learning.

We are also pleased to welcome Greg Dalziel as our new co-editor. Greg, who recently served as guest editor for our preconference issue, brings a wealth of experience in English language education. We look forward to the fresh perspectives he will contribute to *The Language Teacher*.

As always, don't miss our regular JALT Praxis columns, including *My Share*, *TLT Wired*, and *Teaching Assistance*, where you'll find practical resources and ideas to support your teaching journey.

今号は、示唆に富む2本の記事を特集します。まず、バーミンガム大学のAnthony Disorboは、日本の小学校英語教科書を評価し、形式重視の活動と意味重視の活動のバランスを検証しています。その結果、形式を重視する傾向が強く、生徒が本格的なコミュニケーションを行う機会を制限している可能性があることが明らかとなりました。この研究は、教材とコミュニケーションの目的をより一致させるために調整が必要であることを浮き彫りにしています。

2つ目の論文では、北海道大学のSatomi Shinoheが、日本人EFL学習者の過去のコミュニケーション経験と、それがコミュニケーション意欲や主観的英語力に与える影響に関する探索的研究を紹介します。成功したコミュニケーション経験と失敗したコミュニケーション

Continued over



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経験の両方を数値化するためにデザインされたツールであるESUCスケールを導入して、言語学習におけるモチベーションと自信に関する貴重な洞察を提供しています。

また、新しい共同編集者にGreg Dalzielを迎えることができました。Gregは最近、preconference issueでゲスト・エディターを務めましたが、英語教育における豊富な経験をもたらしてくれます。彼がThe Language Teacherに新たな視点を提供してくれることを楽しみにしています。

いつものことながら、実用的な情報源そして教える過程で支えとなりうるMy Share, TLT Wired, Teaching Assistanceなど、JALT Praxisの定期的なコラムもお見逃しなく。

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Evaluating the Representation of Form-Focused and Meaning-Focused Activities in Japanese Elementary School English Textbooks

Anthony DiSorbo
University of Birmingham

Japan's Course of Study aims for elementary school students to develop fundamental abilities for actual communication in English. This study evaluates how the seven English textbook series used in Japanese elementary schools facilitate the development of communicative abilities by examining their representation of form-focused and meaning-focused activities. Activities from all 14 elementary school textbooks in these series were evaluated on a form-meaning scale. The results indicate that the textbooks have a higher proportion of form-focused activities—particularly in speaking, reading, and writing—and relatively few meaning-focused activities. Consequently, students may be impeded from actively engaging in actual communication unless relevant adaptations are made. Moreover, the preponderance of form-focused activities may limit opportunities and incentives to think about language use and instead place priority on mechanical learning.

日本の学習指導要領は、小学生が実際に英語でコミュニケーションを行うための基礎的な能力を育成することを目標としている。本研究では、日本の小学校で使用されている7つの英語教科書シリーズについて、形式重視の活動と意味重視の活動の取り扱いを分析することで、コミュニケーション能力の育成がどのように促進されているかを評価した。全14冊の小学校教科書の活動を、形式と意味の尺度で評価した。その結果、特にスピーキング、リーディング、ライティングにおいて、形式重視の活動の割合が高く、意味重視の活動が比較的少ないことがわかった。結果として、適切な適応がなされない限り、児童は実際のコミュニケーションを図ることを妨げられる可能性がある。さらに、形式重視の活動が圧倒的に多いため、言語使用について考える機会や動機付けが制限され、代わりに暗記学習が優先される可能性がある。

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In 2020, seven English textbook series were published for the fifth and sixth grades in Japanese elementary schools (JES). These textbooks were screened by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) and deemed suitable for the revised Course of Study (COS; MEXT, 2017). According to the COS, students are to learn how to communicate about themselves and everyday topics at a basic level. It reasonably follows that MEXT-approved textbooks should facilitate instruction for the development of communicative abilities. Prior research suggests that MEXT-approved textbooks do not always align with Japan's curricular goals and should, thus, be evaluated (Glasgow & Paller, 2019; Gorsuch, 1999; Ogura, 2008). This study aims to evaluate the seven JES textbook series, particularly the representation of form-focused and meaning-focused activities within them.

Textbooks and Form–Meaning Focus

Textbooks, as interpretations of curricular policies, present sequences of pedagogical content that aim to shape classroom activities. Although textbooks do not determine teaching methods, they still influence curricular implementation. For example, teacher self-report data from the cross-national Third International Mathematics and Science Study indicate that textbooks strongly affect content selection, presentation, and instructional approach (Valverde et al., 2002). Furthermore, during periods of curricular change, textbooks provide a pedagogical framework for teachers to follow and a means for re-skilling and training (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994). In the context of JES English, which is a relatively recent introduction to the curriculum, it is essential that textbooks provide a framework to effectively facilitate the achievement of COS objectives. Additionally, as a training source, textbooks should impart methodologies that prioritize the development of communicative abilities.

Communicative approaches contend that learners develop communicative abilities through interaction and engagement in meaning-focused communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Meaning-focused communication provides learners with practical experience using language, allows learners to think about their language use, and develops fluency and confidence (Willis and Willis, 2007). However, research indicates that solely engaging in communication may hinder the development of accurate and complex language and, thus, meaning-focused activities should be bolstered with

form-focused instruction (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Form-focused instruction enhances awareness and noticing of language features, helps automatize explicit knowledge, and provides learners with corrective feedback (Ranta & Lyster, 2017). Form-focused instruction is most effective when part of a meaningful context (Nassaji, 2017). Thus, a combination of both form- and meaning-based instruction is better than either one alone. Although the optimal balance between form and meaning remains a topic of inquiry, research increasingly suggests that primarily meaning-focused contexts are most conducive to effective language learning (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

MEXT (2017) implicitly calls for a combination of meaning-focused communication and form-focused instruction. According to the COS, students should experience purposeful, meaningful communication across various contexts allowing them to utilize any language at their disposal. At the same time, MEXT also acknowledges the need for form-focused instruction, emphasizing that language input and form-focused practice should be linked to functions and meaningful contexts. Accordingly, a well-designed textbook should facilitate both meaning-focused communication and form-focused instruction to align with COS guidelines.

Measuring Form–Meaning Focus

Measuring the degree to which textbook activities focus on form or meaning can be done using form–meaning scales. At present, such evaluative work has not been conducted on JES textbooks, but several studies have evaluated textbooks designed for communicative English courses in Japanese high schools (Glasgow & Paller, 2019; Gorsuch, 1999; Ogura, 2008). The general conclusion of these studies is that those textbooks contain a disproportionate number of form-focused activities (because of exam washback), despite the goal of these courses ostensibly being to develop communicative abilities.

Textbook publishers contend that teachers are free to supplement their lessons with their own (meaning-focused) activities (Gorsuch, 1999). However, for many JES teachers, who are uncertain about their English and ability to teach it (Otsuki, 2020), having a textbook that also facilitates meaning-focused activities would be more beneficial for classroom support and teacher re-skilling. Understanding the form–meaning composition of JES textbooks is a critical first step in determining how they should be used by teachers.

The current study will address the following question: How are form-focused and meaning-focused activities represented in JES textbooks? A scale proposed by Littlewood (2004, 2011) will be used for evaluations. Littlewood provides a framework in which form-focused *analytical learning* and meaning-focused *experiential communication* contribute to the development of communicative abilities. Analytical learning promotes conscious learning and practice of form, form-meaning pairings, isolated skills, or other discrete aspects of language. Experiential communication provides opportunities for experimenting with and integrating different language components and developing fluency through holistic practice. Importantly, learners practice actual communication, which is the ultimate goal of any communicative approach.

Method

Materials

The following MEXT-approved, fifth- and sixth-grade textbook series were evaluated:

- *New Horizon Elementary* (Tokyo Shoseki, 2020a; 2020b)
- *Junior Sunshine* (Kairyudo, 2020a; 2020b)
- *One World Smiles* (Kyoiku Shuppan, 2020a; 2020b)
- *Junior Total English* (Gakkotosho, 2020a; 2020b)
- *Here We Go*! (Mitsumura Tosho, 2020a; 2020b)
- *Crown Jr.* (Sanseido, 2020a; 2020b)
- *Blue Sky Elementary* (Keirinkan, 2020a; 2020b)

Only activities within the main units were evaluated. Preliminary or supplementary sections were not included, as the author concurs with Ogura (2008) that the main units represent the material that publishers and teachers consider most important to cover. Activities were grouped by language skill (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) according to how they were categorized by their textbook. If a single activity was categorized into multiple language skills, each corresponding part of that activity was coded separately, and if an activity had multiple or numbered steps, each step was categorized and evaluated separately on the basis of the skill-related words in the instructions. A fifth category, *oral–written integration*, was created for activities that involved reading or writing while simultaneously listening.

Evaluation Scale and Procedure

Activities were evaluated with a five-level, form–meaning scale developed by Littlewood (2004, 2011). The scale is shown in Table 1 along with the

evaluation criteria used for this study. As stated earlier, experiential communication is primarily meaning-focused, while analytical learning is primarily form-focused. On the end of experiential communication is *authentic communication*, which mirrors what would be experienced outside the classroom. Next is *structured communication*, which is defined by the occurrence of unpredictable language, but regulated to a degree, by either the teacher or the materials. Moving into *communicative language practice*, the focus shifts to form. This level still involves the communication of new information (meaning), but language is controlled. Next, *pre-communicative practice* does not require communication of anything new, but learners must attend to meaning in order to complete the activity. On the end of analytical learning is *non-communicative learning*, which includes activities such as pronunciation practice, consciousness-raising, and mechanical drills.

A single evaluator (the author) conducted evaluations using the rubric in Table 1. The evaluation scores for each language skill were then given frequency counts.

Results

Across all 14 textbooks, 2,880 activities were evaluated. Listening and speaking activities constituted 75.6% of all activities. Much fewer were reading and writing activities, which made up 16.6%. Oral–written integration activities made up the remaining 7.8%. Within oral–written integration activities, 56.0% of them were Listen-and-Read and 44.0% were Listen-and-Write.

Overall, 83.0% of the activities involved analytical learning and 17.0% were experiential communication. The proportions differed across language skills. Moreover, the distribution of levels along the evaluation scale differed within each language skill. Table 2 summarizes these points. First, analytical learning characterized 89.4% of speaking activities and 68.0% of listening activities. The difference between speaking and listening was most pronounced at the ends of the continuum. Speaking had more non-communicative learning activities associated with it than did listening. Many of these activities were in the form of drills, chants, and other choral exercises. Conversely, listening had more structured communication activities associated with it than did speaking. These activities often appeared at the beginnings of units and required students to focus on meaning and deal with unpredictable language while considering the scene, the characters' intentions, and the language being used. Moreover, listening was the only skill to involve authentic language activities in which students learn about another topic through English with relatively high unpredictability, but these activities were few (N = 20). Although comparisons between series are outside the scope of this study, it is worth noting that 64 of the 124 structured communication speaking activities occurred in the *New Horizon Elementary* series. The proportions of analytical learning and experiential communication activities between textbook series are included in the Appendix.

The proportion of analytical learning activities was also high in the written skills area. Reading activities were 86.0% analytical learning, such as reading alphabet letters or example sentences. Analytical

Table 1

Levels of Analytical Learning and Experiential Communication

Dimension	Level	Evaluation Criteria
Experiential communication (meaning and message)	Authentic communication	*Focus on meaning *Communicating with unpredictable language
	Structured communication	*Focus on meaning *Structured but with some unpredictable language
Analytical Learning (form and meaning)	Communicative Language practice	*Focus on form *Use of pre-taught language but communication of new meaning
	Pre-communicative practice	*Some attention to meaning required but nothing new communicated *Attention given to form–meaning pairings
	Non-communicative learning	*No focus on conveying meaning

learning was even more common among the writing activities (94.8%). Most writing activities involved non-communicative learning and pre-communicative practice, such as handwriting drills or simple sentence completion drills. A similar result was found for the oral–written integration category, which included rote learning activities to make connections between phonetic sounds and written text.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to determine the representation of form-focused and meaning-focused activities in JES textbooks. The results indicate that both form-focused and meaning-focused activities are present, but that there is a much greater proportion of form-focused activities, especially for speaking, reading, and writing. In other words, if a teacher were to use one of the current JES textbooks as is, students would spend little time engaged in communication. While the current study cannot definitively answer whether the observed proportion of form-focused and meaning-focused activities is appropriate for JES students, it raises concerns about the limited opportunities for meaning-focused output.

Meaning-focused activities in JES textbooks tend to center on listening, as exemplified by Authentic Conversation and Structured Conversation in Table 3. Authentic Conversation is a video about Switzerland, while Structured Conversation is about a brother and sister discussing the following school day. The repeated use of "have" in Structured Conversation shows a greater focus on form relative to Authentic Conversation, but both activities encourage students to listen for meaning while considering the context and situation of the video content.

Language output, on the other hand, is largely form focused. Non-communicative learning and pre-communicative practice, which comprised 54.5% of speaking and 79.5% of writing activities, often involve mechanical learning at the word or sentence level, as exemplified in Table 3 by Chant and Pointing Game. With Chant, students simply listen to and repeat expressions. The Pointing Game shows a frequently observed choral drill. Here, students listen to a word, phrase, or hint and then point to its corresponding picture in their textbook. The activity is often expanded to include saying the word or answer in unison. These types of activities neither require students to think deeply about the language they produce, nor do they place language within any meaningful context.

Communication between students mainly occurs during communicative language practice, as exemplified in Interviews 1 and 2 (see Table 3). In Interview 1, one student asks a predetermined question, and another student responds with a predetermined sentence that has one slot to complete with personal information (in this case, "January 27th"). A similar activity is seen in Interview 2, but here the question is manipulated (i.e., "play *shogi*" is substituted with "ride a unicycle," "skate," and finally an action of the student's choosing). The answer is restricted to either "Yes, I can," or "No, I can't." Despite conveying some meaning, these activi-

Table 2

Number of Analytical Learning and Experiential Communication Activities in JES Textbooks

Level	Skill					
	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Oral-Written Integration	Total Number
Authentic communication	20 (2.0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	20 (<0.1%)
Structured communication	304 (30.0%)	124 (10.6%)	24 (14.0%)	16 (5.2%)	1 (0.5%)	469 (16.3%)
Communicative language practice	444 (43.9%)	406 (34.9%)	23 (13.5%)	47 (15.3%)	21 (9.3%)	941 (32.7%)
Pre-communicative practice	128 (12.7%)	125 (10.7%)	47 (27.5%)	133 (43.2%)	32 (14.2%)	465 (16.1%)
Non-communicative learning	115 (11.4%)	510 (43.8%)	77 (45.0%)	112 (36.3%)	171 (76.0%)	985 (34.2%)

Note: Percentages are based on the total count within each column and rounded to the first decimal point.

ties limit discourse and require minimal language manipulation. They will be referred to as *combined communicative-mechanical drills* (CCMDs), based on Paulston's (1970) classification of mechanical and communicative drills. The communicative language is located in the manipulable slot (e.g., "January 27th," "play *shogi*," "Yes, I can"), and the mechanical language is everything else.

Table 3

Exemplary Activities and Language in JES Textbooks

Level	Exemplary Activities	Exemplary Language
Authentic communication	listening about people or places	Authentic conversation *A*: In Switzerland, we use four languages. *B*: Four languages? What languages do you speak? *A*: German, French, Italian, in Romansh. And we use English for tourists. *B*: Excellent! *A*: Look at this picture. This is the Matterhorn in German and English. In French, this is Mont Cervin. In Italian, this is Mont Cervino. *B*: It's interesting. The mountains are very high. (Tokyo Shoseki, 2020b, p. 59)
Structured communication	listening and guessing meaning; listening for gist; talking in pairs; presenting	Structured Conversation *A*: What do you have on Wednesday, Nick? *B*: Well, I have math and music on Wednesday. *A:* I see. Anything else? *B*: I have science, calligraphy, and homeroom on Wednesday, too. And I have P.E...Oh no! I don't have P.E. tomorrow. *A*: Oh, c'mon Nick! (Mitsumura Tosho, 2020a, p. 40)
Communicative language practice	listening for information; talking in pairs; presenting; completing writing frames for classmates to read	Interview 1 *A*: When is your birthday? *B*: My birthday is (January 27th). (Kyouiku Shuppan, 2020a, p. 30) Interview 2 *A:* Can you (play *shogi* / ride a unicycle / skate / _____)? *B:* (Yes, I can. / No, I can't.) (Keirinkan, 2020a, p. 47)
Pre-communicative practice	listen-point-repeat; matching word to picture; completing writing frames	Pointing Game *Teacher*: I want to play baseball! *Students*: <pointing to the baseball illustration> I want to play baseball! *Teacher*: I want to see pandas! *Students*: <pointing to the panda illustration> I want to see pandas! (Kairyudo, 2020b, p. 26)
Non-communicative learning	chants; songs; jingles; phonics; oral repeating; tracing or copying letters or words	Chant *A*: What did you do in summer? *B*: I went to the mountains. I enjoyed hiking. *A*: That's nice! (Mitsumura Tosho, 2020b, p. 52)

The problem with CCMDs is that the mechanical language is already expected by all students and does not require processing. Consequently, it can be spoken incomprehensibly, ignored, or even replaced with incorrect language (e.g., "*What* is your birthday?") without detriment to completing the activity. As a result, students do not have to consider how the language they are practicing relates to function and meaning (Wong & VanPatten, 2003). Instead, practice centers on shallow rehearsal of sentences and recall and recognition of vocabulary used in the slot. Furthermore, the minimum communication required to complete such activities reduces the incentive for independent language use. If one expression is sufficient to complete an activity, why would students decide to use other, unnecessary language? This is why communicative language practice is not a substitution for structured communication. Moreover, even communicative language practice should require students to focus on more than one form so that they can have choices and reasons to think about the language they use. Otherwise, student interaction becomes just a more intricate mechanical drill with only minimal meaning being exchanged.

Teacher Attitudes and Form-Focused Textbooks

Similar to Japanese high school textbooks, JES textbooks display a high proportion of form-focused activities. High school students need to focus on form to prepare for entrance exams, but JES students do not have any such requirement. Why, then, do JES textbooks contain such a high proportion of form-focused activities? One possible explanation is that JES textbooks have been designed to accommodate classroom management and teachers' English skills. Form-focused activities require less interaction, thus making them easier to control in large classes. It is unknown if JES teachers hold such attitudes, but Japanese high school English teachers tend to prefer more controlled activities regardless of whether they are communicative, audiolingual, or grammar-translation (Gorsuch, 2001). Form-focused activities also use more predictable language, which may be desirable for teachers who do not feel confident with their English skills. In one sample of teachers surveyed by Otsuki (2020), 65.5% reported feeling hesitant to teach English, and those who were not hesitant expressed desiring more training. It is possible that textbook publishers, aware that a significant number of JES teachers lack confidence in English, produce materials that would be and feel more linguistically manageable in order to sell more textbooks.

The preponderance of communicative language practice activities may be what Glasgow and Paller (2019) refer to as a compromise between a communicative classroom and teachers who prefer the security of form-focused language teaching. However, the implementation of meaning-focused activities is essential if students are to have opportunities to think about the language they are using and to benefit from communicating with classmates. Moreover, the absence of meaning-focused activities in textbooks does not exempt teachers from incorporating them, as these activities are still required by the COS. Including these activities in the textbooks would not only improve alignment with the COS but also serve as a valuable resource for teachers, particularly those who are unfamiliar with such activities.

Textbooks as Training Sources

For busy teachers, textbooks are positioned to be an accessible training source. Teacher guides that accompany textbooks already provide some instructions on lesson planning and classroom English. Moreover, the *New Horizon Elementary* series includes a training manual for teachers with topics similar to those in a language-teaching methodology course, such as accuracy versus fluency, teacher versus facilitator, and error correction (Tokyo Shoseki, 2020c). Unfortunately, such manuals tend to remain unused at schools, at least in the author's experience. The most commonly used resource is the teacher's textbook (*shidousho*). To enhance its effectiveness as a training tool, it would be beneficial to incorporate more language-teaching methodology information in future *shidousho*, including guidance on designing and implementing meaning-focused activities, which would help teachers improve their skills and confidence in teaching English.

Textbooks can also provide training through their day-to-day use. Much of teacher development occurs on the job, with senior teachers mentoring their junior counterparts. However, this hierarchy can stifle pedagogical change and perpetuate entrenched ways of teaching (Sato et al., 2020). Textbooks can mediate this development and provide a space for negotiation between teachers by laying out lesson content and clear, precise procedures (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994). As such, future textbooks should include more meaning-focused activities, especially for output. Additionally, they should provide *detailed* instructions in the *shidousho* to ensure their proper implementation. Furthermore, future textbooks could improve communicative language practice by reducing the number of CCMDs.

Limitations and Future Research

This study evaluated textbooks under the assumption that teachers follow them closely. However, teachers may modify textbook activities. For example, they may change the focus from form to meaning or vice versa. Learners' focus can also differ from a textbook activity's intention. For example, students could complete a form-focused activity without actually focusing on form (e.g., "You birthday?" "(January 27)") and, thus, missing the intended purpose (i.e., to practice "When is your birthday?" and "My birthday is (January 27th)."). Students could also complete a communicative language practice activity without sharing new information. In this case, the activity becomes pre-communicative practice in which students just go through the motions of the activity. For example, two students might ask each other, "When is your birthday?" even if they already know the answer. With these limitations in mind, it is important to note that textbook content still influences instruction (Valverde et al., 2002). The current study contributes to our understanding of JES textbooks' influence by reporting their proportion of form-focused and meaning-focused activities. However, further research should explore the textbooks' actual use in classrooms.

Two other methodological limitations of this study must also be noted. First, the evaluations were conducted by only one person (the author). To prevent bias, a rubric was used to keep evaluations as objective as possible. Second, this study focused only on student textbooks. It did not evaluate any additional materials included with each series. As a final point, textbook evaluations, such as the one presented here, can focus on the materials themselves, but they can also focus on student performance and outcomes (Hadley & Hadley, 2022). Further research is needed to determine what learning outcomes students are actually obtaining through JES textbooks.

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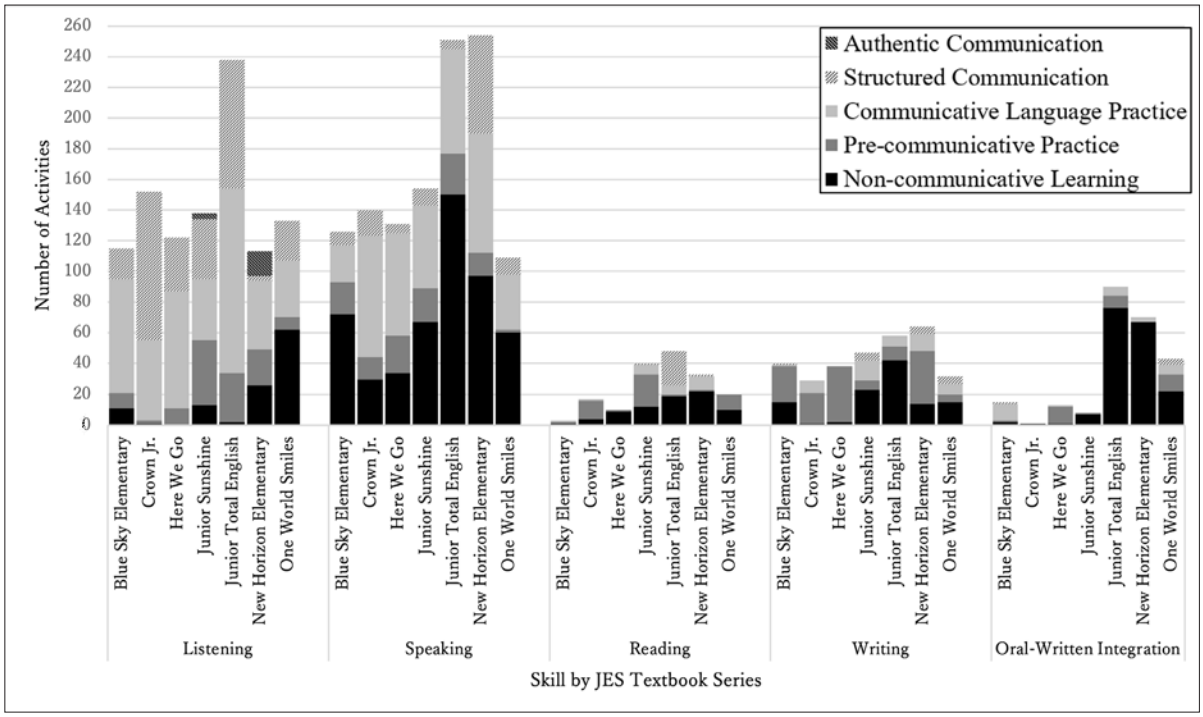
Appendix

Analytical Learning and Experiential Communication Differences between JES Textbook Series



Japanese EFL Learners' Successful and Unsuccessful Communication Experiences in English: An Exploratory Study

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Previous studies have shown that EFL learners' past communication experiences can influence their present attitudes. This study examines the factors related to Japanese EFL learners' previous communication experiences, their willingness to communicate (WTC), and their self-perceived English proficiency. The Experiences of Successful and Unsuccessful Communication (ESUC) Scale was developed as an original scale. The items for successful communication experiences were divided into two main areas: "practical English communication experiences" and "positive classroom experiences." The items for unsuccessful communication experiences were grouped into the following two categories: "realizing insufficient English proficiency" and "perplexity in English communication." Successful communication experiences correlated positively with WTC, whereas unsuccessful communication experiences correlated negatively with WTC. Moreover, the high-proficiency students frequently experienced successful communication, and the low-proficiency students often experienced unsuccessful communication. The study's findings suggest the importance of considering learners' past communication experiences and how they may affect current and future outcomes.

英語学習者の過去のコミュニケーション経験が学習態度に影響を及ぼすことが多くの研究で示されてきた。本研究では、日本人英語学習者の過去のコミュニケーションにおける成功体験と失敗体験に関するスケール(ESUC Scale)を開発し、学習者の過去におけるコミュニケーション経験、コミュニケーションを取ろうとする意欲（WTC）、そして英語力の自己評価と関連する要因を調べた。過去のコミュニケーションの成功体験については「実践的な英語コミュニケーション経験」「教室内のポジティブな経験」の2因子、失敗体験では「英語力不足の実感」「英語コミュニケーションに対する困惑」の2因子が抽出された。また、コミュニケーションの成功体験とWTCの間には正の相関、失敗体験とWTCとの間に負の相関が確認された。さらに、英語力の自己評価が高い学習者の方が成功体験の経験の割合が高く、自己評価の低い学習者は失敗体験の経験の割合が高い傾向がみられた。本研究から、学習者の過去におけるコミュニケーション体験と、それが現在そして将来の成果にどう影響を与えるかを考慮することの重要性が示唆された。

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English as a foreign language (EFL) learners generally encounter many experiences of success and failure through the process of learning to communicate in English. Previous research suggests that learners' past communication experiences in English can influence their present attitudes, motivation, and willingness to communicate (WTC) in EFL learning (Asassfeh et al., 2012; Polat, 2013; Saito, 2021; Tsang, 2023). Rastegar and Gohari (2016) established a significant relationship among Iranian EFL learners' communication strategies, attitudes, and English language oral output. Their findings revealed that EFL learners with many experiences of successful communication developed a more positive attitude toward learning English. Furthermore, Saito (2021) investigated the relationship among intercultural communication experiences and the knowledge of English as an International Language (EIL) and learner attitudes, concluding that exposure to English resulted in positive learner attitudes. However, some contend that experiencing too much difficulty during communication may erode language learners' confidence and consequently inhibit their WTC (Mesgarshahr & Abdollahzadeh, 2014). Past communication experiences, whether positive or negative, greatly affect EFL learners. Dewaele and Dewaele (2018) compare the past language experiences of second language (L2) users to swimming:

> The L2 user/swimmer will recall previous swimming experiences, including how enjoyable it was, and what dangers were faced, before dipping his/her toe in the water… the swimmer will have decided that the temperature is acceptable to jump in, and that the water looks clean. (p. 1)

Although they mention the limits to this metaphor, as the swimmer may face drowning while the L2 user may experience social embarrassment because of unsuccessful communication, both contexts imply that the individuals' volitional actions are based on their previous experiences. This example suggests the importance of considering the effects of previous experiences on EFL learning.

Literature Review

Studies on Learners' Past Experiences

According to Polat (2013), experience is "a subjective process that occurs inside a person's mind and contributes to his or her knowledge, emotions, or identity on a conscious or subconscious level" (p. 72). Polat insists that although experience is affected by external events and information, each person's internalization affects how they interpret their experiences, especially for language learning. Recently, some studies have focused on how learners' past experiences could impact their language learning and achievement. Tsang (2023) carried out semi-structured interviews with eight successful EFL learners in Hong Kong and examined their experiences with English reading and listening. One of the findings of his study was the existence of hedonism (i.e., the pursuit of pleasure) in learners with successful experiences. The existence of hedonism among participants was related to greater intrinsic motivation and ability to reach the state of flow (i.e., becoming completely involved in something). Such positive traits were commonly seen in successful EFL learners. Similarly, Wen and Piao (2020) conducted interviews with 20 students learning Chinese and examined the interactions between motivational factors and learning experiences. The results showed that enjoyable experiences with native speakers contributed to these learners' strong aspirations to be able to communicate in the target language, but overwhelming amounts of Chinese coursework were intimidating for them. According to Asassfeh et al. (2012), a mismatch between learner preferences and needs may have negative effects on learners' motivation toward EFL learning. Polat (2013) interviewed 12 learners of French as a second language and grouped them into high- and low-language performers to test the relationships between learners' language experiences and differential second language performance. High performers expressed their enjoyment of studying French, and their language proficiency increased over time. However, the low performers did not mention similar feelings of enjoyment, and they experienced only a small improvement in their proficiency. These studies suggest a certain relationship between learners' language proficiency levels and their past language learning experiences.

Past Communication Experiences and WTC

Willingness to communicate is one of the most important learner variables in Japanese EFL contexts, where first-language homogeneity in the classroom remains a significant problem (Freiermuth & Ito, 2020). Various factors, including past communication experiences, are known to influence WTC. Dewaele and Dewaele (2018) investigated learner-internal and learner-external predictors of WTC among students studying foreign languages in the UK. The strongest predictors were found to be foreign language classroom anxiety, frequent foreign language use by the teacher, a positive attitude toward the foreign language, high levels of social foreign language enjoyment, and age. Another study by Chichon (2019) examined the factors influencing student WTC by carrying out an ethnographic study of students enrolled in general English and IELTS preparation courses in China. The results indicated that the topic, interlocutors, task focus, learners' proficiency, and task complexity all influenced WTC. These studies imply that learners' past communication experiences, including classroom interactions with teachers and peers, their emotional reactions, and their language usage may significantly affect their WTC.

Motivation for the Current Study

While considering learners' past communication experiences is important, further investigation into types of experiences, namely successful and unsuccessful communication experiences in English, is necessary. Specifically, developing a scale to assess learners' past communication experiences may serve as a useful tool in examining the interrelationships with other factors such as WTC, motivation, anxiety, and self-perceived English proficiency. Fujii's (2023) qualitative study examined the relationship between Japanese EFL learners' past communication experiences and their WTC levels. This study revealed that high-WTC students were likely to have more experiences of successful communication than low-WTC students, and low-WTC students exhibited more concern over their unsuccessful communication experiences in the past than high-WTC students. Through qualitative text analysis, the researcher found different tendencies between the previous communication experiences of high- and low-WTC students. To expand the scope of Fujii's (2023) investigation into learners' past communication experiences, this study developed an original scale to assess successful and unsuccessful communication experiences of learners and examine the relationships between learner WTC and self-perceived English proficiency using a quantitative statistical method. The research questions for this study are as follows:

RQ1. What are the factor structures of learners' successful and unsuccessful communication experiences in English?

RQ2. What are the relationships between learners' past communication experiences and WTC?

RQ3. What are the relationships between learners' past communication experiences and self-perceived English proficiency?

Method

Participants

The participants were 153 Japanese EFL students (107 male and 46 female) from two national universities and one private university in Japan. Students' majors varied from general education and humanities to information technology, but all the students were taking required English classes. The participants were 18 to 25 years old, and their overall English proficiency levels were between CEFR A1 and B2. A total of 95 students classified themselves as having low proficiency and 58 classified themselves as having high proficiency in English. All the students agreed to participate in this study.

Instrument

The study used an original questionnaire with items targeting learners' successful and unsuccessful communication experiences. The items were generated from the qualitative data extracted from the text analysis in Fujii (2023) and were adapted for this study. The questionnaire comprised two main sections: items denoting successful communication experiences (e.g., "I enjoyed having interactions with others in English") and unsuccessful communication experiences (e.g., "I could not find the right word in conversation with my classmates, so I had to use Japanese instead"). Participants were asked about the frequency of their past experiences, that is, to what extent they have experienced certain situations. They recorded their responses on a five-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (many times). The survey was carried out online using Google Forms during the fall semester of 2022. The questionnaires were administered in Japanese and later translated into English by the author.

Data Analysis

IBM SPSS Statistics 28 was used for data analysis. To develop an original scale, exploratory factor analysis using the principal factor method with promax rotation was conducted, followed by several additional analyses (i.e., Pearson's correlation analysis and individual *t*-test) to examine the constructional validity of the data. For these analyses, the Willingness to Use the Four Skills Scale from Fujii (2021) and an item asking about students' self-perceptions of their English proficiency were employed.

Results

Factor Structures of Past Communication Experiences

RQ1 aimed to determine the factor structures of the original scale on past communication experiences in English. Table 1 presents the results of exploratory factor analysis of successful communication experiences. According to the scree plot and eigenvalues, the items generated a two-factor structure. Factor 1 included seven items related to successful experiences in the practical use of English, for example, "I could speak English with confidence" and "I could ask the teacher questions." These items included learners' successful communication experiences with native speakers of English, such as international students or foreign tourists in Japan. Factor 2 comprised three items related to successful experiences during classroom activities, such as "I was able to present my speech while reading my own script" and "During classroom activities, I could communicate with classmates in English." Items in this factor represent successful moments learners have experienced, for example, accomplishing classroom presentations or gaining success in English debates or discussion activities. The overall result of Cronbach's alpha coefficient was $\alpha = .87$, indicating a high reliability.

Table 2 illustrates the results of exploratory factor analysis on unsuccessful communication experiences. A two-factor structure was assumed based on the factor loadings. Here, Factor 1 comprised three items related to learners' unsuccessful experiences due to their insufficient English proficiency, such as "I could not express my intention to others in English" and "I could not think of the appropriate vocabulary, so I could not communicate in English." These items are related to communication problems resulting from inadequate English comprehension skills. Factor 2 was based on learners' experiences of being perplexed at the situation of communicating in English. It included four items, such as " I did not know what to do when a foreigner spoke to me in English" and "I felt ashamed to speak in English in front of a large group." Such items represent learners being at a loss when speaking English or feeling nervous in stressful circumstances. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was $\alpha = .80$, demonstrating fairly high scale reliability as a whole.

Table 1

Factor Analysis Results of Successful Communication Experiences

No. Items	Factor 1	Factor 2
7. When someone talked to me in English, I could respond correctly.	**.886**	-.162
6. I was able to understand English spoken by a native speaker.	**.769**	-.158
10. I could speak English with confidence.	**.665**	.036
3. I could ask the teacher questions.	**.587**	.082
5. I could get across my idea in English.	**.570**	.233
9. I enjoyed having interactions with others in English.	**.556**	.186
2. I was able to answer the teacher's question correctly.	**.522**	.176
4. I could give a presentation well because I had prepared thoroughly beforehand.	-.069	**.937**
8. I was able to present my speech while reading my own script.	-.059	**.900**
1. During classroom activities, I could communicate with classmates in English.	.173	**.564**

Note. Factor 1 = Practical English communication experiences; Factor 2 = Positive classroom experiences.

Table 2

Factor Analysis Results of Unsuccessful Communication Experiences

No. Items	Factor 1	Factor 2
4. I could not express my intention to others in English.	**.926**	-.144
1. I could not find the right word in conversation with my classmates, so I had to use Japanese instead.	**.676**	.058
3. I could not think of the appropriate vocabulary, so I could not communicate in English.	**.540**	.237
6. I did not know what to do when a foreigner spoke to me in English.	-.128	**.658**
5. I felt ashamed to speak in English in front of a large group.	.116	**.471**
7. I could not understand the utterance in English, so I could not communicate.	.124	**.435**
2. When I had to present in front of class, I became so nervous that I forgot what to say.	.288	**.404**

Note. Factor 1 = Realizing insufficient English proficiency; Factor 2 = Perplexity in English communication.

Correlations Between Past Communication Experiences and WTC

RQ2 investigated the correlations between learners' past communication experiences and WTC. As shown in Table 3, Pearson's correlation analysis clarified that both factors of successful communication experiences correlated positively with WTC. Factor 1 (Practical English Communication Experiences) and WTC had a moderate positive correlation, with $r(153) = .54$, $p < .001$. Factor 2 (Positive Classroom Experiences) had a weak positive correlation with WTC, with $r(153) = .26$, $p < .01$. Overall, these results indicate that the more students have successful communication experiences, the higher the WTC.

Table 3 also illustrates the correlation between unsuccessful communication experiences and WTC. Results show that the two factors of unsuccessful communication experiences had negative correlations with learner WTC. Factor 1 (Realizing Insufficient English Proficiency) had a weak negative correlation with WTC, with $r(153) = -.22$, $p < .01$. Factor 2 (Perplexity in English Communication) and WTC demonstrated a weak negative correlation of $r(153) = -.24$, $p < .01$. These results suggest that the more students experience unsuccessful communication, the lower their WTC in English. It is therefore important to consider how to motivate students who have had many unsuccessful experiences to communicate actively in English classrooms.

The correlation of the two factors of successful communication experiences showed moderate positive correlation with each other, with $r(153) = .53$, $p < .001$. In addition, the two factors of unsuccessful communication experiences had high positive correlation with each other, with $r(153) = .84$, $p < .001$. As for the correlation between successful and unsuccessful communication experiences, weak

negative correlation was found between Factor 1 of successful communication experiences and the two factors of unsuccessful communication experiences. Factor 2 of successful communication experiences had very weak or no correlation with the two factors of unsuccessful communication experiences.

Relationships of Past Communication Experiences and Self-Perceived English Proficiency

RQ3 addressed the relationships between past communication experiences and self-perceived English proficiency of learners. The factor scores of successful and unsuccessful communication experiences were compared between high- and low-proficiency students based on their self-perceptions. As seen in Table 4, the independent *t*-test revealed that Factor 1 of successful communication experiences had significant difference, with $t(151) = -6.655$ and $p < .001$, and both of the factors of unsuccessful communication experiences showed significant differences (Factor 1: $t(151) = 3.157$, $p = .001$; Factor 2: $t(151) = 2.936$, $p = .004$). Factor 2 of successful communication, however, was also very close to the value of significance at $t(151) = -1.960$ and $p = .052$. These results show the clear difference between high- and low-proficiency students' frequency of successful and unsuccessful communication experiences in the past.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the results of the individual *t*-test by comparing the average factor scores of learners' successful communication experiences according to their self-perceived English proficiency. What stands out in these figures is the distinctive pattern seen in both graphs; students with high proficiency have higher scores than students with low proficiency in both Factor 1 and Factor 2. These results suggest that learners with higher self-perceived English proficiency tend to have higher fac-

Table 3

Correlations Between Past Communication Experiences and WTC

	WTC	Successful: F1		Successful: F2		Unsuccessful: F1		Unsuccessful: F2	
WTC	—	.543	***	.262	**	-.222	**	-.235	**
Successful: Factor 1		—		.526	***	-.247	**	-.284	***
Successful: Factor 2				—		-.186	*	-.119	
Unsuccessful: Factor 1						—		.837	***
Unsuccessful: Factor 2								—	

Note. Successful = Successful Communication Experiences; Unsuccessful = Unsuccessful Communication Experiences. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

Table 4

T-Test Results of Past Communication Experiences and Self-Perceived English Proficiency

Variable (Factor Scores)	Self-Perceived Proficiency	*N*	Mean	*SD*	*t* (151)	*p*
Successful: Factor 1	Low	95	−0.347	0.818	−6.655	.000
	High	58	0.568	0.836		
Successful: Factor 2	Low	95	−0.117	0.938	−1.960	.052
	High	58	0.191	0.947		
Unsuccessful: Factor 1	Low	95	0.177	0.923	3.157	.001
	High	58	−0.290	0.827		
Unsuccessful: Factor 2	Low	95	0.1523	0.893	2.936	.004
	High	58	−0.249	0.686		

Note. Successful = Successful Communication Experiences; Unsuccessful= Unsuccessful Communication Experiences

tor scores in successful communication experiences in both factors.

Figure 1

Factor Scores for Successful Communication Experiences (Factor 1) According to Students' Self-Perceived English Proficiency

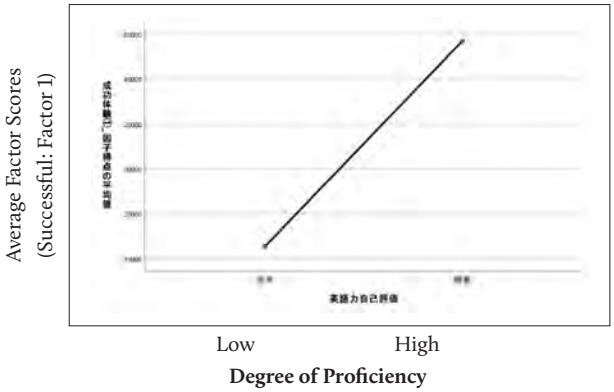
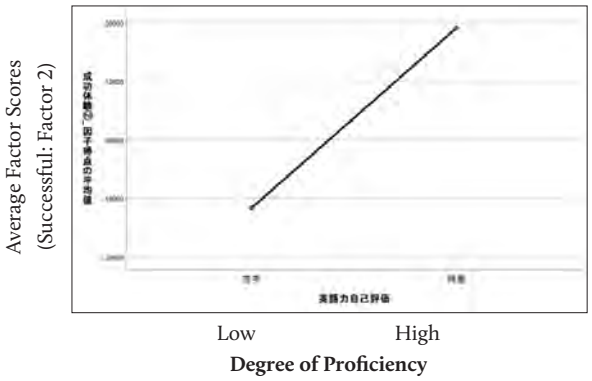


Figure 2

Factor Scores for Successful Communication Experiences (Factor 2) According to Students' Self-Perceived English Proficiency



Figures 3 and 4 show individual *t*-test results of unsuccessful communication experiences and self-perceived English proficiency, calculated by comparing the average factor scores in the two groups of students. Interestingly, the pattern is opposite with that of the results of successful communication experiences. Students with lower self-perceived English proficiency tended to have higher factor scores in unsuccessful communication experiences in both of the factors. Overall, these results indicate the significant difference between the frequency of learners' successful and unsuccessful communication experiences and the degree of learners' self-perceptions of English proficiency.

Figure 3

Factor Scores for Unsuccessful Communication Experiences (Factor 1) According to Students' Self-Perceived English Proficiency

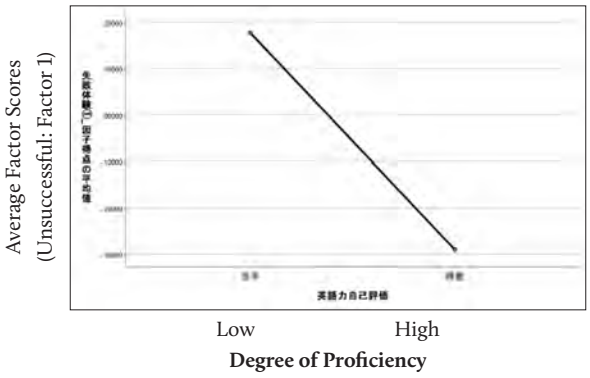
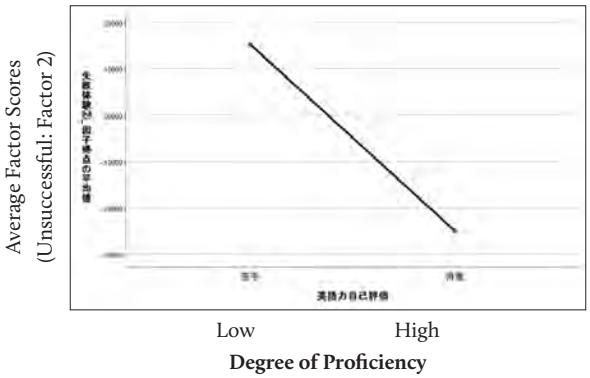


Figure 4

Factor Scores for Unsuccessful Communication Experiences (Factor 2) According to Students' Self-Perceived English Proficiency



Discussion

This study aimed to develop an original scale to assess EFL learners' experiences of successful and unsuccessful communication through exploratory factor analysis. This scale, named the Experiences of Successful and Unsuccessful Communication (ESUC) Scale, comprises two factors— Practical English Communication Experiences and Positive Classroom Experiences—and includes 10 items of successful communication experiences. The second part of this scale has seven items that exemplify unsuccessful communication experiences and is composed of two factors—Realizing Insufficient English Proficiency and Perplexity in English Communication. The good reliability of all of the scale items was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha values. The development of a scale focusing on past

communication experiences appears to be the first of its kind. As Wen and Piao (2020) state, past experiences can positively or negatively affect learning, thereby influencing the learners' present attitudes. Thus, applying this scale in different learning contexts may help to understand the EFL learners' disparate previous experiences.

The second question in this study sought to determine the relationships between past communication experiences and WTC. Results showed that successful communication experiences correlated positively and unsuccessful communication experiences correlated negatively with learner WTC. Moreover, this study confirmed that the higher the students' WTC, the greater their frequency of successful communication experiences, and the lower their WTC, the greater their frequency of unsuccessful communication experiences. Previous researchers have observed that EFL learners' WTC is highly influenced by their prior English learning experiences, and that positive past experiences may lead to higher WTC (Alam et al., 2022; Freiermuth & Ito, 2020). This study clarified the correlation between past communication experience and WTC and is consistent with the findings of the previous studies.

The third question in this research addressed the relationships between past communication experiences and self-perceived English proficiency. Findings indicated that the higher the self-perceived English proficiency the higher the score in successful communication experiences; and the lower the self-perceived English proficiency, the higher the score in unsuccessful communication experiences. Such a clear contrast in the two groups of learners was an interesting finding. According to Alimorad and Farahmand (2021), a lack of self-perceived proficiency can affect students' communication with others. The present research supports the relationships between self-perceived English proficiency and past communication experiences and this may lead to a better understanding of individual differences in EFL learning contexts.

Conclusions

This study examined learners' successful and unsuccessful communication experiences through exploratory research. However, due to its exploratory nature, and because no existing scales for past communication experiences were found in the literature, the items in this scale were solely based on the authors' own previous research (Fujii, 2023). The second limitation is that the data were collected at one point in time. Further study needs to be carried out to validate the current scale. In addition, the author was the sole analyst of this study, which is another limitation. Therefore, replications of the developed scale in different contexts could add more implications to the current findings. In spite of its limitations, this study adds to our understanding of how past communication experiences are important factors in EFL students' current learning.

Dewaele and Dewaele (2018) point out that more advanced learners have more experiences in using the foreign language, which boosts their self-confidence in their ability to communicate successfully in the foreign language. Moreover, according to Mesgarshahr and Abdollahzadeh (2014), coping successfully with communication problems leads to a great sense of self-confidence and motivation. It is therefore crucial for instructors to help EFL learners move beyond their unsuccessful past communication experiences so that they can embrace more positive attitudes toward EFL learning and ultimately be successful. Teachers should provide learners a better understanding of the fact that going through trial and error is a natural process of EFL learning and there is no need to be perfect from the very beginning. Reflecting on learners' past communication experiences can positively influence the present as well as the future for EFL learners.

Acknowledgement

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[JALT PRAXIS] TLT INTERVIEWS

Torrin Shimono & James Nobis

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An Interview with Kathleen Kampa

Jehan Cruz

Ritsumeikan University

Welcome to the first issue of TLT Interviews *in 2025! Before we begin, we have a correction for the July/August 2024 issue. It should have read, "Judy Noguchi is Professor Emerita of Kobe Gakuin University where she served as Dean of the Faculty of Global Communication. Prior to that she was Professor of English at Mukogawa Women's University, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences."*

Now, we are delighted to share with you an interview with Kathleen (Kathy) Kampa: an educator, author, and consultant known for her work in English language teaching (ELT), particularly with young learners. She has co-authored several popular teaching materials published by Oxford University Press, including Magic Time 1 *and* 2 *(Kampa & Vilina, 2012),* Everybody Up 5 *and* 6 *(Kampa & Vilina, 2016),* Oxford Discover 3 *(Kampa & Vilina, 2013) and* 4 *(Kampa & Vilina, 2014),* Beehive

Level 4 *(Kampa & Vilina, 2022), and* Buzz Book 5 *(Kampa & Vilina, 2024), which all are designed for teaching English to young learners. Kathy is also recognized for her focus on integrating global skills, inquiry-based approaches, growth mindset, learner agency, and the use of music and movement in language education.*

In addition to her writing and teaching, Kathy has been actively involved in teacher training, professional development, and offering workshops and resources to help educators enhance their teaching practices. Her philosophy emphasizes the importance of engaging students through creative, interactive methods and fostering a positive learning environment.

Kathy was interviewed by Jehan Cruz, who is a lecturer in the Faculty of Business Administration at Ritsumeikan University, Osaka, where she teaches English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). With nearly fifteen years of experience teaching at Japanese universities, she also organizes tandem learning programs connecting universities in Australia, the Philippines, and Japan, promoting cross-cultural exchange and collaborative learning.

Her research interests include online tandem learning, bilingualism, and supporting migrant children's language education. Her recent work focuses on the challenges migrant children face in accessing quality education and explores ways Japanese schools can better support their language development and integration. Jehan's teaching philosophy emphasizes learner autonomy, independence, and a student-centred approach, where she empowers students to take ownership of their learning. She is dedicated to advancing inclusive education and creating effective, supportive learning environments for diverse learners, especially migrant students, both in Japan and internationally. Without further ado, to the interview!

Jehan Cruz: *What got you into teaching?*

Kathleen Kampa: As the oldest of five girls, I had a lot of fun teaching my four younger sisters and babysitting the neighbours' kids. My mom helped me set up a makeshift classroom in our home. When I was fifteen, I worked as an assistant teacher at a dance studio, and by sixteen, I had started my own business performing at children's birthday parties. I played games, sang songs, and danced with the kids. These experiences made me realize how much I loved working with children.

When I went to university, I studied elementary education and music. My teaching career began in Japan, where I had the opportunity to work with students of all ages. During my time at Seisen International School, I attended numerous conferences and workshops, learning from influential educators like Dr. Howard Gardner, Kath Murdoch, John Hattie, Rachael French, and others. I worked with educators who were curious, creative, and collaborative. When we returned to the U.S. in 2006, I decided to pursue a master's degree in TESOL.

During my TESOL practicum in the U.S., I worked with students facing significant learning challenges. One of my high school students had struggled academically, partly due to his family's frequent moves between Mexico and the U.S., which caused him to miss key elements of his education. I found that much of the high school material he was expected to learn was too advanced for him, so I started by identifying the gaps in his learning. Using materials from my elementary school classes, I was able to meet him at his level and scaffold the content to help him succeed. Although he eventually had to leave school, I was able to mentor him and help him pass the tests he needed to graduate. That experience was a turning point for me—one of those moments when I realized is that sometimes all a student needs is someone who believes in them and says, "Let's figure out what's not working" and "You can do this!"

What is your core philosophy when it comes to teaching English to young learners, and how has it evolved over your career?

I love teaching young learners! If you teach kids, you know, it's very active, hands-on teaching. Early in my career, I learned about multiple intelligences (MI) theory through Dr. Howard Gardner and Project Zero (Harvard Graduate School of Education, n.d.). I discovered the different ways in which people express their intelligence. Through Dr. Thomas Armstrong's work (2009, n.d.), I learned how using varied approaches to learning based on MI can be a powerful tool in the young learner's English language classroom. To ensure that my lessons include diverse approaches to learning, I use the MI Pizza metaphor. In this metaphor, each slice of the pizza corresponds to a different type of intelligence: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist. It highlights the unique strengths children possess in different areas, emphasizing the importance of a balanced approach to support diverse learning styles in the classroom.

Another important aspect of teaching is creating a positive environment in the classroom. I use numerous transitional chants and songs to maintain a positive classroom energy. These chants and songs make teaching seamless, helping to smoothly transition students from one activity to the next.

Another essential strategy in my classroom is what I call CCBA: catch children being amazing. Rather than focusing on negative behaviour, I highlight the positive things that are happening. To offer suggestions for improvement, I use the approach of a

"compliment sandwich." First, give positive feedback, then suggest an area for improvement, and end with another positive comment. Another approach is "two stars and a wish," where I note two positive things and suggest one idea for improvement.

When I point out something interesting or something that fulfils the task, it encourages others to do the same. For example, if my kindergarten students are actively making letter shapes, I might say, "Oh, I see Jehan is making the letter 'M' with her arms, and Sara is making the letter 'M' with Mai." By describing the action and truly noticing what students are doing well, others take notice and come up with their own ideas. This kind of positive feedback always creates positive energy in my classes. This aligns with the work of John Hattie (2008) in *Visible Learning*. Based on his research into classroom strategies, appropriate and timely feedback is one of the key factors that can have a significant impact on teaching. I believe that providing timely feedback creates learner agency and nurtures a growth mindset.

Lastly, I believe that concept-based inquiry nurtures curiosity and global skills. As a teacher at an international baccalaureate primary years program (IB-PYP) school, inquiry and questioning were at the heart of everything we did. We encourage students to wonder, ask questions, and make connections. We looked at big concepts, such as wellbeing. While this may be new and challenging for students, I think it's an essential focus for young learners today. It encourages them to take more responsibility for their learning, think about how they can help others, and understand how they can become changemakers in the world. Encouraging students to realize that they can make a difference is crucial.

How did your learning and teaching evolve?

As an IB-PYP teacher, I had access to a variety of professional development. I had the privilege of studying with a lot of the great minds and reflecting on how their ideas align with my own teaching philosophy. I worked alongside outstanding educators and applied their ideas, which led me to adopt a teaching approach that synthesizes the best practices. I would say my teaching philosophy has become a combination of inquiry-based learning, concept-based inquiry, brain-based learning, as well as music and creative movement education. I've blended various teaching philosophies and English language teaching theories that we've all learned in our master's classes, so I'm constantly teaching, reflecting, and adjusting my methods.

How do you decide on the themes and content for each book? And, how do you ensure that your books and your teaching materials remain engaging and fun for young learners?

We track trends in education and research to better understand what students around the world are interested in and what they may be studying in their school curriculums. We examine how they are living their lives and identify areas of concern. For example, we want our students to understand the world around them, to be inquirers, and to make connections between ideas. We encourage them to recognize problems and find solutions.

We also want to ensure that teachers feel equipped to teach our courses. Oxford University Press (OUP) provides extensive support for teachers through a variety of resources, including research papers, online blogs, teaching materials, workshops, webinars, and consultant support.

My husband, Charles Vilina, and I have co-authored several English language series, including *Magic Time* (*2012*), *Everybody Up* (*2016*), *Oxford Discover* (*2013, 2014*), *Beehive* (*2022*), *and Buzz* (*2024*), with a new course scheduled for release in 2025. Each book has its own unique philosophy. For instance, when we wrote Magic Time, we used a MI approach. We designed double-page spreads that embedded vocabulary within the content. This encouraged students to look closely at the pages and find the vocabulary, turning it into a game that engaged them. The colourful illustrations allowed children to build on what they had already learned, creating an automatic review of their knowledge while adding new language. Instead of simply stating, "This is a triangle, this is a circle, this is a square," students actively searched for these shapes within the pictures. The language in the songs also followed predictable patterns, which are developmentally appropriate for that age group.

For each book we've written, we've employed different strategies and made distinct choices. This variety is what makes the writing process interesting for us as authors. In Everybody Up, we followed the present, practice, produce, personalize (PPPP) approach and included engaging CLIL (content language integrated learning) lessons, value-based stories, and great songs. In *Oxford Discover*, we focused on inquiry-based learning, visible thinking routines, and the four C's of 21st-century learning (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication). I believe this series has changed the way we approach English language teaching. In 2015, we were honoured to receive the ELTON Award for Innovation in Course Design, which was

incredibly exciting. We worked hard to incorporate 21st-century skills into the book, creating a fresh approach that differed from traditional formats.

Our most recent courses, *Buzz* and Beehive, emphasize a strong grammar and vocabulary framework. We designed each lesson around one or more of the *Global Skills* (Oxford University Press, n.d.-a), which expand upon the four C's of 21st-century learning. Each unit includes a beautiful section on social-emotional learning, with stories that help kids engage with important values and issues in their lives. There is also a cross-cultural component, which introduces students to the world around them. They explore popular topics, such as food, art, or exercise, from the perspectives of two countries and then compare and contrast these topics with their own culture. They learn through skills, such as reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing videos. This approach provides them with the language to compare not only the cultures they study, but also their own. At the end of every lesson, students use the language and skills they've learned in fun team-up activities.

Would it be possible for an elementary school teacher in Japan to use these courses in the classroom?

It's important for teachers to discuss their class needs before deciding on an English course. Each of our courses offers many valuable learning tools. I particularly enjoy using the Teacher Presentation tool in my online lessons. There is also a new focus on online learning components, including videos. For example, in *Buzz* and *Beehive*, instead of just showing a drawn picture of a cat, students can watch a short video of a real cat. These videos help students understand the word from various perspectives.

Buzz and *Beehive* help develop important global skills in students. Each lesson focuses on one or more global skills, and students also have the opportunity to work together with classmates at the end of each lesson through team-up activities. These activities allow students to synthesize their learning in a fun and interactive way. At the end of each unit, students can choose which assessments they want to complete, using a choice board format. This promotes learner agency and a growth mindset. For instance, if a student prefers to learn through music, they might showcase their learning through a song, while another student who enjoys drawing could demonstrate their understanding through illustrations. This approach gives students the freedom to choose how they want to demonstrate their learning.

What got you started in teacher training programs? What are the essential skills and qualities that a language teacher should possess, and how do you cultivate these in your training programs?

I was encouraged to start teacher training after several friends told me, "You're a good teacher." I had many ideas to share, and I was constantly questioning and exploring the best ways to teach. Since Oxford University Press is a research-based company, we've been able to use our big ideas to create the best materials possible for students.

Sometimes, teachers ask for specific details in a training session, such as, "How did you do that chant?" I want to ensure that teachers leave with both the immediate tools they can use in their classrooms and a deeper understanding of the broader concepts behind these activities. For example, a chant might seem like just a fun classroom activity, but the larger idea behind it could be something like "catching children being amazing." The challenge is finding a balance between providing teachers with small, practical tools—what I like to compare to collecting seashells on the beach—while also helping them see the bigger picture, like the entire beach or ocean. Teachers need those small shells-(i.e., activities they can use in class tomorrow), but they also need to understand the broader principles to sustain long-term learning. Being a knowledgeable teacher is also key. You have to think deeply about how you're going to teach the desired outcomes. Each teacher and each classroom are unique. Teaching is a dialogue. It's not just about delivering a lesson, but also about listening to students, adjusting the lesson as needed, and making sure that students are truly learning and understanding the material.

Today, teachers have access to many resources online—YouTube videos, for example—that can offer new insights in a short amount of time. However, in-person workshops, like the Oxford Teaching Workshop Series, are invaluable. The energy in the room and the opportunity to interact with other teachers are powerful. You can share challenges, bounce ideas off each other, and learn from one another. The power of networking is crucial. It's not just about attending a conference and sitting at the back of the room; you need to set a goal to meet new people, have meaningful conversations, and learn from those around you. For example, I work closely with a colleague, and we constantly learn from each other. She'll suggest an idea, and I'll think, "Oh, we could try this as well," and the ideas bounce back and forth. Teachers can learn so much from one another. Oxford University Press has excellent teacher trainers, and the teachers in our workshops also have valuable experiences to share.

What practical things can in-service teachers do in Japanese classrooms to engage learners and motivate them to continue learning English?

Motivation is essential, and one concept I emphasise is CCBA. It's a simple idea that teachers can easily implement, but it requires careful thought about how it looks in practice in your classroom. I know that many Japanese teachers have large classes, so it's important to notice the great things that different students are doing. Avoid picking the same student all the time, as this can demotivate others. A teacher should make sure to take time to notice and acknowledge all the students. For example, I might plan to focus on six to eight specific students during a lesson to ensure that I highlight what they are doing well. Planning hands-on or group activities can also be an effective strategy. Cooperative learning activities, such as those developed by Dr. Spencer Kagan (1994; 2024) encourage students to work together rather than compete against each other. These activities also provide teachers with the opportunity to move around the classroom, listen to students' ideas, and observe their progress more closely. Giving students choices in how they work—whether independently, with a partner, or in a group—can help meet the diverse needs of all learners.

Do you have extra resources or practical guides for teachers that you've put together?

I write a free resource blog for teachers called *Magic Time Kids* (Kampa, n.d.), where I provide teaching notes, create Google Slides, and produce videos. For example, if a teacher wants to do a celebration chant, they can visit the Google Slides link, and the presentation will pop up in their classroom, allowing them to follow along with the video. I've been focusing on creating resources like this to help teachers: something simple and easy to use. These resources can even be student-facing, so teachers can show the video to a group of students, and they can follow along together. Additionally, Oxford University Press offers a large collection of academic articles and materials that are available to all teachers. These resources provide valuable insights into major trends in education. *The Oxford Teacher Toolkit* (OUP, n.d.-b) has materials to use immediately in classrooms, too. I love the tool, Two Stars and a Wish.

Based on your experience of teaching in Japan, what are the biggest challenges that young learners face when learning English, and how do your books address these challenges?

Many of my Japanese students only have one English class per week, so their exposure to the language is limited. Because of this, I always try to find ways to keep English in front of them during the other six days. The Japanese language is structurally very different from English, which makes it a challenge for young learners. They are not only learning a new writing system, but also a completely different grammar structure. To make the learning process as natural and effortless as possible, I try to make it feel almost like they are learning their mother tongue.

When we wrote our first course, *Magic Time*, we kept the language simple. The course includes a lot of songs, and my students would start singing them without realising it, which made their language feel fluid and natural. By learning English through songs, chants, and playful activities, the kids start thinking, "Oh, this is easy; English isn't so hard." The more we can make the learning process playful—using songs and chants with simple repetition—the more we help build fluency and boost their confidence.

When we created *Everybody Up*, the children loved reading the stories, doing CLIL lessons, and singing songs. Now, with my current students using *Buzz*, we make the most of the limited time we have for online lessons. I love the teacher presentation tool for my Zoom lessons, and my students also have access to extra games and activities to practice with throughout the week.

As technology continues to evolve, what future developments in AI or educational technology do you anticipate impacting language education, and how can educators prepare for these changes? What trends or changes do you anticipate in the field of ESL teaching in the coming years?

It's really hard to know what will be available in Japan and when things will be accessible globally. We need to consider the role of AI in education and come to terms with how we use it. Developing global skills is important. Within the five strands of global skills (OUP, n.d.-a), we need to cultivate digital literacy. The need for critical thinking is more important than ever before. I believe that global skills will become central to English education. These five strands—critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, and digital literacy—can support our language teaching and help prepare students to be active, informed citizens in the 21st century.

CLIL has already played a powerful role in English language lessons for years. Students enjoy learning about other subject areas through English, which helps them engage with both language and content simultaneously.

Finally, I believe inquiry-based learning will continue to foster critical thinking and prepare students to face the challenges of the 21st century. As we shift towards concept-based inquiry (CBI), we can help nurture students who are capable of making connections in their learning and becoming changemakers in the world.

Of all the books and materials, you have written, do you have a personal favourite or one that holds special significance to you?

Every book we write is kind of like one of our children. When we wrote our first book *Magic Time*, we sent our work out into the world for others to use in their own way. When I sing the first few words of one of the songs in this course, my students start singing songs. We had a little more time to create it, and our son Christian helped colour the pages. But to be honest, every book is special. With each book we've created, it has a different philosophy. As I mentioned, I've learned from so many great researchers and individuals who have helped me rethink the way I teach. In that respect, our books are like giving birth. It's amazing to see the end product and then to see all of its "siblings." Each book has its own personality, and they go out into the world, becoming meaningful to children everywhere. It's just remarkable.

As authors, we're often part of a larger team. We collaborate to create the vision, pedagogy, and curriculum for each book. We work closely with various teams—editorial, design, video, DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion), marketing, and more—to ensure the content flows seamlessly from one level to the next. Writing involves a lot of reflection; we research, interview, write, rewrite, and revise repeatedly. We comb through our books over and over, making sure they are the best they can be. Our books are previewed by teachers, tested by students, and finally published.

Is there anything else you would like to say to our readers?

First of all, I want to thank everyone at JALT for inviting me to attend the 2023 JALT conference, to give the plenary, and to present a workshop. It was really a dream opportunity for me! Returning to Japan and sharing ideas in the plenary, especially, those related to a growth mindset, was wonderful. A growth mindset is important for everyone, not just young children. I spoke about how learning should be full of wonder and joy and how we want all students, not just young learners, to feel that way. I lived in Japan for 31 years, so attending the JALT conference felt like a homecoming. I was so happy to reconnect with old friends and have meaningful one-on-one conversations. I'm grateful that my many days of pondering and hard work made the presentation the best it could be.

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Lorraine Kipling

We welcome submissions for the My Share column. Submissions should be up to 600 words describing a successful technique or lesson plan you have used that can be replicated by readers, and should conform to the My Share format (see the guidelines on our website below).

Email: jaltpubs.tlt.my.share@jalt.org • Web: https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/myshare

Welcome to My Share!

As we are getting settled into the new year, it's a good time to think about how we help our students get warmed up and motivated in their regular language practice. This issue we have four accessible activities from members of the JALT community, to do just that.

First up, Jude Conlon's 'no-limits' adaptation of the grammar auction aims to gamify TOEIC questions to boost motivation. Next, Akihiro Saito uses chunked scripts and iterative practice to improve presentation skills. Then, Angelo Morales applies a 'spin-the-wheel' format to liven up conversation prompts. And finally, Peter Quinn offers a simple and accessible way to update starter questions for a regular speaking warm up.

I hope you find something of interest here. Please feel free to get in contact if you have an original activity that you would like to share. We welcome admissions from newbies and familiar names, and look forward to seeing your ideas! Email me at jaltpubs.tlt.my.share@jalt.org with questions or submissions.

All the best for 2025! —Lorraine

No-Limit TOEIC

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Quick Guide

- Keywords: *TOEIC, motivation, engagement, gamification*
- Learner English level: *Beginner to advanced*
- Learner maturity: *University students*
- Preparation time: *5-10 minutes*
- Activity time: *20-40 minutes*
- Materials: *A TOEIC activity, whiteboard/blackboard, whiteboard marker/chalk, board eraser, small portable whiteboards, markers with erasers for students.*

When English language educators are tasked with delivering lessons containing TOEIC content, motivating students can be challenging. Inspired by no-limit poker, No-limit TOEIC was developed in order to increase student engagement and motivation. In the same vein as Grammar Auctions, No-limit TOEIC is an activity that allows students to compete by bidding on their answers after discussing multiple-choice problems in small groups.

Preparation

Step 1: Have a TOEIC activity (or other multiple-choice activity) ready for students to complete.

Step 2: On the left side of the board, set up rows from top to bottom by writing as many numbers of the assigned problems as you can fit. If you do not have enough space to write all the numbers, you can add them later.

Step 3: Across the top of the board, set up columns by writing the team numbers, i.e. "Team 1", "Team 2", "Team 3", "Team 4", etc. Under each team, write "10." This is the number of points each team starts with and the default number of points teams can be lent if they go 'bankrupt' (Appendix A).

Procedure

Step 1: Divide the class into teams of three to five students, assign team numbers, and have teams sit together. Give each team a portable whiteboard and marker with an eraser.

Step 2: Explain to students that they will be playing a game where, after completing a TOEIC activity, each team chooses an answer and places a bet, from zero to all their points, depending on their confidence in its correctness. Explain that if a team loses all their points, they will be given a loan of 10 points, which must be repaid at the end of the game.

Step 3: Have teams complete the TOEIC activity.

Step 4: Have teams discuss Problem 1 and the number of points they want to bet on their answer.

Step 5: Tell students to write their answers and bets on their whiteboards.

Step 6: On the count of "three, two, one show," a member of each team holds up their whiteboard.

Step 7: Record the teams' bets and answers on the board (Appendix B).

Step 8: Reveal the correct answer and discuss and explain, if necessary.

Step 9: Calculate the teams' scores by adding or subtracting the points they bet and record any loans on the board (Appendix C).

Step 10: Repeat the process until all problems are completed. As the game progresses, the running total for each team is added and written in the appropriate space at the end of each round. If there is no more space to write, erase the board and write the totals under each team's name. Write the new problem numbers on the left side of the board (Appendix D).

Step 11: After all the problems are finished, subtract any loans given during the game and write the total scores on the board. The team with the most points wins.

Conclusion

University students in Japan may perceive TOEIC content as dull. However, studying TOEIC content via No-limit TOEIC adds competition and excitement, and student feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. No-limit TOEIC could also be employed for various other multiple-choice content. For educators wishing to expand their repertoires of engaging gamified activities, this may be one to add.

Appendices

The appendices are available from the online version of this article at https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/myshare

Improving Speech Delivery With "Read, Look Up, and Say"

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Quick Guide

- Keywords: *Presentation, script, delivery, 'read, look up, and say' technique*
- Learner English level: *Intermediate and above*
- Learner maturity: *High school and above*
- Preparation time: *30 minutes*
- Activity time: *20 minutes*
- Materials: *250-word chunked speech script handout (see Appendix)*

Students often read their scripts with their eyes downcast, focusing on the accuracy of their speech content but neglecting to engage with their audience. This accessible activity can improve students' presentation skills through iterative practice. Students read part of their script, look up to connect with the audience, and speak the content from memory or with minimal reference to the script. This activity, an adaptation of the 'read, look up, and say' technique (Fanselow, 1972) using chunked scripts, helps balance accuracy of content with engaging delivery. For ease of understanding, I refer to a reader-friendly sample script adapted from LeBeau (2021) (see Appendix).

Preparation

Step 1: Choose a topic that is familiar to students.

Step 2: Create a Word file and prepare a 250-word script in easy English. As the focus is on improving delivery rather than grammar or vocabulary, make sure the script is at a level that your students can read with ease. For my example (see Appendix), I transcribed and edited a speech about visiting a city from LeBeau (2021).

Step 3: Edit the script so that students can easily modify it, changing place names, dates, events, and food names as needed. In my example, I have underlined parts of the script that could be left black for students to fill in (e.g., '…are you a <u>baseball</u> fan?')

Step 4: Divide the script into manageable sense groups by starting each chunk of language on a new line.

Step 5: Print the script as a handout or make it shareable with students online.

Procedure

Step 1: Explain that students will practice a technique that will help them to engage with their audience.

Step 2: Demonstrate the technique. Read part of a script, look up to make eye contact with students, and speak.

Step 3: Hand out (or share) the prepared chunked script (see Appendix), and have students practice the technique in pairs.

Step 4: Divide the class into groups of 4 or 5.

Step 5: Ask one student to stand up and face the other students in their group.

Step 6: Explain that the presenter has 3 minutes to rehearse the script. Reassure them that it is OK if they cannot finish in that time.

Step 7: Explain that the other students will time on their smartphones the total time the presenter can look up. Set an initial goal of one-minute cumulative 'look up' time for the first round of practice.

Step 8: Have students begin their presentations. Gradually increase the time as practice continues. Encourage regular practice to see continuous improvement and greater comfort in public speaking.

Conclusion

The 'read, look up, and say' technique, along with chunked scripts, provides a practical way for students to improve their presentation skills. By balancing content accuracy with engaging delivery, students can increase their confidence and ability to interact with an audience. This activity helps students become more engaging speakers, promoting a more interactive presentation style.

Extension

As the class proceeds, have students edit the script to make it more personalized.

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Appendix

The appendix is available from the online version of this article at htttps://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/myshare

Conversation Wheel

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Quick Guide

» Keywords: *Communication skills, communicative competence, pair work*
» Learner English level: *False Beginners and above*
» Learner maturity: *Junior high school and above*
» Preparation Time: *10-20 minutes*
» Activity time: *10-15 minutes (can be extended)*
» Materials: *Smartphones, laptop, or tablets, online conversation wheel tool and list of conversation topics (see Preparation), stopwatch/timer*

The "Conversation Wheel" is a communicative task to practice meaningful conversation in pairs using a "Spin the Wheel" game. Some online platforms have ready-to-use conversation wheels, and some allow for customization. Making a game out of selecting conversation topics helps students to activate stored knowledge on topics that are relevant to their lives. It can also strengthen class relationships while students use target language in a natural conversation setting. This activity requires minimal preparation and can be adapted and extended for a variety of classroom contexts.

Preparation

Step 1: Access an online conversation wheel tool such as Wordwall (wordwall.net), Spin the Wheel - Random Picker (spinthewheel.app), Wheel of Names (wheelsofnames.com), and Picker Wheel (pickerwheel.com). You can search online using the key words "Customizable Wheel Spinner" or "Conversation Wheel" for alternatives. See appendix for an example using Wordwall.

Step 2: You can choose a ready-to-use conversation wheel or one that allows you to enter your own questions. Some have easy conversation prompts, such as favorites, likes/dislikes, etc., that are ideal for getting students to immediately start conversing in English. Others have prompts that practice specific target grammar (e.g., past tense). You can also enter your own questions depending on the lesson objective.

Procedure

Step 1: Tell the class they will be using a Conversation Wheel tool to practice speaking with a classmate.

Step 2: Set the conversation time limit (e.g., 2 minutes talk time per student) or have the class decide how much time they'd like to talk about the prompt.

Step 3: Make conversation pairs. You may randomly create pairs or assign specific students to be activity partners.

Step 4: Choose one student to "spin the wheel" using the class tablet or laptop. Ask the "spinner" to

read the question in a clear and loud voice for the class. Check for comprehension.

Step 5: Make sure everyone is ready to discuss, then start the timer. Go around the classroom to monitor the conversations, providing support if needed.

Step 6: If a pair finishes their conversation quickly, help them think of follow-up questions. For example, if the topic is about a favorite movie, the students can discuss their favorite scene, their favorite actors or actresses, their opinion about the ending, etc.

Step 7: When the timer goes off, choose another student to "spin the wheel" to generate the next conversation prompt. Repeat steps 3-5.

Step 8: After a few rounds, tell the pairs to wrap up their conversation. If time permits, have some students share an interesting point from their conversations.

Conclusion

The "Conversation Wheel" is a fun and engaging way to do conversation practice in pairs, either as a class warmup or as an end-of-class activity. There are plenty of chances to involve the students in the activity creation, which enables them to practice both their language skills and creativity.

Variation

Make the activity more learner-centred by preparing a conversation wheel with only one or two questions. Either in pairs or individually, have the students come up with a question that can be entered into the conversation wheel. The type of questions or prompts that go into the conversation wheel can depend on the topic or the target language the class is currently learning, or the linguistic ability of the students (e.g., "Do you like ....?" for beginners; "If you were ..." for intermediate or advanced students).

Appendix

The appendix is available from the online version of this article at https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/myshare

Starting Question

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Quick Guide

- Keywords: *Warm up, Speaking, Google Forms*
- Learner English level: *All levels*
- Learner maturity: *University*
- Preparation: *Less than 30 minutes*
- Activity time: *10 minutes*
- Materials: *online survey, such as Google Forms, classroom PC, projector, student devices*

The goal of this warm-up activity is to get the students speaking in English from the beginning of the class and to allow the students to get to know more about each other and the teacher. This activity is designed to be the first activity that the students do each class. It is best to do this activity regularly so that the students can start the class with an enjoyable and predictable activity. Students can enjoy interacting with each other by discussing different easy and personal questions each class.

Preparation

Step 1: Create a Google Form (Appendix A) or other online survey using a question such as "What is your hobby?" or "Who is your favorite person in your family?" See Appendix B for more example questions.

Step 2: Share the link with students by putting it into the LMS or sharing it on the projector in class.

Step 3: Repeat Steps 1 and 2 for each question you plan to use in the semester.

Procedure

Step 1: Show the students the question for today on the projector. Have the students repeat the question two times. Tell the students your answer to the question.

Step 2: Have students open the survey on their devices.

Step 3: Tell the students to ask three other students the question and to write the students` names and answers into the survey form.

Step 4: Show the results page of the survey on the projector so that the students can see how many

have finished the activity in real time. If using Google Forms, this is the "Form Edit" page. See Appendix A for an example. Check on and support students who seem to be taking a long time.

Step 5: After all the students have finished, show the results page and read the answers aloud. See Appendix A for an example. The teacher can read all of the answers or just the most interesting ones. Then briefly discuss the answers with the class.

Variations

Due to the online nature of this activity, you can edit the question at the last minute. For example, if it is a very rainy day, you can change the question to "Did you bring your umbrella today?" It is funny when a student answers "no." If there was an interesting news story or sporting event, you can change the question to ask about that. For example, you can ask "Did you hear about....?" or "How do you feel about.....?"

If you have a very motivated class, you can change the number of students that the students have to talk to from three to five students. This will encourage the students to stand up as the students will not be able to interact with five other students otherwise.

You can make Step 5 more interesting by preparing some jokes. For example, for the question "Who is your favorite person in your family?" you could pretend to be offended when none of the students choose "father" for the answer and say "Please love your father!"

Conclusion

This is a quick and easy warm-up activity that gets the students ready for more difficult activities later in the class. It also increases their familiarity with the teacher and their fellow students.

Appendices

The appendices are available from the online version of this article at https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/myshare

[RESOURCES] *TLT* WIRED


Sarah Deutchman & Edward Escobar

In this column, we discuss the latest developments in ed-tech, as well as tried and tested apps and platforms, and the integration between teaching and technology. We invite readers to submit articles on their areas of interest. Please contact the editors before submitting.

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Using Mentimeter in Foreign Language Classes and its Educational Significance for Improved Student Engagement

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Information and Communication Technology (ICT) usage has rapidly advanced in foreign language education, where its effectiveness is widely recognized (Suleymanova, 2021). In line with these developments, integrating ICT into traditional teaching methods is expected to increase student engagement and improve the quality of learning experiences (Cao et al., 2023; Hussain et al., 2019; Schneider et al., 2016). The use of ICT in higher education also reshapes the roles and interactions between students and instructors, promoting active learning and collaboration (Rodríguez et al., 2014). Among these ICT tools, Mentimeter is a powerful interactive platform that facilitates real-time engagement between students and teachers, allowing educators to assess students' understanding instantly.

Student response systems (SRS), such as Mentimeter, have the potential to transform traditional one-way lecture styles into more interactive and engaging learning experiences (Rudolph, 2018). Research by Schneider et al. (2016) found that real-time automated feedback using digital tools positively impacts learners' motivation, confidence, self-awareness, and performance, reinforcing the

value of such interactive tools in enhancing student engagement.

Mentimeter's features, such as anonymous responses, create a supportive environment for more introverted or hesitant students, encouraging them to express their opinions freely. This functionality increases classroom engagement and builds a more inclusive and collaborative atmosphere (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2020). As a result, Mentimeter has become a valuable asset in foreign language education by promoting active participation and deeper learning. For teachers to effectively use tools such as Mentimeter, a solid understanding of its functions and purposeful integration into lessons is essential. The thoughtful use of technology positively impacts the teacher-student relationship, promoting interaction, motivation, and classroom cohesion (Rodríguez et al., 2014). As educators gain proficiency in these tools, they can create more inclusive and dynamic learning environments that cater to various student needs. In line with this, Mentimeter is accessible on any device and accommodates large classes and individual needs, allowing for adaptable, responsive instruction (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2020).

Enhancing Communication and Participation With Mentimeter

Mentimeter allows students to participate in various activities, such as polls, quizzes, and brainstorming exercises, through their own devices, enabling real-time feedback. This functionality allows teachers to conduct diagnostic assessments, gauge comprehension as the lesson progresses, and provide immediate clarification. The option for anonymous responses further enhances this dynamic by creating a safe space, where students feel comfortable sharing their ideas, which is particularly beneficial for those anxious about speaking up (Khalili & Ostafichuk, 2020). According to Moorhouse and Kohnke (2020), this anonymity helps remove psychological barriers to participation, creating a supportive learning atmosphere that encourages all students to engage. Consequently, students who might otherwise remain silent in a traditional classroom setting are more likely to participate actively, ultimately enhancing the motivation of the entire class. However, as Rudolph (2018) notes, although there are advantages, teachers must also be careful. Relying too heavily on anonymity can sometimes reduce accountability, making students feel less responsible for their input and potentially hindering meaningful discussion.

Application of Mentimeter in CALL Methodology: Enhancing Learning Efficiency and Adapting to Diverse Learning Styles

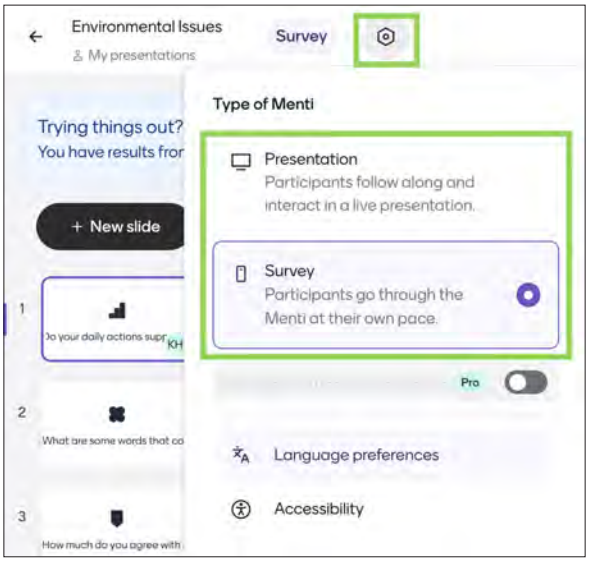
From the computer-assisted language learning (CALL) perspective, interactive tools like Mentimeter can also significantly enhance learning efficiency in language education. For example, using features such as Q & A, Guess the Number, 2 x 2, and Pin on Image slides allows teachers to check students' comprehension of the lesson content in real-time and to provide immediate feedback. Moorhouse and Kohnke (2020) also noted that Mentimeter's diverse question types (e.g., open-ended questions, rankings, and multiple-choice options) foster discussions and collaborative learning among students. This flexible feature allows learners to engage with the material in ways that align with their learning preferences, broadening their opportunities for understanding and retention. Therefore, Mentimeter is an effective tool for enhancing language learning experiences by adapting to different learning needs.

Flexible In-Class and Out-Of-Class Usage: Presentation Mode and Survey Mode

As Figure 1 below indicates, Mentimeter offers two modes: Presentation Mode, where facilitators control the slides shown to the participants, and Survey Mode, where participants can navigate slides at their own pace. As Moorhouse and Kohnke (2020) explains, presentation mode is helpful for real-time comprehension checks, allowing learners to follow along with

Figure 1

Two Modes: Presentation and Survey Modes



the facilitator's pacing. On the other hand, survey mode is ideal for self-paced learning, such as assignments completed outside of class or review activities. For instance, teachers can assign tasks in survey mode, allowing students to progress independently and then discuss the results in class to reinforce learning. This flexibility allows teachers to tailor their approach to each student's learning pace and needs, making it a valuable tool in language education.

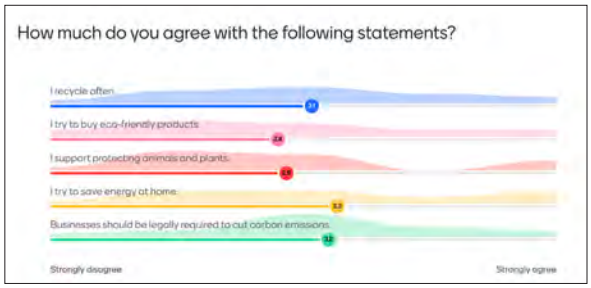
Practical Application in Foreign Language Classes: Concrete Uses of Mentimeter

One practical use of Mentimeter in foreign language classes is the Scale Slide, which enables teachers to gather real-time feedback and insights from student responses. Before beginning a new unit, teachers can use the Scale Slide to check the class's understanding of foundational concepts, and assess students' familiarity with key topics as a diagnostic tool. By knowing the student's or class's initial status, teachers can appropriately adjust the pacing and focus areas for the unit. At the end of a lesson, for example, teachers can ask students to rate the pace of the session to assess class satisfaction and comprehension. The scale slide feature enhances this feedback process with its unique capabilities. Results from multiple questions can be displayed on a single slide, showing the average number for each question based on all respondent's answers, thereby enabling easy comparison across responses (see Figure 2). Customizable labels, such as a Likert scale from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" or other tailored evaluation criteria, make this feature flexible for different feedback needs.

Furthermore, Mentimeter's design also incorporates soft and welcoming colors, making the interface visually appealing and approachable for students. Additionally, the average display function provides a clear view of overall trends, helping teachers and students grasp class sentiment at a glance. Recent updates have further enhanced the accessibility and readability of the Scale Slide, benefiting all participants.

Figure 2

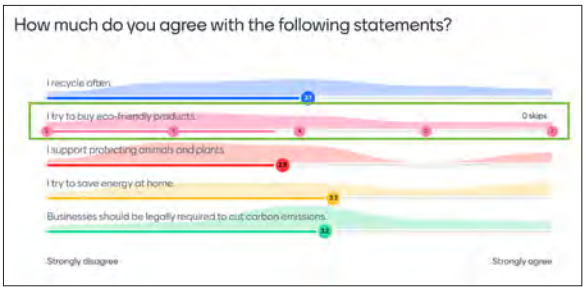
Scale Slide



An additional benefit of using Mentimeter is that, when teachers present the results on the Scale Slide, hovering the cursor over a particular response shows a breakdown of how many people selected each option, such as "Strongly Agree," "Agree," and so on (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Detailed Results for Scales



Mentimeter's Word Cloud Slide offers another practical tool for language classes. Teachers can periodically use this slide to review vocabulary by prompting students to submit words they associate with the day's topic (see Figure 4) or to identify main themes from listening to recent news. A word cloud visually represents text data, with the size of each word indicating its frequency. As can be seen in Figure 4, words with more prominent font sizes, such as "river," "animal," "tree," and "air" were entered more often, whereas words in smaller font sizes, such as "pollution" and "sea," are less common. Displaying students' word submissions in a Word Cloud Slide reinforces vocabulary and allows even quieter class members to participate actively in a low-pressure environment.

Figure 4

Word Cloud Slide

Additionally, there are a range of interactive response formats (slide types) in Mentimeter, including quizzes, polls, and multiple-choice slides (see Figure 5). These features allow teachers to visualize class responses and identify trends in understand-

ing or opinions. The quiz format, in particular, adds a gamified element to lessons, increasing student motivation through friendly competition (Halim et al., 2020; Worm & Buch, 2014; Zainuddin et al., 2020) and reinforcing knowledge retention through peer interaction. Teachers using the free version can create up to 100 slides and invite 50 participants per month, making it useful for larger classes. The pro-level account supports additional participants and offers further functionality, but this paper discusses only the free version.

Once teachers set up Mentimeter's features, they can apply these tools effectively in class to create an interactive and engaging learning environment. For instance, teachers can use the Scale Slide to gauge comprehension and class satisfaction immediately at the end of the lesson, adjusting instruction as needed. The Word Cloud Slide is ideal for vocabulary reviews, enabling all students to contribute and reinforcing language learning in a collaborative, visual format. Quizzes and other interactive slides offer competitive elements that foster student engagement, promoting a dynamic learning experience. Together, these interactive tools foster an inclusive and motivated learning environment. Research by Esnaashari et al. (2019) supports this approach, showing that interactive digital tools promote deeper student engagement and a greater willingness to share ideas, ultimately enhancing the overall learning experience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Mentimeter has proven to be an effective tool for enhancing interactive communication and learning outcomes in foreign language education. Considering practical examples and the importance of professional development in ICT-supported environments, integrating technology can motivate students and provide opportunities for deeper learning. Mentimeter's diverse features strengthen the interactivity in foreign language classes, creating an environment where students are encouraged to engage in their learning actively. For teachers, interactive tools like Mentimeter improve the quality of lessons by allowing them to respond flexibly to students' needs, suggesting that these tools will continue to be highly valuable in an educational context. Therefore, teachers should consider using Mentimeter.

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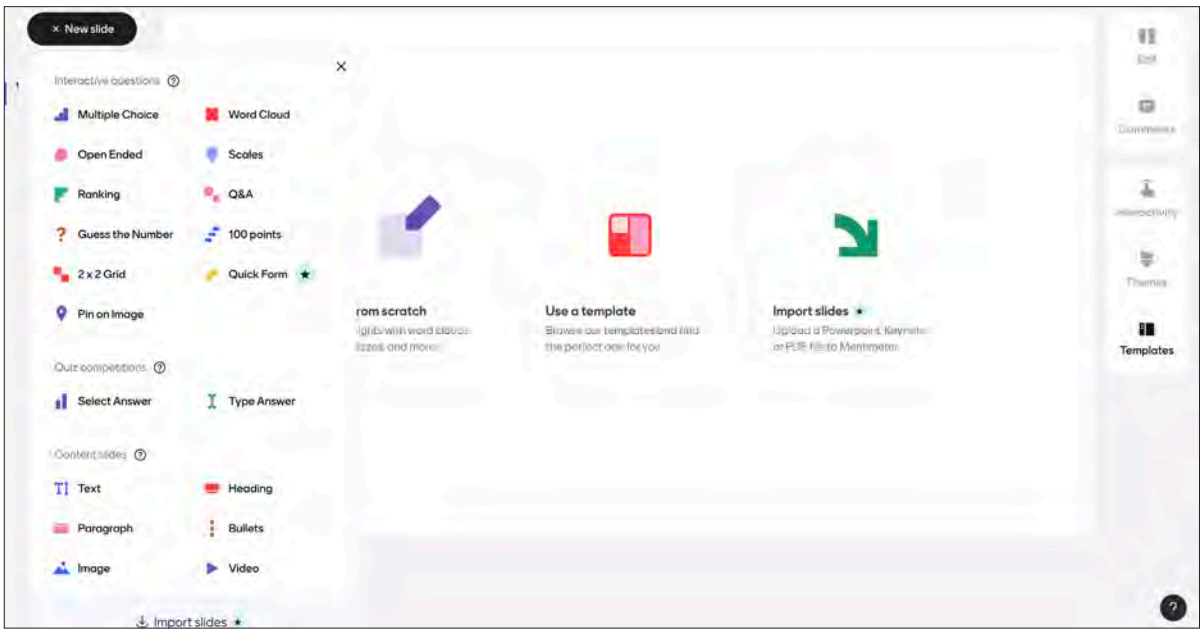
Figure 5

Slide Types



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Utilising Linktree to Foster Learner Autonomy in Non-English-Speaking Environments

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British Council, Japan

Learner autonomy, defined by Holec back in 1981, is "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (cited in Benson, 2011, p. 59) and as educators, we would like our learners to be able to achieve this. However, students making the transition from carefully controlled pre-tertiary education (Arroub, 2015) to university often require more support and cannot be expected to be proficient autonomous learners (Mynard, 2019).

Learners in non-English-speaking environments (NESE), like Japan, have less chance to benefit from English outside of the class than those studying in English-speaking contexts (Entwistle, 2020). Although it is true that many modern leaners possess a range of electronic devices to aid their studies (Armitage, 2019), the sheer volume and plethora of choices of English language content can be overwhelming (Lin, 2022). With this being an issue, the choice was made to use Linktree to provide a range of suitable, level appropriate, and high-quality online resources for students to self-study outside of the classroom. This *Wired* review will outline how and why Linktree was utilised in a university context in Japan, the challenges this caused the learners and teachers, and why, in my opinion, the benefits outweigh the drawbacks.

Figure 1

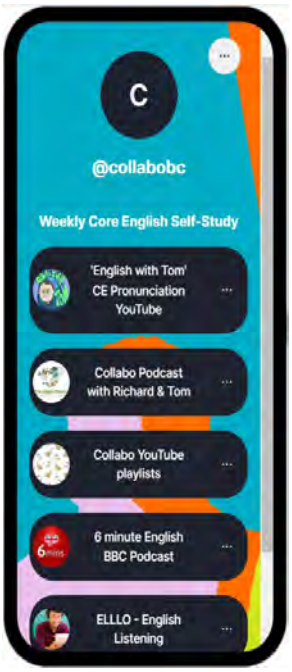
How Linktree Appears on Students' Desktops

Utilising Linktree to Provide Suitable Material and Foster Autonomous Learning

Linktree was chosen to help provide materials to promote learner autonomy and self-study. Linktree is a "freemium" social media landing page (Reddy, 2020); that is, it is free for basic services with an option to upgrade for a fee, which allows users to upload their entire list of social media, or business links to one place (see Figure 1). All one needs to do is create a username and password using an email address. The free service also lets users make very basic design choices, order the links however they wish, then share the master link with their students. Free service users can then view the analytics to see which links have been accessed the most. However, more in-depth analytics are only available on the premium pricing plans. In my case, I posted the master Linktree link to our university learning management system (LMS) and shared a QR code in class for students to scan on their smart devices (see Figure 2). My Linktree provided extra listening, reading, pronunciation, exam preparation, and study-abroad preparation material that students could experiment with and then tailor their own self-studies to their own wants and needs. In previous studies (Al Jawad & Mansour, 2021), the ability for learners to take control of what digital material they used in their own learning proved successful and fostered greater autonomous learning.

Figure 2

How Linktree Appears on Students' Smart Devices



Although a somewhat limited function when signed up through the free membership, Linktree members can view the analytics of the links provided to students. This allows teachers to replace less popular links with alternative sources to hopefully boost engagement. Figure 3 shows my Linktree accounts' yearly analytics, from April 2023 to January 2024. It shows that our department's freshmen cohort of 97 students visited the Linktree list 1,950 times and clicked on one of the links on the list 2,340 times, resulting in a click-through rate (CTR) of 119.56%. This shows that every visit to the Linktree page led to a student accessing at least one of the curated links. This positive engagement with the provided links can help turn students' NESE into a more language rich environment (Entwistle, 2020) by adding much needed comprehensible input.

Figure 3

2023's Yearly Analytics

Although Linktree has limited functionality and is primarily a landing page for various links, it could be used as a replacement LMS by educators who either work in contexts that do not have an LMS, or by teachers, like part-time teachers, as a simple one-stop-shop for everything they wish to announce to their class by using the header function (Reddy, 2020). See Figure 4 for an example of a set of fictional, homework (HW) tasks for week 5 ("W5") as a visualisation of how to use Linktree as a stand-in LMS. Note that even on the free Linktree plan, one can add as many headings and links as they like. In theory, one could have a year's worth of HW tasks laid out such as in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Example LMS Design

Challenges Linktree Can Cause Both Teachers and Learners

I started using Linktree at the start of the 2023 Japanese academic year. Of course, integrating new technology into one's classes can be problematic for both teachers and students, and utilising Linktree also has its challenges. It has been shown that when learners are left to themselves to source their own material without any guidance, the task can be a burden due to the huge amount of choices (Lin, 2022). Furthermore, it has been shown that lower-level students often lose interest and motivation when the materials they find are too complex (Li & Medic, 2021). It is, therefore, important that the teacher spends time sourcing suitable links.

Also, to make sure they are of quality, level-appropriate, and meets the students' wants and needs, I found vetting the self-study materials was quite a time-consuming and tedious task. Though now the list has been curated, only periodic checks should be needed to delete, add, or swap content.

Conclusion

This review has shown the potential Linktree has for aiding self-study and promoting learner autonomy. While Linktree does have somewhat limited functionality, especially on the free plan, it has proven to be an extremely useful platform to provide students with appropriate self-study links, thus taking away the burden on the students of sourcing their own material. This in turn has led to greater engagement with English outside of the class, which is key in NESE, and helps learners transition from high school, where their education was much more controlled, to a university setting where they are expected to take more control of their learning.

There are of course different pricing options such as the starter, pro, and premium packages which offer more functionality like greater customisation and more in-depth analytics. Furthermore, there are 30-day free trials available. For more information on Linktree and its subscription packages, please see https://linktr.ee/.

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Martin Sedaghat & Emily MacFarlane

The Younger Learners column provides language teachers of children and teenagers with advice and guidance for making the most of their classes. Teachers with an interest in this field are also encouraged to submit articles and ideas to the editors at the address below. We also welcome questions about teaching, and will endeavour to answer them in this column.

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Escaping the Classroom: Building an Immersive Escape Room Experience for Young Language Learners

Fiona Wall Minami

An escape room is an immersive game experience, locking a small team of players inside a room that they must break out of by finding clues, solving puzzles, cracking codes, and opening locks. While it may not sound like something that would work in a language classroom, with a little creativity an escape room activity can be a rewarding experience for both teachers and students.

Some teachers may start out with a language objective and build a narrative and puzzles around it. In my case, I came to escape rooms first as a player/enthusiast, then as a writer aiming to produce an escape room themed textbook for English language learners. During the writing process, I decided that I would have a go at building an actual escape room for friends, family, and fellow game enthusiasts to play. Not having space in my house, or the budget to rent a room, I set about building it in the classroom of my *eikaiwa* school.

My students noticed more and more mysterious objects filling up the room as they came for weekly classes—a black briefcase suspended from the ceiling, a padlocked wooden chest, an empty wine bottle inside the post-box—and were instantly intrigued. When I explained that I was making a game, and that sadly it might be a bit too difficult for them, they were all desperate to have a chance to play, and so I promised I would create an escape game especially for them before the end of the school year. I followed through on this promise, going on to create a total of four escape rooms in my classroom as well as finishing the textbook I had initially set out to write.

In this article, based purely on my own experiences, I will attempt to touch on some of the practicalities and props required to build a pop-up/homemade escape room that I hope will be of use to any teachers considering building one of their own. While not detailing every single aspect of the puzzles and challenges I made for my game, I hope to give enough useful information that some teachers may be inspired to create an original children's escape room from scratch as I did.

First Steps

The Room

The space you have available will determine what kind of game you can make. Do you have a whole room at your disposal, or just an area of your room? Do you have time in the room before and after students are there to set up and take down your game? Would it be more practical to make your game one that does not require many physical objects? A simple alternative could be a series of paper-based puzzles that lead up to a final locked treasure box, or a set of boxes within boxes that can only be opened by breaking codes and finding keys.

The Goal

Before you start planning a theme for your game, it might be wise to start at the end. While a 'real' escape room usually has the end goal of exiting the locked room, this is most likely not a realistic option for an English class. Some simpler, child-friendly objectives could include solving a mystery, finding hidden treasures, opening a mysterious box, or freeing a trapped soft toy from a locked cage.

The Story

Once you have an end goal in mind you can set about creating a story that works in the space you have. Fortunately, children have rich imaginations, so they may be more willing than adults to make a leap into believing that the room they are in is now a spaceship or a castle, with the aid of just a few props. However, you could also create a narrative to fit the space you are in without having to go

overboard on decorations. I never attempted an ambitious transformation of my classroom, deciding instead to incorporate it into my story – the classroom has been placed under a curse, a wizard has hidden powerful treasures in the room, the classroom is being used as the base of a spy operation and players are detectives solving a mystery. These themes enabled me to make minimal changes to the actual layout of the room while still immersing players in an imaginary world. Christmas and Halloween also lend themselves very easily to building a game (see Figures 1 & 2), and you are likely to have a variety of seasonal items on hand that can double up as props or puzzle components without the need to spend a lot of money.

Figure 1

Christmas Game Bulletin Board

Figure 2

Christmas Game Table

The Players

Before you start working on your game, consider who will be playing it. The class size and age of students will be important factors, as will their English ability. For a small class of up to six students, working together in one team is optimal. For larger classes you would be better splitting the class into competing teams, either working simultaneously in different corners of the room, or each given their own set of puzzles to solve. Age and reading ability will determine what kind of puzzles will work, and you might want to spend a few classes teaching the language they need to know before playing the game. It is crucial that every member of the team feels involved and important, and no-one is left out. One way to ensure this is to assign roles: a leader, a timekeeper, someone in charge of reading clues, one person to open locks, and so on. I decided against designating roles, allowing students to find their positions in the team more organically. I did set one important rule, however: that any decisions, such as requesting a hint, had to be agreed on by everyone. More about the importance of hints later.

The Budget

If you have funds at your disposal, a great amount of money could be spent purchasing props, ready-made puzzles, and high-quality locks and treasure chests. If on the other hand, if, like me, you do not have access to any kind of expense budget, you can still make a decent escape room spending between five and ten thousand yen. In fact, the limitation of not having a blank cheque or blank canvas to work with leads to more creativity, in my opinion.

When I set about building my first escape room, I gave myself a maximum of ¥10,000 to spend, and fortunately, many of the items I bought could be reused in subsequent games. But before spending any money I sat in my classroom and had a good look around at what was already there: tables and chairs; a large whiteboard; shelves filled with board games and picture books; posters and a map of the world; items used for arts and crafts; Lego; flashcards; and stickers (see Figure 3). With imagination, all of these can be used in a variety of ways, so consider what you have at hand before hitting the shops.

Figure 3

Stickers and Scrabble Tiles

Props and Puzzles

Purchased Items

- **A variety of locks:** three-digit locks from the ¥100 shop along with four-digit bicycle locks with the combination already set (you would need a puzzle to lead to this particular number). More expensive alphabet locks and heavy padlocks with keys purchased from hardware stores (see Figure 4).
- **Things that can have locks attached:** plastic storage boxes and zippered pouches from the ¥100 shop shop. I also bought a small antique wooden chest of drawers from a recycle shop. Items could be hidden inside or behind the drawers, and the drawers themselves could be locked. I used this in each of my escape room games.
- **Mini whiteboards with markers and erasers:** A simple trick I learned in a Bulgarian escape room is to write the actual clue on a whiteboard in permanent ink and surround it with words, letters, or numbers written with a whiteboard marker. When erased, only the clue remains. Afterwards, you can erase the permanent ink by writing over it with a whiteboard marker and erasing it (it may take a few tries). A small whiteboard can also be used by players to jot down codes or other information they find in the game (see Figure 5).
- **Blank jigsaw puzzles:** around ¥400 from Flying Tiger, and it is best to buy a few as back-ups in case pieces go missing (see Figure 6). Children love hunting for jigsaw pieces and then assembling the puzzle. I copied an illustration from *Where's Spot*, which signalled that students needed to look under the flaps in that book for numbered stickers to help open a lock.
- **Random objects from the ¥100 shop:** Just wandering around a shop can trigger ideas for simple puzzles. Some items I bought without an initial plan include pet food bowls, colourful plastic ice cubes, pipe cleaners, glass jars and wire baskets (see Figure 7). I attached alphabet stickers to the underside of the pet food bowls and wrote symbols on the cubes which I enclosed in a wire basket. Shaking or manipulating with chopsticks enabled players to find all the hidden symbols. Once you get into the puzzle-making zone, you will start to see possibilities all around you.

Figure 4

Photo of Locks

Figure 5

Whiteboard and Eraser

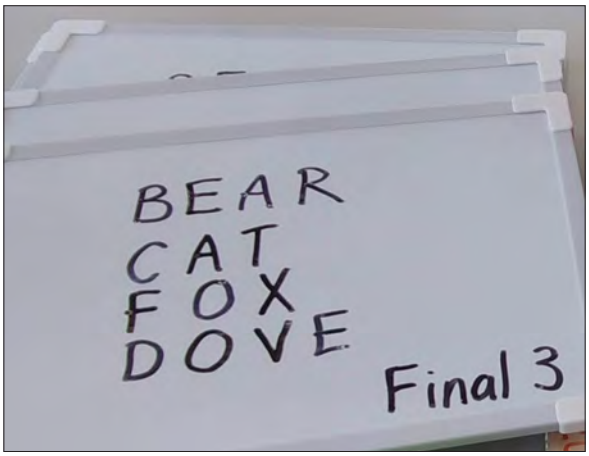

Figure 6

Blank Jigsaw Puzzle

Figure 7

Mesh Basket With Coloured Cubes

Props Already in my Classroom

- **books:** In my games for adults, I have always included literary references, and once went overboard paying homage to George Orwell when none of the players had ever read *1984*. I also used a cutter knife to gouge out part of an old paperback to hide a key inside and made another puzzle by redacting letters on a certain page of a book hidden in my shelves. For my children's game, I stuck to familiar picture books such as *Where's Spot* and Eric Carle's books, making simple puzzles related to the animals within them. If you have a large collection of books, it is better to signal the relevant shelf players should limit their searching, saving wasted time. I did this via a map of the bookshelves with "Xs" on all but one of the shelves.
- **board games:** Deciding on a treasure hunt theme for my game, I used accessories in a game called *Forbidden Island* as my treasures. I took a piece of felt and cut out spaces where each treasure had to be laid to win the game before time ran out. Then, the object of the game became to solve puzzles leading to the discovery of each hidden treasure. I also used Scrabble letters hidden in drawers to spell out important words, and Monopoly money for purchasing hints.
- **voice recorder:** I used this to record messages and songs adding audio puzzles into the mix of challenges players faced. With older students the batteries could also be hidden in separate locations. As an example, a recording of Old Macdonald could play, revealing the order toy farm animals with numbered stickers should be assembled to find a lock combination. Without a voice recorder, a certain song or message could be played on a phone at a certain moment in the game.
- **maps:** Students located stickers on a globe and had to match these to destinations on a world map (see Figure 8). A world atlas could also be used to add some geography related puzzles. The Scrabble letters could also signal where on the map to look for tiny-numbered stickers.
- **realia:** Any other items lying around (e.g., Christmas decorations, soft toys, wooden or plastic foods, dice, miniature animals, unused flashcards) all have puzzle potential and can be used in multiple ways (see Figures 9, 10, & 11).

Figure 8

Students Looking at World Map

Figure 9

Table With Various Objects

Figure 10

"Erase the Animals" Poster

Figure 11

Assorted Props

About Hints

As with any successful English class, pace is very important. If players are stuck on a puzzle, the whole exercise can quickly become frustrating, and time is wasted. Therefore, having a strategy for giving players hints is vital, as is their understanding that using a hint is not a failure but a smart, strategic move. To my mind, a good escape room involves dilemmas and decisions, so putting a limit on the number of hints makes students communicate together. To access a hint, you could have all the players jump simultaneously, perform a dance, or say a phrase in unison. In my game, I hid Monopoly money around the room, and this could be spent to purchase clues, solutions, or five more minutes in the game—very useful when time is running out!

Final Considerations

Time

Think about how many times your game can be replayed, and how long you will need for setting up and resetting after each play. If the combination of a lock has accidentally been changed, the whole game could fall apart so you need to be very attentive to small details. If you have little time between classes, it might only be realistic to run the game once a day or as a special event outside of class time.

Effort

Is it worth the time, energy, and expense needed to build an escape room from scratch? For me, yes. I gave my students a unique experience which they talked about for a long time afterwards, and some even started creating their own puzzles to bring to class. In terms of language objectives, perhaps the time could have been better spent, but my intention was to create an enrichment experience rather than a strictly educational activity.

Compromise

If a whole escape room project is unrealistic, can you make something similar but less ambitious, such as trying out one or two puzzle activities in a class? It is also possible to purchase ready-made escape room kits online, although they may not be aimed specifically at language learners.

Before and After

Prepare well by testing out your game to check if everything flows correctly and that it can be completed within your desired time limit. A simple linear game, in which one puzzle must be solved before moving

onto the next, is ideal for young learners. Make sure your players know the rules—that they must not force locks or break objects, that they have a time limit, and that everyone must agree on getting a hint. Spend a little time demonstrating how to open locks or use equipment they will find in the game. Above all, be sure to follow up, having students write, talk, or draw about their experience, and possibly even build some escape room puzzles of their own.

Conclusion

Building an escape room from scratch is an ambitious project, requiring a lot of time and energy. It is also incredibly rewarding, providing a memorable experience and one that has multiple benefits in terms of the positive feelings that come from being absorbed in the flow of an immersive task, as well as important life skills such as collaboration, problem solving, creativity and communication. Even if you decide that a full escape room project is not viable, incorporating puzzle-based learning into your classes provides a fulfilling challenge for the open-minded teacher, while enriching your students' language learning journeys.

Fiona Wall Minami combines running her language school, Britz, with teaching at Kumamoto University and four other colleges. She is the author of several textbooks including *In the Driver's Seat* and the 2021 ELTons finalist *Escape the Classroom*, an escape room themed course for university and high school students. She has broken out of over fifty escape rooms and created four of her own. Her love of boardgames, puzzles, and quizzes has led her to competing in online reality game shows, as well as creating and hosting an international YouTube Mastermind quiz. firowami@gmail.com

[JALT PRAXIS] BOOK REVIEWS

Robert Taferner & Stephen Case

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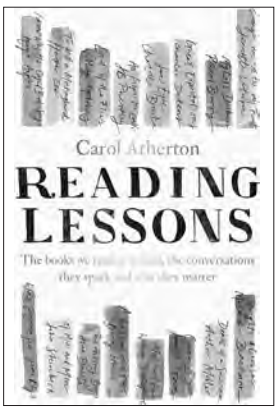
This month's column features James Taylor's review of Reading Lessons: The Books We Read at School, the Conversations They Spark, and Why They Matter.

Reading Lessons: The Books We Read at School, the Conversations They Spark, and Why They Matter

[Carol Atherton. Fig Tree (Penguin Random House), 2024. pp. viii + 392. ISBN: 978-0-241-62948-2.]

Reviewed by James Taylor, International College of Technology, Kanazawa



Reading Lessons: The Books We Read at School, the Conversations They Spark, and Why They Matter is an exploration of the importance of English literature. Although *Reading Lessons* is aimed at a general readership rather than only teachers, English as a foreign or second language (L2) teachers can nevertheless gain ideas for the classroom. The texts and activities in the book would be most suitable for L2 learners of at least an intermediate level. The premise of *Reading Lessons* is that English literature as a school subject may be undervalued. Although Teranishi et al. (2015) note that the use of literature in English language teaching has increased in recent years, Takahashi (2015) shows that in Japan the use of

literary texts in L2 classrooms has declined significantly in recent decades.

Reading Lessons is organised thematically, with one or two texts forming the basis of each chapter. Various genres are covered in the book: novels (both classic and modern), plays, poetry, and autobiographical fiction. There are also references to graphic novels and wordless picture books. Most chapters begin with an autobiographical vignette, a summary of the selected text, and then analysis of the text itself. The analysis also details the text's relevance to modern society and includes practical examples of activities and discussions. Each chapter generally concludes by reiterating the importance of the text and its themes to students. Within the analysis of the texts, there are examples of how teachers of English literature can extend the analysis and teaching to encompass wider social issues. There are also suggestions for introducing students not just to the literature itself, but to the social issues surrounding it and to the parallels in the world around them and their own lives. For example, Chapter 1 uses Robert Browning's poem, *My Last Duchess*, to lead into a discussion of topics, such as domestic violence, toxic masculinity, and sexual harassment. In Chapter 2, analysis of *An Inspector Calls* refers to income inequality and the poverty line. Chapters 2 and 10 contain mention of the stigma of single motherhood and unmarried parents. Chapters 5 and 14 deal with not fitting in and feeling like a failure, respectively. All of these issues are present in modern Japanese society and likely to be relevant to students in Japan. Arizpe et al. (2014) believe that literature, especially fiction, "helps navigate real-world experiences as well as the emotions of other human beings" (p. 2). By sensitively approaching these topics through literature in class, teachers can potentially help students with their lives outside the classroom.

For novice or inexperienced teachers of English literature, there are abundant approaches to teaching various texts that can be easily implemented in many educational contexts. Approaches include discussion topics, writing tasks, reading activities, creative writing, drama, and doing research. There are ideas for individual and collaborative activities. At the end of the book, there is a section on further reading for each chapter. This section contains recommendations for other media and texts on similar topics. These are helpful for deeper exploration of the texts and accompanying issues.

I used some ideas from the poetry section of the book with my students and incorporated the spirit of discussions and lines of questioning from various chapters into discussions of other genres. For the third unit of an English literature course for first-year technical college students, which focused on wordless picturebooks, I used discussion ideas for *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan (2014). The discussion concerned the metaphorical idea represented by a creature that casts shadows over the images in the book. The lack of words in wordless picturebooks increases their value to language learners and teachers, as readers must become more active to interpret the images and make meaning (Arizpe et al., 2014). I found this to be the case, and my students appreciated the opportunity to encounter different genres of literature, to discuss issues, to consider perspectives they had not previously, and to try a variety of activities. However, they also commented on the difficulty of English literature as a subject in general. As this is not a textbook, it does not contain detailed lesson plans or activity instructions for teachers.

There are many useful classroom activities in *Reading Lessons*. By introducing the reader to the author's students' lives and the ways they engage with the texts covered, it encourages us to consider our students' classroom interactions. As such, this book will surely be of interest to English teachers in Japan.

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* ***Bedside manner intermediate: An intermediate English course for nursing***—Capper, S. Perceptia Press, 2024. [This new coursebook builds on the basics of *English of Bedside Manner Beginner* and aims to help learners acquire the essentials for the workplace while increasing awareness and understanding of medical English vocabulary through puzzles and games. Supplementary materials, including audio, can be downloaded through the publisher's website.]

Case studies in business innovation: Readings for discussion—Benevides, M., Valvona, C., & Firth, M. Atama-ii Books, 2023. [This coursebook is for English learners at the CEFR B1 level and higher. It is comprised of 30 case study readings and supporting tasks. The material supports task-based, as well as project-based approaches, and is also suitable for a business English course.]

* ***Colour your English! Learning collocations by colouring in.***—Hirschman, S., & Alton Bautz, A. Perceptia Press, 2023. [Language learners dream of being able to join in with everyday conversations in real-life contexts, but it can be difficult to remember the words you need and use them naturally. This book offers a unique way of noticing, recording, and activating useful collocations: the basic building blocks of language. Each of the 12 units is centered around a location in a town, and in each unit, students review and extend collocations with common verbs and nouns while practicing listening and speaking skills.]

* ***Eat well! An introductory English course for nutritionists (4th ed.)***—Jones, R., & Simmonds, B. Perceptia Press, 2024. [This 12-unit coursebook aims to provide English training to university nutrition majors. Topics include mechanics of nutrition, as well as global nutrition issues, including obesity and malnutrition. Each unit contains a reading passage, listening tasks, and language exercises. An e-learning component is available through the publisher's website.]

From student to community leader: A guide for autonomy-supportive leadership development—Watkins, S., & Hooper, D. Candlin & Mynard, 2023. [This book is a guide for autonomy-supportive leadership training, which can be applied to any field where learners become empowered leaders. The principles and activities aim to foster and sustain student-led leadership communities that prioritizes learner well-being, ensures everyone's voice is heard, and builds a positive climate that is conducive to learning.]

! ***Life topics: Changing views***—Berman, J. Nan'un-do, 2023. [Thoroughly researched and thoughtfully organized, this coursebook combines language lessons with advice on how to live happy and meaningful lives. Topics include anticipation, social media, and forgiveness. The teacher's manual includes supplemental information, quotable quotes, and teaching suggestions. Audio download available.]

Linguistic soup: Recipes for success (2nd edition)—Caraker, R. Perceptia Press, 2020. [This new edition of the CLIL-based applied linguistics coursebook for EFL classes integrates the content of teaching methodology and SLA theories with task-based reading, writing, listening, speaking, and vocabulary exercises. This book is written for students interested in increasing their proficiency and their knowledge of principles of language teaching and learning.]

* ***Talk a ton: Speaking power***—Spiri, J. Independently Published. [This coursebook for Japanese learners of English includes readings on comprehensible topics that form the basis for a variety of communicative activities. Learners can practice two ways of exchanging information: through discussions and interviews.]

学習意識改革ノート:外国語を自律的に学ぶための３ヶ月プログラム—加藤聡子、善永美央子、2024.「８つの法則で学習の核心を学び３１のワークで自分と向き合い、スケジュール帳で行動と感情を記録。」

Books for Teachers

African possibilities: A matriarchitarian perspective for social justice—Amadiume, I. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024. [Representing the culmination of over 40 years of groundbreaking work on notions of matriarchy at the intersection of the Igbo-African universe and the Western capitalist reality, Amadiume sets forth a blueprint for a new matriarchitarianism, critiquing all forms of social injustice and introduces a matriarchal-relational humanism.]

Babygirl, you've got this! Experiences of Black girls and women in the English education system—Pennant, A.-L. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024. [This book explores the educational experiences and journeys of Black British girls and women in England and considers the influence of the intersections of race, gender, ethnicity, cultural background, and social class on their journeys. It features unique qualitative data, covering Black girls' and women's experiences from primary school to university, and provides insights, which are globally applicable.]

Blackness at the intersection—Andrews, K., Crenshaw, K., & Wilson, A. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024. [In the 1980s, Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw first coined the term intersectionality. Curated by Crenshaw and featuring several of the leading scholars of critical race theory, this collection is the first to apply the concept of intersectionality and Blackness to contexts outside the United States. Focusing on Blackness in Britain, the contributors examine how scholars and activists are employing intersectionality to foreground Black British experiences.]

Native-speakerism and trans-speakerism: Entering a new era—Hiratsuka, T. Cambridge University Press, 2024. [Native-speakerism perpetuates unequal power dynamics in language education. By introducing the concept of trans-speakerism, this book dismantles prevalent biases and reshapes discourse. The author proposes more inclusive designations, such as global speaker of English (GSE), global teacher of English (GTE), and global Englishes researcher (GER), and urges a move away from labels that foster marginalization. The author ultimately encourages language educators, researchers, and policymakers to oppose biases, welcome diversity, and develop inclusive language environments.]

David McMurray

Graduate students and teaching assistants are invited to submit compositions in the form of a speech, appeal, memoir, essay, conference review, or interview on the policy and practice of language education. Master's and doctoral thesis supervisors are also welcome to contribute or encourage their students to join this vibrant debate. Grounded in the author's reading, practicum, or empirical research, contributions are expected to share an impassioned presentation of opinions in 1,000 words or less. Teaching Assistance is not a peer-reviewed column.

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In this column, a teaching assistant (TA) for undergraduate majors in intercultural studies shares an impassioned essay on why taking students to learn outside the confines of a regular four-walled classroom can stimulate their interest in global issues, as well as hone their business English speaking skills.

Outdoor Learning for Students of Business English

Yuuki Hara

The International University of Kagoshima Graduate School

In this essay, I suggest an activity to help students broaden their outlook in an increasingly polarized world. I begin by sharing historical notes and my vision of the shifting winds of global affairs. I anchor my proposal in a list of nine pedagogic techniques and end by deciphering the magic of outdoor learning.

As a graduate student in a seminar specializing in English education, I assist with the teaching of undergraduate students at a private university located in Kagoshima Prefecture. Readers might be unaware of Kagoshima's geopolitical importance, especially in comparison to Tokyo, which dominates the nation's economic activities. Geographically Kagoshima is within reach of Asian countries via three major seas: the Sea of Japan, the Pacific Ocean, and the East China Sea. According to Nippon.com (2024) the population of the prefecture is decreasing, yet its island municipalities of Tokunoshima and Amagi sustain the highest birthrates (2.25%) in Japan. That is because when these babies grow up, they leave to find jobs in Osaka or Tokyo. Local governments and companies have been unsuccessful in attempts to revitalize the prefecture to limit the outflow of its citizens and workers.

Historical Events in Kagoshima

Kagoshima Prefecture once held a historically significant position in the southernmost part of Kyushu, Japan. Formerly known as Satsuma, Kagoshima served as Japan's frontline in key events, such as the bombardment of Japan by the British navy in 1862. In response to these challenges, the Shimadzu family, who were feudal lords in this domain, dispatched students abroad—remarkably, to England, an adversary at the time. One member of the family, Yoshihiro Shimadzu, was known for saying, "To defeat your enemy, learn from your enemy."

Case Study Approach

As a TA, I helped to guide students enrolled in a business English course to solve a business case in the English language aimed at reimagining Japanese history. A business case study approach is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular policy, institution, program, or system in real-life (Simons, 2009). I recognize that many students struggle in classes taught in English and often end up discouraged with their English proficiency.

Finding a way to deliver lectures successfully in English, however, offers a valuable opportunity to create a classroom environment that fully integrates the use of the second language in Japan. In addition, the use of a foreign language can foster a spirit of challenge for students to take part in an international community outside the classroom. English is a widely shared global language: a lingua franca. It seems essential to include English as an international language (EIL) when designing a program, courses, and lesson plans. Even selecting a title for a subject can be challenging.

The fusion of "business skills" and "English skills" into a course title contributes to their initial sense of trepidation that the course will be difficult. Following lectures given all in English are challenging. Students who registered told me they felt they could not succeed. Yet, as they became aware of their weaknesses, they seemed to improve. After critically reflecting on my experiences as a TA, I be-

lieve that implementing the following nine teaching strategies for a business English course can help students and their teacher to both learn business English language skills and to develop an intercultural perspective:

- **usage of outdoor spaces:** Students get sleepy in a heated or air-conditioned classroom with all the windows shut. They lose concentration when their hands are glued to mobile phones used for social networking rather than academic research. I believe that outdoor learning encourages students to better focus on the lesson at hand.
- **real-world relevance:** The content of the business cases should be grounded in local history and current issues.
- **accessibility:** Local examples from *K'gonma* (a translation of "Kagoshima" in the local dialect) should be reflected in cases prepared by a local teacher. The use of business English language textbooks published by international publishers can be used as reference materials.
- **students as central figures:** The content of lessons should be student-centered and include experiential learning methods.
- **a flexible lesson structure:** to help students understand concepts and learn more effectively;
- **comprehensiveness:** The scope of the syllabus needs to be broad yet cohesive, covering all necessary aspects while integrating both global perspectives and local contexts.
- **continuity:** Learning needs to be structured in a manner so that students can connect concepts from one lesson to the next.
- **roleplay learning:** business English classes should focus on cultivating collaborative and communicative skills.
- **accountability**: Students must take responsibility for their own learning performance.

Outdoor Learning

I discovered three benefits from learning outdoors that motivated a cohort of 35 Japanese students and five Chinese students enrolled in Business English. First, by incorporating contemporary issues, students had the opportunity to pay attention to what was going on around them in Kagoshima and to forecast what might happen next. Second, by focusing on historical events—such as the Satsuma domain's perspective and unique educational methodology, known as *Gochu* education or the training of samurai children—students took more pride in proposing business ideas. Kagoshima's historical context, particularly forward-thinking international outreach, continues to be respected. By reflecting on these historical lessons, students gained insights into how past experiences shaped modern approaches. Third, by walking around outdoors, students naturally thought about what their next step was, along with the next step to solve the business case. This forward-looking component challenged students to apply their knowledge to future risks and scenarios. Outdoor learning cultivated critical thinking and problem-solving skills, encouraging students to consider how they could use what they have learned to address future challenges, both locally and globally.

Figure 1

Students Interact in an Open-Air Class

Throughout this outdoor learning process, students were encouraged to develop two critical habits: a want-to-know-more mindset, which sparked their curiosity and motivated them to seek a deeper understanding, and the recognition of "yes, we've learned about this before," which reinforced the continuity and interconnectedness of their learning experiences. This cyclical process ensured that students not only absorbed information, but also applied it in increasingly complex and meaningful ways, preparing them to be proactive contributors to their community in Kagoshima and the wider world.

Roleplay Learning

Teachers and TAs can recreate real-case scenarios by staging roleplays, and if learning takes place on a real-life stage, it is so much better. Open spaces and gardens on campuses provide an ideal setting for drama activities. I took the students outside to a patio, equipped with a portable whiteboard and a marker pen to facilitate the lesson. In this class, students used the 3 Ships case scenario from McMurray's (2018) *Active Learning & Active Testing* textbook to demonstrate world affairs. The case engaged

students in a dynamic exercise on how to conduct a three-way conversation between sailors, merchants, and captains to reach an agreement on where to sail to develop new business ventures in Asia. The outdoor courtyard was divided into three areas to facilitate this three-way discussion, allowing teams to first engage in dialogue on the assigned topic. A crucial aspect of this approach empowered students to hold constructive discussions independently. When small groups of students struggled to generate meaningful ideas, I suggested they move to a garden with an inspirational view of Kinko Bay and Mount Sakurajima. This blue-sky approach, combined with the breeze from the ocean and an iconic symbol of the students' hometowns in view instilled a magical effect. Students were able to ponder what-if scenarios and were creatively inspired by their wide-angle surroundings. This shift in perspective encouraged them to develop an international viewpoint and enriched their discussions.

Eventually, the insights gained from 30 minutes in this picturesque setting were brought back to the classroom, where students could continue for another 60 minutes to put their ideas in report form for the next steps in their project.

Although university classes in Japan are typically centered on traditional classroom learning within four walls for 90 minutes, I believe university classes should allow for outdoor learning and local fieldwork. I feel it is essential to utilize outdoor spaces to introduce variety and keep students motivated. Personally, I find the indoor classroom setting confining, and I thrive in environments that allow for exploration and interaction with nature. By integrating outdoor learning, we can create dynamic experiences that enhance student engagement and foster a deeper connection to the material. I will continue to assist classes that encourage students to take the initiative and develop an interest in the local community while deepening their understanding of their specialized fields.

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[JALT PRAXIS] WRITERS' WORKSHOP


Jerry Talandis Jr. & Daniel Chesmore

The Writers' Workshop is a collaborative endeavour of the JALT Writers' Peer Support Group (PSG). Articles in the column provide advice and support for novice writers, experienced writers, or nearly anyone who is looking to write for academic purposes. If you would like to submit a paper for consideration, please contact us.

Email: jaltpubs.tlt.writers.ws@jalt.org • Web: https://jalt-publications.org/psg

Strategies for Effective Collaboration in Academic Writing

Jerry Talandis Jr.

This past summer, an opportunity arose to submit a paper to our university's *kiyo* (in-house journal). I had meant to do this for years, so I decided to go for it so that I could introduce a new research project I had just begun. Although the six-week deadline was tight, I felt motivated: It was a guaranteed publication and would help me wrap my head around the many facets of our project. My colleagues were supportive but quite busy, so I knew I would have to work hard to make it easy for them to contribute where possible. One helped by providing high-level theoretical input while the other improved the text's clarity and flow. I handled most of the writing duties, but I made sure that both colleagues had opportunities to weigh in and make their voices heard, especially in the *Discussion* section. Ultimately, despite everyone's busy schedules, their contributions exceeded my expectations. The paper turned out much better than if I had written it alone. As I submitted it, I reflected on how relatively smoothly the process went, especially compared to other, more challenging collaborations I have experienced. Years of experience and hard-earned lessons had gone into this moment. It then occurred to me: Why not share some of what I have learned about collaborative writing in this column?

As a long-term Japan-based educator, I believe that working well with co-authors on writing projects is a fundamental skill for academic and professional success. Publishing is essential to career growth, and collaboration allows us to combine our strengths, producing work that is greater than the sum of its parts. Some real-world benefits include workload sharing (Mulligan & Garofalo, 2011), diverse perspectives (Yeo & Lewis, 2019), and increased productivity and higher acceptance rates (Ductor, 2015). However, collaborative writing can also be a stressful process. I have experienced my share of frustrations, such as interpersonal conflicts and disagreements (Huggett et al, 2011), unclear roles and responsibilities (Harvey et al., 2022), and ill-conceived or poorly designed workflows (Lingard, 2021)—all of which can quickly turn a promising collaboration into an exhausting process. Although collaboration is often viewed as a way to ease the workload, poorly managed efforts can make it even more taxing than working alone. It is not a process to take lightly.

My goal for this column is to help you avoid common collaboration pitfalls by integrating insights from the literature with some hard-won advice from my own experience. The topic of collaborative writing is broad, so I will aim to cover a few key areas, such as how to assemble a strong team, clarify leadership, develop a suitable workflow, and use technology to facilitate communication and production. I hope this discussion helps you reflect on your past collaborative efforts and think creatively about how you can improve the way you write with others.

Choose the Right People to Work With

A successful collaboration starts with choosing the right people. Look for colleagues whose skills complement your own and who share your overall goals, as diverse perspectives and expertise can lead to more robust and innovative outcomes (Way With Words, n.d.). Achieving this requires being honest with yourself about your strengths and where you may need support. For example, I enjoy staying organized, feel comfortable with technology, and can communicate professionally and promptly. Iam also confident in my teaching ability. However, I struggle with research design and complex statistical analysis, and my theoretical knowledge in certain areas of ELT is limited. When I embarked on the *kiyo* paper this summer, I was grateful to have colleagues with expertise in these areas. Each member brought complimentary skills to the project, which made for a strong team.

How about you? What strengths and perspectives do you bring to a team? As you join or assemble one, take time to reflect on what you can contribute and how your efforts will align with others. It can help to discuss research goals and expectations early on to ensure alignment and address any potential issues before the project gets underway (Yeo & Lewis, 2019). While working with friends might seem appealing due to built-in trust and rapport, it can complicate things. Mixing personal and professional relationships can introduce challenges that are easier to avoid in more formal collaborations (Harvey et al., 2022).

Who Will Drive the Bus?

A key to successful collaboration is determining which team member will serve as the lead author, or "drive the bus" as my colleagues and I like to say. Ideally, this decision is made at your project's outset (Harvey et al., 2022). Without clear leadership, it is much more difficult to reach your full potential as a team (Yeo & Lewis, 2019). I learned this lesson the hard way on one particular project. My colleague and I never addressed the question of leadership, and in hindsight, I believe this was a major reason the project failed. We spent over two years working together, subtly asserting control, debating differing opinions, and making compromises—all of which resulted in an outcome that was less than satisfying. It felt like there were two drivers pulling the wheel in different directions, and ultimately, we ended up in the ditch, figuratively speaking.

To avoid a frustrating outcome, it is much more productive to discuss leadership roles openly and honestly from the start (Gani et al., 2021). Sometimes, the decision is straightforward, such as when the most senior or accomplished member naturally takes the lead. The role could also fall to someone who is motivated and available enough to do the job. In my *kiyo* paper project this summer, the lead author position happened to go to the person (me) with the most time to dedicate to the work. There is no one best way to determine who takes the wheel. The decision often emerges organically, shaped by the personalities, motivations, and availability of the team members involved.

For those of you considering a leadership role, it would help to understand some of the duties and expectations that come with having your name listed first, such as project management, drafting the initial manuscript, clarifying roles and contributions of team members, overseeing production through multiple drafts, facilitating communication, and putting out any fires of disagreement

amongst your team (Huggett et al., 2011). Lead authors also liaise between the team and the target journal's editors by managing submissions, responding to reviewer comments, and handling revisions. Itss all a lot of work and a big responsibility. Since good leadership can be the difference between publication and rejection, it is not a role to take on lightly. If you are early in your career, I would recommend gaining experience by working under more seasoned colleagues before stepping into this responsibility yourself—it can be a much less stressful way to prepare for the lead author role.

Clarify a Suitable Writing Workflow

An important early discussion in any project is how the paper will actually get written. Spending time upfront to determine who will do what and when can streamline the entire writing process. Lingard (2021) outlines five common group writing strategies, summarized in Table 1, along with their pros, cons, and best use cases.

As you review these options, reflect on your past collaborations and which strategies you employed. How well did they work? If you are new to collaborative writing, which approach appeals to you most, and why? Personally, I tend to prefer the all-for-one approach for its straight-forward efficiency. When someone takes the lead on a first draft, it gives the rest of the team a foundation to build on, lightens the workload, and maintains a consistent voice throughout. I have used other strategies, and they can work well too, but their success often depends on the makeup of the group. In the long run, experimenting with different strategies is valuable—you will gain the skills and flexibility to collaborate effectively in any situation. However, when you are just starting out, it can help to use whatever approach you are most comfortable with. Seeing these options laid out can help you think more intentionally about how to structure your writing process. This list is not exhaustive, and there is flexibility within each one. While no strategy is perfect—there are always trade-offs involved—the good news is that careful planning and timely communication can help mitigate any drawbacks, much like how oil keeps a car's engine running smoothly. Reflecting on the following questions (Lingard, 2021) can help you be more purposeful and explicit about your workflow, allowing your team to leverage everyone's strengths and increase the chance of success:

- Which writing strategy is best suited to our team?
- Are we choosing this strategy intentionally or by habit?
- Do we explicitly discuss our workflow, or do we unconsciously fall into old patterns?
- Are we using our strategy as efficiently as possible?
- Are we leveraging technology to support our efforts effectively?

Table 1

Five Workflows for Collaborative Writing (Lingard, 2021)

Strategy	Description	Pros	Cons	Best Uses
All-for-one	One person drafts on behalf of the team	Stylistic consistency, efficient	Limits consensus, fewer revision opportunities	Small, low-stakes projects (e.g., memos, summaries)
Each-in-sequence	Members complete sections sequentially	Straightforward, asynchronous coordination	Minimal interaction, bottlenecks, lack of cohesion	Early drafts with clear task delineation (e.g., grant applications)
All-in-parallel	Members write assigned sections simultaneously	Speed, efficiency, writer autonomy	Risk of redundancy or contradictions without careful planning	Projects easily divided by expertise
All-in-reaction	Everyone writes simultaneously, adjusting on the go	Fosters consensus, creativity, new ideas	Can be chaotic and hard to manage	Small, non-hierarchical teams with high trust
Multi-mode writing	Combines multiple strategies	Adaptable, flexible, responsive	Challenging without careful planning and oversight	Complex projects requiring varied approaches

Leverage Technology

When it comes to technology, the final point I want to emphasize is the importance of selecting the right tools to support project management early on. With rapid advancements in internet-based applications, collaborative word processors, and communication platforms, there is no shortage of options—sometimes to the point of distraction. New tools emerge constantly, and as we get older, mastering them can become more challenging.

When evaluating any tool, one key consideration is how essential it really is. While flashy features can be enticing—especially in this new age of generative AI—it is important to stay focused on what you truly need. For a writing project conducted remotely, you will absolutely need software that supports real-time collaborative writing and data management, such as those provided by Google (i.e., *Docs*, *Sheets*, *Slides*, and *Forms*). The capability to simultaneously write and edit documents is so popular that traditional word processors such as MS Word (Windows), Pages (macOS), and OpenOffice (Linux/Open Source), have begun offering similar features at perhaps a notch below Google's level. These types of tools enable teams to track changes, manage versions, make comments, correct grammar, and build tables and figures—all essential for a smooth workflow.

Another essential component of successful collaboration is communication—without it, nothing moves forward. You will need a reliable way to meet online, with platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, or MS Teams, being popular options. Many of us became familiar with these tools during the pandemic, and the skills we developed then can now be applied to group projects. In addition to meetings, you will need an efficient way to manage communication between sessions. Setting up a private group chat on an app, such as WhatsApp, Google Chat, Slack, MS Teams, or Discord, can be helpful. If you already use some of these apps for personal communication, consider using a different one exclusively for work-related projects. That is the approach I take with WhatsApp: I reserve it for project communication, but I use Line and Messages for personal needs. This helps me stay organized. For each project, you can set up a dedicated thread and invite only the relevant team members, keeping discussions private and focused.

Beyond core apps for writing and communicating, there are many nice-to-have tools you can consider on an as-needed basis. These can help with specific tasks and enhance your workflow. For example, if scheduling meetings is a challenge, try a free service like Doodle to poll members' availability and identify the best meeting time. For support during the brainstorming phase, a mind-mapping tool, such as MindMeister, would allow your team to generate ideas freely and flexibly. Another tool I have found immensely useful is Fathom—a free service that records online meetings, creates transcripts, and uses AI to generate summaries. During the meeting, you can tag key discussions, creating direct shareable links to those moments. This ensures you capture inspiration when it strikes and makes it easy to keep absent team members up to date or revisit previous ideas. Fathom has proven its worth for me time and again. Finally, if you prefer an all-in-one solution, consider a project management platform like Basecamp (which JALT currently uses), Google Workspace, Microsoft 365, Slack, or Asana. These platforms combine multiple features into a single hub, which may be easier than managing a patchwork of smaller tools.

To sum up, evaluate technology for your project carefully and thoughtfully. Choose only what you truly need and try not to get swept away by flashy features. That said, keep an open mind to new possibilities, and stay flexible if you need to use tools you are not entirely sold on. Entering a collaboration with rigid demands (e.g., "I'll use this, but not that) can create friction. For example, on my *kiyo* project, we had to find common ground, since each of us preferred different platforms (Windows, MacOS, Linux). By choosing tools we could all work with, we avoided unnecessary complications. Since you will nott always get to use your preferred tools, try to remain open to learning new ones. This sort of flexibility and accommodation can be a valuable contribution to your team's success. In the end, it is important to choose tools that enhance your collaboration, that all members are comfortable with using (Huggett et al., 2011).

Final Thoughts

Collaborative writing is a large and nuanced topic. Although the space in this column is limited, I have done my best to highlight a few essential points. These include the importance of choosing reliable collaborators, establishing clear leadership and roles, thoughtfully designing your production workflow, and leveraging appropriate technologies. You may have noticed a recurring theme: the value of addressing these considerations early—before the writing begins. Reflecting on my career, I can say that doing so would have saved me mountains of stress and unnecessary struggle. Whether you are just starting out or are well into your career, I hope these ideas have provided some useful insights. Mastering collaboration takes time, but with the

right approach, it can be a rewarding journey. Whether you take on the role of lead author or supporting contributor, I encourage you to embrace collaboration thoughtfully for both personal and professional growth. With careful preparation, it can become an enjoyable part of your career.

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[JALT PRAXIS] JALT FOCUS

Michael Phillips

JALT currently has 31 chapters and 32 special interest groups (SIGs) spread out across Japan. Many of these groups are very active, holding regular events large and small. Further, collaboration, in all its forms, is a cornerstone of JALT's presence in the language teaching community. In addition to these "visible" groups, there are many other officers and committees that keep the organisation running smoothly from behind the scenes. This column publishes an in-depth review of one JALT group each issue, providing readers with a more complete picture of what the different groups are undertaking and achieving.

Past columns are available at https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/jalt-focus
Email: jaltpubs.tlt.jalt.focus@jalt.org.

Jennie Roloff Rothman
SIG Representative Liaison

The *JALT Focus* column has kindly invited me to introduce myself and talk about my JALT journey up to accepting this new position as JALT's SIG Representative Liason (SRL). First, let me take a moment to speak about Grant Osterman, who is stepping down from the role of SRL this month after serving for four and a half years. I would like to express my immense appreciation and gratitude for all of Grant's work in this role. I have big shoes to fill, but he has been a wonderful support to SIG leadership. I hope to continue the good work he has been doing. I have enjoyed working with him as a colleague and mentor.

In terms of my background, I am currently Senior Coordinator of Teacher Professional Development in the English Language Institute at Kanda University of International Studies. I have been teaching in Japan since 2004, first as an assistant language teacher in Shizuoka and then at the tertiary level since 2009. I received a master's degree in TESOL from the Tokyo campus of Teachers College (TC), Columbia University. In fact, it was at TC where I first encountered the JALT organization. My course professor was Kip Cates, the Global Issues in Language Education (GILE) SIG leader at the time, and he offered students the opportunity to present their project ideas in the SIG's annual forum. This led me to join JALT and the GILE SIG as well as present in the 2005 GILE Forum at the November International Conference.

From that time, I began regularly attending conferences, and I eventually became the GILE program chair and began organizing the forums that I had always enjoyed. In 2011, I took over editing the *SIG News* column, one of the predecessors to this col-

umn. Over the four years that I held this position, I began to develop a love of SIGs as a key component of the JALT community. In 2020, I became the GILE coordinator, a role which I have served in for the last four years. In fact, I am now leaving this position to become SRL. Although GILE remains near and dear to my heart, I have also maintained my membership and strong connections in several other SIGs over the years, such as CT, GALE, TD, THT, and CUE to name just a few.

In addition to my own SIG membership, I have been an active supporter of the PanSIG Conference and a member of its planning committee for the better part of the last decade. My favorite thing about JALT is its SIGs and, in particular, I love this specific event because it showcases the passion SIG members have for their areas of expertise. I enjoy seeing how they choose to express their group identities and leave every PanSIG energized by all the ideas I have acquired. I therefore intend to continue to support the PanSIG conference and promote its growth as an international event.

Overall, there is wonderful variety in the types of events, publications, support, and camaraderie SIGs provide to their members. My hope as SRL is that I will be able to maintain this while ensuring this vibrancy develops even further. Another goal of mine is to foster even greater collaboration between SIGs and also between SIGs and chapters, whether it be co-sponsoring events or producing jointly published work. Deepening links between groups like this will help ensure the relevance of the organization long into the future while reducing the burdens of event planning and management on individual SIGs.

In many ways, my current university position reflects my JALT involvement and growth. Though I teach Japanese students, my primary role is supporting the professional growth and development of our lecturers. I encourage them to present, conduct research, engage in reflective practice, and network with other educators. Where did I learn these skills? Within JALT naturally. I am committed to giving back to the organization, and the field, as much as it has given me. Our way forward is, and has always been, together, so I will do all I can to make this become a reality. I look forward to serving the SIGs, their leaders and members, and the larger JALT community in my new role. I encourage all of you in JALT to become more active and engaged because I would like every member to have an experience like mine.

JALT2024 International Conference News

From the Director of Conference

The JALT2024 conference is over, and I am sure those who participated have been reflecting on what you learned, who you met, what you did, and all other manner of thoughts. The first thing that comes to my mind is, "Thank you" for supporting your own professional development by supporting JALT through this conference.

If you participated in JALT2024 by attending the conference, please check your emails for a survey from our CVENT system. We want your thoughts, opinions, and suggestions.

With over 1,200 registered participants, there were a lot of people at The Granship in Shizuoka. This was made all the richer by the large number of international participants. One hundred thirty-six people from abroad visited Japan for this conference. Thank you to all our international participants—you added a vibrant flavor to our conference. In particular Team Mongolia and Team Thailand—33 and 25, respectively—thank you for diversifying our ranks. Following that, 13 people from Taiwan, 12 from the United States, and 10 from South Korea round out our double-digit participants. Thank you again to them, and everyone who made the choice to attend JALT2024!

JALT2024 was JALT's 50th conference and takes its place among a great history of professional development events. From a fledgling band of language teachers, to one of the preeminent language education conferences in the world, this annual autumn international conference and materials exhibition is carried out by a dedicated team of volunteers whose mission is to provide the best experience possible. We strive to elevate the best in our community and find a place for everyone—whether you are new to research or a veteran, an academic at a university or a business owner reaching a neighborhood community, or a teacher of children, teens, young adults or seniors. Even though many of our messages come to you in English, we are a place where all languages, cultures, and voices are welcome; a place for all. We will keep highlighting these aspects in the next 50 years of JALT conferencing!

On that note, let me take this moment to introduce the theme for JALT2025, which will be conference 51, and sees JALT as an organization turning 50 years old!!

LanguageS: Learning, Teaching, Assessing
— JALT 50 Years —
Challenges and Perspectives

Our Conference Chair is Gabriela Schmidt, whose L1 is German and has chosen this theme to emphasize that JALT is a LANGUAGE teaching organization that is not bound by one language. A significant portion of our members speak and teach multiple languages, and the rich treasure of LanguageS will be open for exploration in Tokyo from October 31 to November 2, 2025 at the National Youth Olympic Center in Yoyogi. The call for presentation proposals will be open soon with a tentative deadline of February 17, 2025. Keep your eyes on https://jalt.org for updates regarding everything about JALT2025!

Once again, and on behalf of our dedicated Conference Planning Team and NPO JALT, thank you for supporting JALT and the wider language education community!

Be well and stay safe. Sincerely,

Wayne Malcolm

NPO JALT Director of Conference

Photos from JALT2024 Available

Come see the photos from JALT2024: The 50th Japan Association for Language Teaching International Conference at https://www.flickr.com/photos/jalt/albums We have uploaded 1,140 photos from the event. A huge thank-you to the JALT photography team: Bradford Lee, Tim Cleminson, and Becky Alp.

JALT MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

The Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT)

- A professional organization formed in 1976
  - 1976年に設立された学術学会
- Working to improve language learning and teaching, particularly in a Japanese context
  -語学の学習と教育の向上を図ることを目的としています
- Almost 3,000 members in Japan and overseas
  - 国内外で約 3,000名の会員がいます

https://jalt.org

Annual International Conference

- 1,500 to 2,000 participants
  - 毎年1,500名から2,000名が参加します
- Hundreds of workshops and presentations
  - 多数のワークショップや発表があります
- Publishers' exhibition - 出版社による教材展があります
- Job Information Centre
  - 就職情報センターが設けられます

https://jalt.org/conference

JALT Publications

- *The Language Teacher*—our bimonthly publication
  - 隔月発行します
- *JALT Journal*—biannual research journal
  - 年2回発行します
- JALT Postconference Publication
  - 年次国際大会の研究発表記録集を発行します
- SIG and chapter newsletters, anthologies, and conference proceedings - 分野別研究部会や支部も会報、アンソロジー、研究会発表記録集を発行します

https://jalt-publications.org

JALT Community

Meetings and conferences sponsored by local chapters and special interest groups (SIGs) are held throughout Japan. Presentation and research areas include:

Bilingualism • CALL • College and university education • Cooperative learning • Gender awareness in language education • Global issues in language education • Japanese as a second language • Learner autonomy • Lifelong language learning • Materials development • Pragmatics, pronunciation, second language acquisition • Teaching children • Testing and evaluation

支部及び分野別研究部会による例会や研究会は日本各地で開催され、以下の分野での発表や研究報告が行われます。バイリンガリズム、CALL、大学外国語教育、共同学習、ジェンダーと語学学習、グローバル問題、日本語教育、自主的学習、語用論・発音・第二言語習得、児童語学教育、生涯語学教育、試験と評価、教材開発 等。

https://jalt.org/main/groups

JALT Partners

JALT cooperates with domestic and international partners, including (JALTは以下の国内外の学会と提携しています):

- AJET—The Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching
- IATEFL—International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language
- JACET—The Japan Association of College English Teachers
- PAC—Pan-Asian Consortium of Language Teaching Societies
- TESOL—Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

Membership Categories

All members receive annual subscriptions to *The Language Teacher* and *JALT Journal*, and member discounts for meetings and conferences. *The Language Teacher*や*JALT Journal* 等の出版物が1年間送付されます。また例会や大会に割引価格で参加できます。

- Regular 一般会員: ¥13,000
- Student rate (FULL-TIME students of undergraduate/graduate universities and colleges in Japan) 学生会員(国内の全日制の大学または大学院の学生): ¥7,000
- Joint—for two persons sharing a mailing address, one set of publications ジョイント会員 (同じ住所で登録する個人2名を対象とし、JALT出版物は2名に1部): ¥21,000
- Senior rate (people aged 65 and over) シニア会員(65歳以上の方): ¥7,000
- Group (5 or more) ¥8,500/person—one set of publications for each five members グループ会員(5名以上を対象とし、JALT出版物は5名ごとに1部): 1名 ¥8,500

https://jalt.org/main/membership

Information

For more information, please consult our website <https://jalt.org>, ask an officer at any JALT event, or contact JALT's main office.

JALT Central Office

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Joining JALT

Use the attached *furikae* form at post offices ONLY. When payment is made through a bank using the *furikae*, the JALT Central Office receives only a name and the cash amount that was transferred. The lack of information (mailing address, chapter designation, etc.) prevents the JCO from successfully processing your membership application. Members are strongly encouraged to use the secure online sign-up page located at:

https://jalt.org/joining

Scott Gardner *jaltpubs.tlt.old.gram@jalt.org*

Lessons Learned and Lunches Lost

Have you ever heard of the vaudeville performer, Hadji Ali? A century ago, Ali was a minor hit as an entertainer for what Wikipedia (2024) calls "acts of controlled regurgitation." He could consume various objects and substances and spew them back out at will. For example, he would swallow different colored handkerchiefs, sort them in his stomach, then hawk them up one at a time per audience request. His famous closing act was to drink a mixture of water and kerosene and, in turns, set fire to and then extinguish a stage prop by spitting out the appropriate fluid on demand.

Upon reading Ali's story, my initial reflex was of course to throw up, but after quashing that urge my thoughts naturally turned to my students. How often, I wondered, had they been asked on mid-term quizzes to perform mental acts of regurgitation not unlike Ali's gastric exhibitions? And did they resent me for all the intellectual heaving they had to go through? Thinking about it made me feel depressed, and a little nauseated.

I hate mindless repetition exercises as much as the next teacher, but we know that sometimes learning requires rehearsal and rote repetition. Without it, you're like that friend who usually hates karaoke but gets too drunk one night and decides to cold start a Celine Dion song. I myself am a poor language rehearser: On a rainy day, I might see a rainbow, but the proper Japanese term for it, *niji*, never seems to pop into my head. I'll have called it a pheasant (*kiji*), a screw (*neji*), or an onion (*negi*) before I come up with the right word, and by then the initial awe of nature will be lost. It would also do me good someday to sit down and write the word "weird" a hundred times on a sheet of paper because I always get stuck after the "w", forgetting which vowel comes next. Someone once even taught me a mnemonic phrase for it: "'I' before 'E'...unless you're weird."

Speaking of weird, there's AI: weird, weird, weird. I'm sure that in 10 years, we'll all be maintaining perfectly normal, healthy, monogamous relationships with our own personalized bot buddies. At present, socio-intellectually, artificial intelligence is like a bizarre new next-door neighbor, who seems outgoing and glad to know you, but when you actually start chatting him up, he responds by going off on wild tangents of murky affairs that you feel you're not supposed to be hearing about. He also displays hideous home-made found-object sculptures in his front yard that scare the children and discourage you from inviting your friends over for dinner. That's the nature of my attitude towards AI right now. To help me with my problem, I've sought advice from several SNS friends who specialize in impersonating specialists, and collectively they've diagnosed my condition as "the creeps." You can hardly blame me when you witness the twisted ways that AI and its devotees consume genuine culture—academic, popular, and so on—and spit it back out at the world: essays citing research studies that don't exist (and would violate global ethics codes if they did); photographs of movie stars with six-fingered hands; TV commercials advertising explosive, flesh-eating watermelons; and so on ad nauseum.

The AI encounters that bother me the most, really, are the written ones. Their subtlety can be very unnerving. I once asked my students to write in their online journals about a personality trait that they would like to improve in themselves. Most wrote earnest replies, saying they'd like to be nicer or manage their time better. One student submitted a long paragraph that started out, "I have often thought about which personal characteristic I would like to improve." Suddenly, though, her submission took a turn: "This is a particularly challenging question for me, since as you know I am only artificial intelligence and I do not really have personality traits per se."

My student had literally copied and pasted my assignment to an AI site, then copied the result into her journal without even reading it. I was of course furious at her for cheating, but also eerily moved by the wistful, Pinocchio-like tone of the chatbot's reply. Despite that poignant tug, I gave the student 0 points for her journal. I responded, "Next time at least do me the courtesy of reading what you plagiarize from ChatGPT." Perfecting an art requires practice. Before one can trick the teacher with AI, one must master the basics of tricking in general. It's like asking Hadji Ali to throw up a blue handkerchief and he throws up a tuna fish sandwich instead.

Reference

Hadji Ali. (2024, October 28). In *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadji_Ali

AGENCY & AUTONOMY
IN LANGUAGE LEARNING



Kanda University of International Studies

May 16-18, 2025 - Chiba, Japan

The themes for PanSIG 2025 are "Agency and Autonomy." Autonomy includes the ability to make informed and personally relevant choices. Agency represents putting these choices into action.

PanSIG 2025 will explore how learners and educators can select the best tools and practices to achieve their goals and have the confidence to put them into action.

SUBMIT YOUR PROPOSAL

tinyurl.com/PanSIG2025

Deadline: January 14, 2025, at 11:59 pm (JST)

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