

The Language Teacher

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<https://jalt.org/main/publications>

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Welcome to the November/December issue of *The Language Teacher*, which coincides with the JALT2025 International Conference in Tokyo.

This issue presents four papers selected from the JALT2024 *Postconference Publication* by the PCP editorial team and the JALT Publications Board. Reading the shortlisted papers reinforced for me the exceptional quality of research being conducted across all levels of Japanese education and beyond. I encourage all readers to explore the complete PCP, which can be viewed or downloaded at: https://jalt-publications.org/proceedings/issues/2025-08_2024.1

In the first paper, **Brian J. Birdsell** examines how basic psychological needs—including autonomy, competence, relatedness, and novelty—predict learner engagement and creative potential in EFL contexts. In the second paper, **Nao-mi Sugahara** explores collaborative versus individual writing approaches with high school students, revealing how collaborative methods can reduce anxiety while presenting unique implementation challenges. In the third paper, **Saki Suemori** investigates the professional challenges faced by university English teachers in Japan. In the fourth paper, **Sachi Oshima** provides a systematic method for creating valid reading comprehension tests.

This issue also includes interviews with **Avril Haye-Matsui**. Please be sure to explore My Share and our regular JALT Praxis columns.

In closing, I would like to thank the content authors, reviewers, copyeditors, proofreaders, translators, and all TLT volunteer contributors. Additionally, this issue reflects the enormous volunteer effort invested in producing the *Postconference Publication*—74 contributors to the PCP alone. To all our readers, I hope you find these articles valuable for your teaching and research.

—Greg Dalziel, TLT Editor

Continued over



TLT Editors: Brian Strong & Greg Dalziel
TLT Japanese Language Editor: Mami Ueda

The Language Teacher 11月/12月号へようこそ。本号は東京で開催されるJALT2025国際大会と時期を同じくして発行されます。

本号では、JALT2024のPostconference Publication (PCP)からJALT Publications BoardとPCP編集チームが選出した4編の論文を掲載します。選考対象となった論文を読む中で、日本の教育のあらゆるレベル、さらにその枠を超えて行われている研究の卓越した質を改めて実感しました。読者の皆様には、PCPの全文をぜひご覧いただくことをお勧めします。閲覧・ダウンロードはこちら：https://jalt-publications.org/proceedings/issues/2025-08_2024.1

1つ目の論文では、Brian J. Birdsellが、自律性・有能感・関係性・新奇性といった基本的心理欲求が、EFL環境における学習者の学習意欲と創造的可能性をいかに予測するかを検証しています。2つ目の論文では、Naomi Sugaharaが高校生を対象とした協働型と個人型ライティング手法を比較し、協働ライティングが不安を軽減することを明らかにし、さらに特有の実施上の課題をも提示しています。3つ目の論文では、Saki Suemoriが日本の大学英語教師が直面する職業上の困難を調査しています。4つ目の論文では、Sachi Oshimaが妥当な読解テストを作成するための体系的手法を提供しています。

本号ではAvril Haye-Matsuiへのインタビューも掲載します。My ShareとJALT Praxisの定期コラムもぜひご覧ください。

最後に、論文執筆者、査読者、校閲者、校正者、翻訳者、そしてTLTのボランティアの皆様にご感謝申し上げます。さらに、本号はJALT2024のPCPの制作に注がれた膨大なボランティアの努力を反映しており、PCPだけでも74名関わっています。読者の皆様には、これらの記事が教育と研究に役立つことを願っております。

—TLT編集長 Greg Dalziel

Submitting material to The Language Teacher

The editors welcome submissions of materials concerned with all aspects of language education, particularly with relevance to Japan. For specific guidelines, and access to our online submission system, please visit our website:

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JALT's Mission

JALT promotes excellence in language learning, teaching, and research by providing opportunities for those involved in language education to meet, share, and collaborate.

使命(ミッション・ステートメント)全国語学教育学会は言語教育関係者が交流・共有・協働する機会を提供し、言語学習、教育、及び調査研究の発展に寄与します。

Basic Psychological Needs and Creativity in an EFL Context

Brian J. Birdsell

Hirosaki University

Reference Data:

Birdsell, B. J. (2025). Basic psychological needs and creativity in an EFL context. In B. Lacy, M. Swanson, & R. P. Lege (Eds.), *Moving JALT into the Future: Opportunity, Diversity, and Excellence*. JALT.

Basic psychological needs (BPNs) have the potential to improve student motivation, learning outcomes, and well-being. These needs include the three established needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, alongside the more recently proposed candidate need for novelty. This study explores students' satisfaction and frustration of these needs in an EFL context and how they may predict learner engagement and creative potential in a foreign language. BPNs and engagement were measured using a 34-item questionnaire, and creative potential was measured using divergent, convergent, and metaphorical thinking tasks. Results from regression analyses showed that autonomy, competence, and novelty satisfaction predicted learner engagement, whereas autonomy and competence frustration predicted learner disengagement. As for creativity, although divergent and metaphorical thinking showed significant correlations, the BPNs did not reveal a statistically significant model for creative potential.

基本的心理欲求(BPNs)は、学生のモチベーション、学習成果、ウェルビーイングを向上させる可能性がある。BPNsには、自律性、有能感、関係性という従来から確立されている三つの欲求に加え、近年提案された新たな候補欲求である新規性が含まれる。本研究では、EFL環境におけるこれらのBPNsの満足と不満、そしてBPNsが英語学習者の学習意欲および創造

的の可能性をどのように予測するかを探る。BPNsと学習意欲は34項目の質問票を用いて測定され、創造的可能性は、発散的思考課題、収束的思考課題、メタファー思考課題を用いて測定された。回帰分析の結果、自律性、有能性、新奇性の満足度は学習意欲を予測し、自律性と有能性の不満は学習者の意欲低下を予測した。創造性に関しては、発散的思考とメタファー思考が有意な相関を示したが、BPNsは創造的可能性を予測する統計的に有意なモデルとはならなかった。

<https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTPCP2024-35>

Learner engagement has been referred to as “the holy grail of learning” (Sinatra et al., 2015, p. 1) because it plays a crucial role in influencing both learning outcomes and overall success. Therefore, understanding the factors that affect learner engagement is a key area of focus for educators. Moreover, creativity has become an essential life skill and positively impacts foreign language learning. The research presented here explores how learner satisfaction and frustration, in relation to basic psychological needs, influence learner engagement and creative potential in EFL.

The outline of this paper is as follows. I first provide a review of the literature on one of self-determination theory's (SDT) mini theories called basic psychological need theory (BPNT) (Ryan & Deci, 2017) and how it has been applied to English as a foreign language (EFL) learning context (Birdsell, 2018a). Additionally, I consider the important role creativity plays in learning a foreign language and ways to measure creative potential. Then, I describe the study and the results from a questionnaire and a set of creative production tasks. Finally, I discuss the results and implications this study has for foreign language education.

Literature Review

Basic Psychological Needs Theory

BPNT posits that humans have three basic psychological needs; when these needs are satisfied the individual experiences optimal motivation, engagement, and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). The first need, autonomy, refers to individuals having ownership of their actions and a sense of volition. This is in contrast to when individuals act from external pressures that control

This article was originally published in the Selected Papers section of the 2024 Postconference Publication (PCP), *Moving JALT Into the Future: Opportunity, Diversity, and Excellence*. The PCP publishes papers based on presentations given at the JALT International Conference, and the Selected Papers section highlights a small number of papers of exceptional quality that have been first suggested by the editorial staff and then vetted by the JALTPublications Board through a blind review process. We feel that papers like this one represent some of the best work that the JALT Conference and the PCP have to offer, and encourage interested readers to check out other selected papers at <https://jalt-publications.org/proceedings>.



their behavior. Competence, the second need, refers to the need to feel effective in one's interactions with the environment and to experience opportunities to exercise and expand one's skills. Finally, relatedness refers to the need to feel connected with others and have a sense of belonging within a social community. Conversely, when these needs are thwarted or frustrated, it can lead to negative outcomes such as lower levels of motivation and well-being as well as maladaptive behaviors (e.g., indifference, anxiety).

Researchers have applied BPNT in various contexts, including education, language learning, and organizational settings, to investigate the impact of these basic needs on human functioning and development. Furthermore, these needs have been investigated across multiple cultures, and their universal relevance has been established (Chen et al., 2015), including in Japan (Birdsell, 2018a; Nishimura & Suzuki, 2016).

In the field of EFL, researchers have consistently shown that satisfying these three psychological needs supports language learners' intrinsic motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes (Birdsell, 2018a; Dincer et al., 2019; Noels et al., 2019; Oga-Baldwin et al., 2017). In contrast, the frustration of these needs in a second language, such as the feeling of being controlled, pressured, or isolated, decreases intrinsic motivation and hinders language learning outcomes (Alamer et al., 2023). As BPNT's impact on educational psychology has grown, some researchers have proposed expanding this list to four needs, with the need for novelty as one possible candidate (Bagheri & Milyavskaya, 2020; González-Cutre et al., 2016).

A Candidate Need: The Need for Novelty

The need for novelty refers to the human desire to explore, engage in, and seek out new activities, sensations, situations, and knowledge. Studies have shown that satisfaction of the need for novelty positively predicts autonomous motivation, vitality, life satisfaction, and a sense of meaning in life (Bagheri & Milyavskaya, 2020; Benlahcene et al., 2021; Fernández-Espínola et al., 2020; González-Cutre et al., 2020). In contrast, frustration of this need predicted negative outcomes. Consequently, researchers in the aforementioned studies suggest that the need for novelty may be a valid candidate for inclusion as a basic psychological need, as it demonstrates unique predictive power for various well-being and motivational outcomes, beyond the existing needs in BPNT. The need for novelty has also been tested in an EFL context, where satisfac-

tion of the four basic needs is positively correlated with positive learning outcomes (Birdsell, 2018a).

Learner Engagement

Building on this theoretical framework, the current study examines how the satisfaction and frustration of these needs interact with learner engagement. Learner engagement represents a multidimensional construct encompassing behavioral, cognitive, and affective dimensions (Reeve, 2012). Behavioral engagement refers to active involvement in the learning task, including effort, time investment, and energy invested in the learning event. Affective engagement focuses on learner interest, curiosity, and enthusiasm. Finally, cognitive engagement involves the mental effort and psychological challenge of the learning activity (Benlahcene et al., 2021; Fredricks et al., 2004).

Creativity in the Foreign Language Classroom

A *Google Ngram* search, which tracks language trends based on word frequency in books, shows that usage of the word "creativity" increased by 357% from 1960 to 2018. This reflects the growing interest and importance of this concept in both academic and popular publications.

Creativity is now viewed as an essential higher-order skill linked to success and well-being, and education policies increasingly incorporate it into curricula. Definitions of creativity are numerous but typically include the binary concepts of novelty (i.e., originality, newness, uniqueness) and usefulness (i.e., having meaning) (see Runco & Jaeger, 2012).

In EFL and, more broadly, second language acquisition research, creativity has been shown to increase student motivation and learning performance (Liao et al., 2018), promote cognitive flexibility, which requires students to blend and extend concepts in new and unfamiliar ways (Birdsell, 2019), improve foreign language achievement (Pishghadam et al., 2011), and strengthen problem-solving skills (McDonough et al., 2015).

Finding valid and reliable ways to measure creativity has been one of the major challenges for researchers in this field. Most researchers would agree that they are not measuring creativity *per se*, but rather something more closely related to creative potential (Runco & Acar, 2012). These types of measurements use a productive task, as opposed to those that use questionnaire data (e.g., creative personality, past creative achievements, creative self-efficacy) (Carson et al., 2005; Karwowski et al., 2018), and often rely on tasks requiring divergent

thinking, convergent thinking, or creative production (e.g., generating a poem, story, or metaphor).

Divergent thinking is a cognitive process of generating multiple and varied ideas or solutions to a problem, rather than providing a single correct answer. A common instrument for measuring divergent thinking is the Alternative Uses Task (AUT), where participants come up with alternative uses for everyday objects like a brick, paperclip, or cardboard box. Responses are then evaluated on criteria like fluency (total number of responses), flexibility (categorically different responses), and originality (uniqueness of the responses).

In contrast, convergent thinking is the cognitive process of finding a single, correct answer or solution to a problem (see Cropley, 2006, for more on convergent thinking). A common task for measuring convergent thinking is a Remote Association Task (RAT). For example, a participant is presented with three seemingly unrelated words (e.g., *aid*, *rubber*, *wagon*) and must identify the single word that connects them (*band*).

A common creative product task asks participants to complete a metaphor (Birdsell, 2018b). Typically, this involves completing a nominal metaphor or an *A is B* metaphor. Participants are given the topic (*A*) and must generate possible sources (*B*) for this topic, then select the most appropriate one and interpret the meaning of their created metaphor.

The Current Study

This study aims to extend previous research by examining the relationship between the three established basic psychological needs and the candidate need for novelty in an EFL context. Additionally, it focuses on creativity in an EFL context by using three distinct tasks measuring different facets of creative potential: convergent thinking, divergent thinking, and metaphorical thinking. The study also identifies how satisfaction or frustration of these psychological needs predicts student engagement with and creative potential in English.

Research Questions (RQs)

- RQ1. What is the relationship between the satisfaction and frustration of the four basic psychological needs within an EFL learning context?
- RQ2. What is the relationship between three distinct creative potential measurements in an EFL learning context?
- RQ3. Does the satisfaction or frustration of the four basic psychological needs predict en-

gagement/disengagement in an EFL learning context?

- RQ4. Does the satisfaction or frustration of the four basic psychological needs predict creative potential in an EFL learning context?

Method

Participants

First-year students ($N = 135$; women = 76, men = 59) at a national university in Japan participated in this study. They were all in advanced English classes, as determined by a university placement test at the start of the year. Based on the instructional materials used for the course, their English proficiency was estimated to be at the B2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Participants came from different faculties, such as Humanities and Social Sciences, Science and Technology, Education, and Agriculture and Life Science, but most of the participants were from the School of Medicine. The research review board at a national university in Japan reviewed and approved this research plan (acceptance number: 0012 (2022)). All students gave informed consent, were provided with information about the purpose of the study, were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and, after the completion of the study, were provided with results in a follow-up session.

Materials

The Questionnaire

The basic psychological need satisfaction and frustration scale (BPNSFS) items have been translated, tested, and verified in Japanese (Chen et al., 2015; Nishimura & Suzuki, 2016). These items are general and not specific to a context. For example, for “autonomy satisfaction,” an item reads, “I feel I have been doing what really interests me.” Expanding on this scale, researchers have developed versions for specific contexts like sports (Ng et al., 2011) or work settings (Baard et al., 2004). The study presented here uses a scale that has been previously tested and used in an English language learning context in Japan, referred to as the Japanese version of the *Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale with Need for Novelty in an English Learning* context (BPNSFS-EL) (see Birdsell, 2018a). For instance, the above item was changed to, “In English class, I feel like I have been doing what really interests me.” The items in Japanese were slightly modified for consistency and accuracy from the original version by a Japanese researcher, at the request of the ethical review board.

The questionnaire contained a total of 24 items. Each need (autonomy, competence, relatedness, and novelty) had three items for need satisfaction and three items for need frustration. The second part contained 10 items: seven related to learner engagement, including cognitive (e.g., “I enjoy the intellectual challenge of learning English”), emotional (e.g., “I find studying English stimulating”), and behavioral (e.g., “I look for ways to use English outside the classroom”); and three reverse-scored items related to learner disengagement (e.g., “I find learning English troublesome”). A Google Form was used for this questionnaire. All items were presented to the participants only in Japanese (the L1 of the participants) and they appeared in random order (see Appendix A for the complete questionnaire).

The Creativity Tasks

The following three short creativity tasks were used in this study to measure creative potential in an EFL context (participants completed these in English, the L2 of the participants):

- **Alternative Uses Task (AUT).** Participants completed two alternative uses tasks, one for a PET bottle and the other a cardboard box.
- **Remote Association Task (RAT).** Participants completed a 10-item Remote Association Task. For each item, they were presented with three words (for example: Swiss / Cottage / Cake) and had to identify the single word that connects all three (in this case—CHEESE).
- **Nominal metaphor brainstorming task.** Participants completed a metaphor task consisting of two items (“Creativity is ...” and “Life is ...”). For each item, they first generated multiple potential vehicles for the metaphor (e.g., “Creativity is a lightning bolt,” “Creativity is a plant,” “Creativity is rain”). They then selected what they considered the most creative one and provided an interpretation of their chosen metaphor.

Procedure

During Week 2 of a 15-week semester, student participants ($N = 135$) signed consent forms and completed the two-part questionnaire. In Week 4, participants ($N = 133$) completed the RAT and AUT tasks, which measured convergent and divergent thinking. In Week 5, participants ($N = 118$) completed the metaphor task. They had 20 minutes to complete each set of tasks. The discrepancy in participant numbers across the sessions was due to

student absence or tardiness on those days.

Procedure for Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Mac, Version 27.0. Items measuring satisfaction and frustration for each of the four basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, relatedness, and novelty), as well as engagement and disengagement, were averaged to create composite scores for each construct. This process yielded a total of 10 distinct variables.

As for the RAT task, the 10 items were aggregated into a final score. Results showed that participants had trouble completing this task, with the average score of 2.37 out of 10. The low score is likely due to the added challenge of doing the task in an L2 and the unfamiliarity of the task itself. Additionally, the data were not normally distributed, so they were excluded from the analysis.

For the AUT tasks, four scores were used: fluency, originality, flexibility, and elaboration. The fluency score was the raw number of responses the student provided. The remaining variables (e.g., originality, flexibility, and elaboration) were scored using a large-language model (LLM). The validity of using LLM-based scoring of AUT responses has recently become a research focus, with promising results (e.g., Organisciak et al., 2023). In this study, the researcher used few-shot prompting, providing the LLM (OpenAI’s GPT-4-turbo model) with five example evaluations from human judges prior to asking it to evaluate the participants’ responses for each variable on a 5-point Likert scale.

For the metaphor task, two scores were used: fluency and creativity. The fluency score was the raw number of responses. To assess metaphor creativity, the researcher again used LLMs to evaluate the responses, an approach that has gained recognition as a reliable and valid method (see DiStefano et al., 2024). It reduces both the time typically required and the subjectivity inherent in traditional assessment methods. However, the study presented here used a unique approach by employing a modified version of the Consensual Assessment Technique (CAT; Amabile, 1982), referred to as an LLM-CAT. Whereas the original CAT relies on human judges evaluating the creative product using set criteria, this study instead utilized three LLMs: Google’s Gemini 2.0 Flash, OpenAI’s ChatGPT-4, and Anthropic’s Claude 3.7 Sonnet. Each LLM received identical instructions to act as an expert judge and evaluate the creativity of metaphors written by student participants. The LLMs were instructed to rate each metaphor on a 5-point Likert scale across

four criteria: (a) semantic distance, (b) originality, (c) meaningfulness, and (d) the capacity to evoke imagery. An overall creativity score was then calculated by averaging the scores from these four criteria. (For the complete verbatim prompts, see Appendix B).

Interrater reliability for the creativity evaluations of both metaphor sets was assessed using two measures: Cronbach's alpha and the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC). The Cronbach's alpha for the three LLMs' ratings was .84 (LIFE is ... metaphor) and .94 (CREATIVITY is ... metaphor), indicating good internal consistency among the LLM raters. Additionally, the ICC (average measures) was .77 (LIFE is ... metaphor) and .88 (CREATIVITY is ... metaphor), both with statistically significant results ($p < .01$), suggesting strong agreement between LLM raters. Ratings from the three LLM evaluators were

averaged, then aggregated across both metaphors to produce a final metaphor creativity score.

Results

RQ 1: Descriptive statistics revealed high mean scores for novelty and autonomy satisfaction, and low scores for disengagement, autonomy frustration, and novelty frustration. Across all needs, satisfaction scores were generally higher than frustration scores, with one exception: competence, where frustration scores were higher. This finding corroborates results from an earlier study (Birdsell, 2018a).

Bivariate correlation analysis identified moderate to strong positive correlations among satisfaction needs, as well as among frustration needs. Additionally, moderate to strong negative correlations

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among the Variables of BPNSFS-EL and Engagement/Disengagement With Learning English

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Autonomy S	4.09	0.82		-.50**	.45**	.41**	.59**	-.34**	.48**	-.56**	.72**	-.44**
Autonomy F	2.54	0.93			-.27**	.32**	-.25**	.21*	-.38**	.55**	-.40**	.52**
Relatedness S	3.84	0.90				.66**	.41**	-.27**	.27**	-.47**	.44**	-.27**
Relatedness F	3.28	0.35					.36**	-.11	.15	-.14	.36**	.03
Competence S	3.67	1.00						-.61**	.33**	-.43**	.62**	-.40**
Competence F	3.90	1.10							-.03	.23**	-.31**	.41**
Novelty S	4.63	0.78								-.46**	.46**	-.26**
Novelty F	2.58	0.78									-.45**	.35**
Engagement	4.16	0.94										-.58**
Disengagement	2.02	0.74										

Note. S = Satisfaction; F = Frustration; ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among the Variables for Creative Potential

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. AUT Flexibility	4.18	1.69		.91**	.88**	.91**	.23**	.15
2. AUT Originality	3.83	1.42			.92**	.80**	.24*	.12
3. AUT Elaboration	2.38	1.87				.74**	.25**	.23*
4. AUT Fluency	3.80	1.73					.25**	.09
5. MET Fluency	6.44	2.67						.15
6. MET Creativity	6.65	0.95						

Note. N = 133 (AUT); N = 124 (Metaphor); AUT = Alternative uses task; MET = Metaphor; ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

were found between the satisfaction and frustration needs. One exception to this pattern was relatedness frustration, which showed moderately unexpected positive correlations with autonomy satisfaction ($r = .41$), competence satisfaction ($r = .36$), and engagement ($r = .36$) (see Table 1).

RQ 2: A similar analysis was conducted with the creative potential variables (see Table 2). The bivariate correlation analysis revealed positive correlations between the AUT scores ($r = .88, .91$). AUT fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration also showed weak correlation with metaphor fluency. Metaphor creativity only showed a weak correlation with AUT elaboration.

RQ 3: Examination of residual diagnostics confirmed that regression assumptions were met. Therefore, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether the satisfaction of the four basic psychological needs predicted student engagement. The model explained 59.6% of the variance in student engagement (adjusted $R^2 = .60$), and was statistically significant, $F(4, 125) = 47.13, p < .01$. Three of the four predictor variables significantly contributed to the model. Autonomy was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .43, p < .01$), followed by competence ($\beta = .29, p < .01$), and novelty ($\beta = .17, p = .01$). Relatedness did not significantly predict student engagement ($\beta = .09, p > .05$).

A second multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether the frustration of the four basic psychological needs predicted student disengagement from English learning. The model explained 37% of the variance in student disengagement (adjusted $R^2 = .37$), and was statistically significant, $F(4, 125) = 19.23, p < .01$. Two of the four predictor variables significantly contributed to the model. Autonomy was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .56, p < .01$), followed by competence ($\beta = .26, p < .01$).

RQ 4: A linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between creative potential in English as a foreign language and the satisfaction of the four basic psychological needs in an English learning context. The results of the regression analyses did not reveal a statistically significant model for predicting divergent thinking or metaphorical thinking.

Discussion

In this study, the satisfaction of students' psychological needs predicted student engagement within a Japanese EFL context. Specifically, students who felt they had autonomy, felt competent, and found

novel experiences in their learning had higher levels of engagement. However, relatedness did not show similar significance. This study contributes to the growing interest in basic psychological needs (BPN) in an EFL context. For example, Wang (2024) found BPN satisfaction among Chinese students studying English was a contributor to desirable learning outcomes. Additionally, Alamer and Lee (2019) also found BPN satisfaction (autonomy and competence, however, not relatedness) among Saudi EFL students had a positive impact on English GPA scores.

This study also demonstrates the important role novelty plays in student engagement, further supporting research that proposes novelty as a potential fourth psychological need (e.g., Birdsell, 2018a; González-Cutre et al., 2016). Another contribution of this research is the refinement and validation of the *Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale with Need for Novelty for the EFL context* (BPNSFS-EL) in Japanese. The BPNSFS-EL provides teachers and researchers with a tool to examine how satisfaction or frustration of these psychological needs affects various behavioral, motivational, and emotional variables in the context of learning EFL.

As for creative potential, the results provide preliminary support that two distinct measurements of creative potential (i.e., divergent thinking and metaphorical thinking) can be used in an EFL context. However, convergent thinking (e.g., remote association task) was problematic for the students, and this is likely due to the broad semantic knowledge required to answer these items correctly. From a practical perspective, these creative potential measurements could be used as learning materials in the EFL classroom to enhance student creativity in English. Finally, this study also demonstrates strong internal consistency among LLMs when measuring creative products, such as metaphor production tasks. This LLM-CAT method has potential and should be further researched as a reliable way to measure the creativity of metaphors and possibly other creative products (e.g., poems, titles to a cartoon strip) commonly used in creativity research.

Conclusion

In summary, providing students with autonomy, fostering their competence, and introducing novelty are pedagogical practices that have the potential to positively impact learner engagement. Future research can continue to explore how satisfying these basic psychological needs can impact other key variables for learning English as a foreign language.

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Appendix A

Japanese version of the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale with Need for Novelty in an English Learning context (BPNSFS-EL)

自律性への欲求充足・支援行動 (Autonomy Satisfaction/Support)

1. 自分自身の意思で英語を学習しており、日本語と英語の両方話せる人になりたいと感じている。(I feel I am studying English out of my own choice and desire to become the type of person who can speak more than one language well.)
2. 英語の授業で自分が本当にに関心のあることを行なっていると感じている。(In English class, I feel like I have been doing what really interests me.)
3. 英語の授業で自分のアイデアや意見を自由に表現できると感じている。(I feel free to express my ideas and opinions in my English class.)

自律性への欲求不足・阻害行動 (Autonomy Frustration/Hindrance)

4. 英語学習は、一連の義務のように感じている。(English learning feels like a chain of obligations.)
5. 英語の授業で自分がしているほとんどのことは、強制されているものだと感じている。(In English class, most of the things I do feel like “I have to”.)
6. 英語の授業で自分が望んでもいないことを、多くさせられていると感じている。(In English class, I feel forced to do many things I wouldn't desire to do.)

関係性への欲求充足・支援行動 (Relatedness Satisfaction/Support)

7. 英語で話す時、グローバルコミュニティと繋がっていると感じる。(I feel connected with the global community when I use English.)
8. 英語で話をする時、その話し相手と親密な関係を築いていると感じている。(I feel close and connected with other English speakers.)
9. 英語の授業で出会った何人かの学生は、私の親しい友人になっている。(Some of the students in my English classes have become close friends of mine.)

関係性への欲求不足・阻害行動 (Relatedness Frustration/Hindrance)

10. 英語の授業で他の学生と親密に関わりたくない。(I don't really mix with other students in my English class.)
11. 英語のグローバルコミュニティから排除されていると感じている。(I feel excluded from the global English-speaking community.)
12. 英語を使う時、深い人間関係を築こうとするが、表面的な関係にしかならない。(I feel that the relationships I have with others in English are just superficial.)

有能感への欲求充足・支援行動 (Competence Satisfaction/Support)

13. 英語を学ぶことに対して、自分は能力があると感じている。(I feel I can successfully learn English.)
14. 世界の人々とのコミュニケーションをするために、自分は英語を使うことができていると思っている。(I feel I can successfully use English to communicate with people.)
15. 私は英語を使って色々な活動をできると感じている。(I have the feeling that I can accomplish many tasks/activities using English.)

有能感への欲求不足・阻害行動 (Competence Frustration/Hindrance)

16. 実際に英語の授業で英語を使う能力がないと感じている。(I really don't feel competent using English in English class.)
17. 英語を学ぶことができるかどうかについて自分の能力を疑っている。(I doubt whether I will ever be able to learn English.)
18. 自分の英語能力に自信がない。(I lack confidence with my ability to use English.)

新奇性への欲求充足・支援行動 (Novelty Satisfaction/Support)

19. 英語の授業では、創造力を発揮する機会がある。(In English class, I have the opportunity to be creative.)
20. 英語を学ぶことで、私は新しいものを発見するチャンスがあると感じている。(Learning English, I feel like I have the opportunity to discover new things.)
21. 英語を使う時、新しい感覚を感じている。(I feel new sensations through using English.)

新奇性への欲求不足・阻害行動 (Competence Frustration/Hindrance)

22. 英語の授業のなかでは自分の独創性を育むことはできない。(In English class, I cannot manage to develop my originality.)
23. 私の英語授業のアクティビティは同じようなことばかりだと感じている。I feel that my English class activities are repetitive.)
24. 私は英語を使った新しい取り組みに参加することに消極的である。(I am reluctant to participate in new endeavors that require me to use English.)

10 items about engagement/satisfaction with learning English

1. 私は英語を学ぶという知的な挑戦を楽しんでいる。(I enjoy the intellectual challenge of learning English.)
2. 私は英語の勉強で満足感を得ている。(I get a lot of satisfaction from studying English.)

3. 英語の勉強は刺激的であると思う。(I find studying English stimulating.)
4. 普段、私は英語の勉強にやる気がある。(I find myself usually motivated to study English.)
5. 私は教室の外で英語を使う手段を探している。(I look for ways to use English outside the classroom.)
6. 普段、私は自分で努力して英語の勉強をしている(例: 読書をする、音楽を聴く、映画、YouTubeを見る、など)。(I usually make the effort to study English on my own (e.g., reading, listening to music, watching movies, YouTube, etc.))
7. 将来、自分が英語を使うようになると思う(例えば、社交、仕事、旅行など)。(In the future I see myself using English (e.g., socially, for work, or travel, etc.).)
8. 英語は難しくて学べないと思う。(English is too difficult to learn. **)
9. 英語学習は面倒だと思う。(I find learning English troublesome. **)
10. 英語を学ぶのは時間の無駄であると思う。(Learning English is a waste of time. **)

Note. ** Reverse items for disengagement

Note. The questionnaire was administered in Japanese in random order without the four basic psychological needs' headings. English translations of the items are provided for reference purposes.

Appendix B**LLM Prompts for Metaphor Creativity Assessment**

Do you understand Consensual Assessment Technique? (LLM response)

I want you to be a judge to measure the creativity of a set of metaphors written by student participants in an experiment. Ok? (LLM response)

Use the following 4 criteria in your measurement: semantic distance (how distantly related are the two concepts), originality (how statistically unique is the metaphor), meaning (does the metaphor make sense), and imagery (does the metaphor evoke imagery and insight). For each of these criteria use a 5-point Likert scale. For example, for originality (5 = highly original and novel to 1 = not at all original). Then, average the 4 criteria together into one final 5-point overall creative score. Ok? (LLM response)

Participants were given the topic "LIFE is ..." and they were asked to complete this metaphor and then provide an interpretation. Ok? (LLM response)

The data from this set should be normally distributed. Ok? (LLM response). (Then the data were provided to the LLM for evaluation).

Collaborative vs. Individual Writing in Japanese EFL High Schools: An Exploratory Study of L2 Writing Anxiety and Engagement

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Reference Data:

Sugahara, N. (2025). Collaborative vs. individual writing in Japanese EFL high schools: An exploratory study of L2 writing anxiety and engagement. In B. Lacy, R. P. Lege, & M. Swanson (Eds.), *Moving JALT into the Future: Opportunity, Diversity, and Excellence*. JALT.

This exploratory study investigated the effects of collaborative writing (CW), relative to individual writing (IW), on L2 writing anxiety and engagement among Japanese high school learners of English. Data were collected through questionnaires and open-ended responses from two classes: one group of CEFR A2 basic users ($n=40$) and another of A2 to B1 pre-intermediate users ($n=40$). CW significantly reduced writing anxiety and increased motivation across proficiency levels compared to IW; however, perceived productivity (sentence output) did not differ significantly. Qualitative analysis revealed that CW facilitated peer learning, idea generation, and error correction, whereas IW promoted greater autonomy and concentration. In CW, students noted unequal participation and concerns about peer feedback quality—especially among lower-proficiency learners—whereas in IW they primarily worried about grammatical accuracy. These findings suggest integrating CW

and IW can address L2 writing anxiety while supporting both collaborative interaction and independent writing development.

本研究は、日本の高校生英語学習者を対象に、協働ライティング (CW) と個人ライティング (IW) が書くことへの不安軽減やタスク意欲の向上に与える影響を調査した。初級 ($n=40$) および初中級 ($n=40$) 学習者からアンケートと自由記述を用いてデータを収集した結果、CWはIWと比較して書くことへの不安を軽減し、モチベーションを向上させたが、生産性に関しては両者に有意差が見られなかった。質的分析では、CWが相互学習、アイディアの創出、誤り訂正に有益である一方、IWは自主性や集中力を高める役割を果たすと示された。CWでは、不平等な参加やフィードバックの質に対する懸念が特に低習熟度の学習者間で課題として挙げられた一方、IWは主に正確性に関する不安が指摘された。これらの結果から、CWとIWを組み合わせることで、学習者の不安を軽減し、協働的インタラクションと個々の書く能力を効果的に向上させる可能性が示唆された。

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Writing tasks are beneficial in the second language (L2) learning process (e.g., Ferris & Hedgcock, 2023; Hyland, 2019). For high school curricula in Japan, the government-designed *Courses of Study* emphasizes writing tasks throughout English courses. Students are required to engage in a variety of writing tasks including brainstorming, outlines, and self- or peer-editing (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology–Japan [MEXT], 2018). Engaging in writing tasks also facilitates L2 learning due to the focus on language use in meaningful contexts (Hyland, 2019). However, there are three major challenges to implementing writing tasks in Japanese high school English classes: (a) apprehension about L2 writing, (b) heightened anxiety during the post-writing phase (e.g., peer feedback and editing), and (c) avoidance or unwillingness to engage with writing assignments (Sugahara, 2023). This exploratory study investigates whether collaborative writing (CW) tasks, as an alternative to individual writing (IW), can reduce high school learners' L2 writing anxiety and support their engagement in the writing process.

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Literature Review

L2 Writing Anxiety

Previous research has highlighted the detrimental impact of foreign language anxiety on L2 learners' performance (Aida, 1994; Horwitz, 2001; Horwitz et al., 1986; Shang, 2013). Given how common writing anxiety is among L2 learners, researchers have sought to identify its causes, such as fear of making errors or low confidence in expressing ideas, and to develop strategies to mitigate its effects (Rezaei & Jafari, 2014; Shang, 2013). Other factors can also contribute, including fear of teachers' negative feedback, diminished self-confidence, and limited proficiency in the L2 (Rezaei & Jafari, 2014). Understanding these sources of anxiety can help instructors design writing instruction that not only improves learners' proficiency but also bolsters their confidence in the writing process.

When implementing methodologies for addressing L2 writing anxiety, teachers should provide strategies that both support students' writing processes and mitigate their anxiety (Machida & Dalsky, 2014; Wolfersberger, 2003). For example, implementing effective compensatory strategies that break down the writing process and enable seamless utilization of skills developed in their L1 (e.g., brainstorming and idea organization) would ensure a smoother transition to the L2 writing context (Wolfersberger, 2003). Machida and Dalsky (2014) point out that teachers can help learners utilize strategies, such as generating and organizing their thoughts and ideas in the pre-task writing process, to reduce apprehension levels in L2 writing. To help L2 learners build confidence in their writing, instructors should offer more engaging opportunities that address the relationship between L2 writing anxiety and the writing process.

Collaborative Writing

Collaborative writing (CW) can make the writing process more engaging. It involves two or more learners (including peers with different proficiency levels) working together, which can lead to further L2 development (Li & Zhang, 2023; Storch, 2013). Namely, when students who have different backgrounds and proficiencies collaborate, they can support their writing processes by co-constructing knowledge through social interaction (Storch, 2002; Swain & Lapkin, 1998).

Previous research has found that L2 learners perceived CW positively (Storch, 2013; Sugahara, 2024) and regarded it as helpful in promoting their learning (Shehadeh, 2011). Studies also report

perceived improvements in idea generation and grammatical accuracy through dialogues, in which peers engaged in problem solving and knowledge building (Coffin, 2020; Nixon, 2007). In a study by Jalili and Shahrokhi (2017), participants reported reduced L2 writing anxiety and expressed positive attitudes toward CW.

CW processes involve L2 learners exchanging feedback and revising drafts (Storch & Aldossary, 2019; Storch & Alshuraidah, 2020). Despite some students experiencing heightened apprehension during this phase of L2 writing (Sugahara, 2023), recent literature indicates that the incorporation of peer feedback can play an essential role in writing development (Storch, 2019) and can effectively alleviate learners' L2 writing anxiety (Bolourchi & Soleimani, 2021). Peer feedback can also be applied in Japanese secondary school contexts to enhance responsibility as writers, and promote mutual scaffolding (Kurihara, 2014).

Although the participants in the above-mentioned studies were primarily university students and adult learners, these findings provide valuable insights for educators in other teaching contexts in which the integration of CW is being considered. Specifically, students reported positive experiences with CW in developing language skills, co-constructing knowledge about compositions, improving problem-solving skills, and building teamwork (Shehadeh, 2011; Storch, 2013; Sugahara 2024). These benefits suggest that CW can be an engaging and effective task in high school classes with learners of varying proficiency levels. This approach also aligns with MEXT's (2018) *Courses of Study*, which emphasizes improving communication skills, particularly collaboration and expression, across all grade levels in secondary school. To the best of my knowledge, there is no research that specifically focuses on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) secondary school students' perceptions of L2 writing and their anxiety when doing CW compared to IW. To fill this gap, this study examined L2 writing anxiety and perceptions of L2 writing development by Japanese high school learners of English. The research questions for this study are the following:

- RQ1. Do CW tasks help reduce L2 writing anxiety among students across a range of proficiency levels?
- RQ2. To what extent do CW tasks support students' L2 writing development?

Methods

Research Design

This exploratory study employed mixed methods research to investigate Japanese high school students' perceptions of CW and IW tasks via a questionnaire with Likert items and open-ended prompts. This approach is suitable for studies exploring complex educational phenomena in order to capture both quantitative trends and qualitative insights (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Participants

This exploratory classroom study used a convenience sample of two intact classes, typical for mixed-methods research in Japanese secondary EFL settings. The participants ($n = 80$) ranged in age from 15–16, and were first-year high school students at a private upper secondary school in Chiba Prefecture, Japan. This study focused on two classes: a high-proficiency cohort of A2 to B1 pre-intermediate learners ($n=40$) and a cohort of A2 basic users of English ($n=40$), based on scores of the *Eiken* test. The participants attended Logic and Expression I classes three times a week and English Communication I classes four times a week. Each class was 50 minutes long. One of the English Communication classes was taught by a non-Japanese English teacher, while the other six classes were taught by Japanese English teachers.

Prior to this study, approval was obtained from the school and from students' parents to conduct the research. All students in the class were fully informed about the purpose of this study, that their participation was entirely voluntary, and that they had the choice to withdraw at any time. Student survey responses were used solely for research purposes and did not affect academic performance. Confidentiality of student personal data was strictly maintained, and all procedures complied with the ethical standards of the school.

Procedure

Students were assigned CW tasks as part of their Logic and Expression I course and IW as part of their English Communication I course. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the schedule, time, and content for CW and IW.

For CW tasks, groups of three to four students created original short stories that incorporated the targeted grammatical forms (see Table 1).

Table 1

CW Schedule for Logic and Expression I

No.	Time	Unit	Target Grammatical Feature
1	April	0	Sentence Patterns
2	May	1	Tense
3	May	2	Perfect Aspect
4	June	3	Auxiliary Verbs
5	June	4	Passive Voice
6	September	5-1	Infinitives
7	September	5-2	Infinitives
8	October	6	Gerunds

In the online notebook platform *LoiLoNote* (LoiLo Inc., n.d.), which was used for all subjects at the school, students edited their shared drafts in real time while discussing what to write and how to develop their stories (see Figure 1). In subsequent lessons, students checked and revised stories with their group members and then presented scripts to members of other groups. Teachers withheld error correction and explicit grammar instruction until the end of each unit. This sequencing follows the principles of inductive grammar instruction, where learners experiment with language patterns in meaningful contexts before rules are formally introduced. The aim was to enhance students' engagement with the target forms, promote collaborative problem solving, and deepen understanding through peer interaction. The same procedure was repeated for each of the grammatical features covered in the textbook.

Figure 1

Screenshot of LoiLoNote Program Used During CW



For the IW component, students completed 50 to 80-word argumentative writing tasks throughout the English Communication I course. These tasks

focused on broad, everyday topics appropriate for the CEFR A2 level (see Table 2), using a supplementary textbook (The Japan Times Publishing & Logistics, 2020) and were designed to match academic learning goals.

Table 2

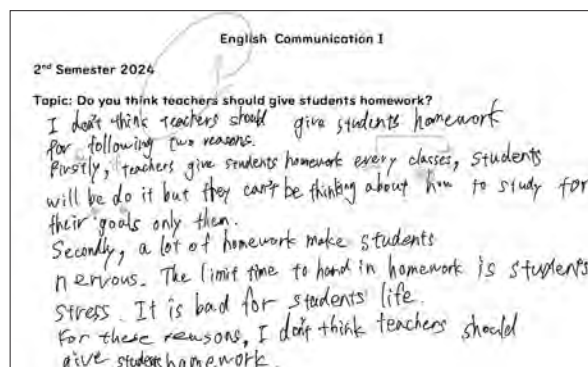
IW Schedule for English Communication

No.	Time	Topic	Target Length
1	April	Describe food you like	50-60 words
2	April	Best season to visit Japan	
3	May	A place to visit in Japan	
4	May	City vs. countryside	60-70 words
5	May	Club activity	
6	June	Convenience store	
7	June	Study alone vs. in groups	70-80 words
8	September	Homework	
9	September	Study abroad	

As a pre-writing task, students first discussed the pros and cons of the assigned topics. Students then wrote their arguments individually and submitted them via LooLoNote. After receiving written corrective feedback (i.e., specific grammatical and lexical corrections with general comments) from the instructor (see Figure 2), a follow-up discussion was conducted.

Figure 2

A Sample of Feedback for Students' IW



Data Analysis

In the middle of the second semester, students completed a questionnaire via Google Forms (see Appendix A) that took approximately 10 minutes. The questionnaire, developed specifically for this study, aimed to capture the unique context and objectives of the writing tasks implemented in these high school courses. It included Likert items measuring L2 writing anxiety and attitudes toward peer feedback, as well as open-ended questions about students' experiences in both courses.

The Likert items used a six-point scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*), to encourage respondents to lean toward agreement or disagreement rather than selecting a neutral midpoint. These items addressed four categories for both IW and CW:

- level of L2 writing anxiety during the tasks
- degree of anxiety reduction throughout the tasks
- level of motivation to work on writing tasks
- perceived productivity of composition

The open-ended questions explored:

- concerns about writing English individually and in groups
- positive aspects of writing English individually and in groups
- feelings about peer feedback during group writing

The questionnaire was administered in Japanese, with all items and open-ended questions written in Japanese. Students' Japanese responses were translated into English by the author and verified by a colleague from the United Kingdom, who is proficient in both languages.

Descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations were calculated for Likert responses using Microsoft Excel. Paired samples *t*-tests examined significant differences between IW and CW conditions, and between student proficiency levels.

Open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic analysis (Stake, 2010). Coding was first conducted manually to identify initial categories, then NVivo software was used to systematically organize and refine those codes. Common concerns and positive aspects of IW and CW, along with reactions to peer feedback, were categorized for interpretation.

Results

Quantitative Analysis

Table 3 presents students' perceptions of IW and CW throughout the courses. As shown in Table 3, students engaged in CW ($M = 3.48$) felt less anxious than when doing IW ($M = 4.21$), indicating a statistically significant difference in L2 writing anxiety between the two modes. Also, learners reported that their L2 writing anxiety decreased during CW ($M = 4.16$) compared to IW ($M = 3.09$) throughout the courses. Effect sizes were $d_z = 0.61$ for anxiety and $d_z = 0.50$ for anxiety reduction (see Table 3).

In terms of motivation, students were significantly more motivated to write when collaborating with classmates ($M = 4.03$) than when writing alone ($M = 3.33$), a statistically significant difference. However, students did not perceive a significant difference in how much they were able to write in terms of productivity between CW ($M = 3.71$) and IW ($M = 3.54$). Effect sizes were $d_z = 0.29$ for motivation and

$d_z = 0.08$ for productivity. These results suggest CW effectively reduced students' L2 writing anxiety and increased motivation but did not significantly impact the quantity of sentences produced (see Table 3).

With regard to proficiency, basic users exhibited significantly higher L2 writing anxiety than the pre-intermediate class for both IW ($M = 4.63$ vs. 3.80) and CW ($M = 3.90$ vs. 3.05 ; see Table 4). However, no other statistically significant differences were observed between proficiency levels for anxiety reduction (IW: $M = 3.15$ vs. 3.03 ; CW: $M = 4.20$ vs. 4.13), motivation (IW: $M = 3.43$ vs. 3.23 ; CW: $M = 4.13$ vs. 3.93), or productivity (IW: $M = 3.48$ vs. 3.60 ; CW: $M = 3.85$ vs. 3.58 ; see Table 4).

In summary, CW reduced students' L2 writing anxiety and increased their motivation compared to IW but did not significantly affect productivity. Basic users reported higher anxiety levels than their pre-intermediate peers, though no significant group differences were found between the proficiency

Table 3

Perceptions of IW vs. CW

Variable	IW		CW		$t(79)$	p	Cohen's d_z (paired)	95% CI	
	M	SD	M	SD				LL	UL
Writing anxiety	4.21	1.41	3.48	1.23	5.46	< .001***	0.61	0.47	1.01
Reduced anxiety	3.09	1.30	4.16	1.28	-4.43	< .001***	0.50	-1.56	-0.59
Motivation	3.33	1.45	4.03	1.28	-2.60	.011*	0.29	-1.24	-0.16
Productivity	3.54	1.36	3.71	1.29	-0.70	.486	0.08	-0.67	0.32

Note. $N = 80$. Differences computed as IW – CW (positive = higher rating for IW). Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree. Effect sizes are absolute values. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit

Table 4

Perceptions of IW vs. CW Between Groups

Variables		Basic Users		Pre-Intermediate		$t(78)$	p
		M	SD	M	SD		
Writing anxiety	IW	4.63	1.37	3.80	1.34	-2.72	.008**
	CW	3.90	1.15	3.05	1.18	-3.27	.002**
Reduced anxiety	IW	3.15	1.31	3.03	1.31	-0.43	.671
	CW	4.20	1.18	4.13	1.38	-0.26	.795
Motivation	IW	3.43	1.47	3.23	1.44	-0.62	.540
	CW	4.13	1.22	3.93	1.35	-0.70	.489
Productivity	IW	3.48	1.40	3.60	1.34	0.41	.684
	CW	3.85	1.23	3.58	1.36	-0.95	.345

Note. Independent samples t -tests. Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

levels in terms of reduced anxiety, motivation, or productivity.

Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis of student responses to the open-ended questions revealed several recurring patterns regarding their experiences with IW and CW.

The most frequently mentioned advantage of IW was being able to concentrate fully without distractions ($n = 27$). Learners also valued the freedom to express their thoughts independently without external influence ($n = 20$), along with efficiency in task completion ($n = 7$). In addition, they could reflect on their current ability to write sentences on their own when writing individually ($n = 6$) and their growth in L2 writing ($n = 8$). IW provided students with the opportunity to work at their own pace, focus on the tasks without distractions, and improve their sentence construction skills.

In contrast, 23 of 80 students reported that the support they received for correcting grammar, vocabulary, and spelling mistakes during CW was beneficial. Additionally, they also appreciated the opportunity to generate ideas together ($n = 17$). Other students highlighted benefits, such as teaching each other ($n = 14$), asking for help easily ($n = 13$), and expanding their writing repertoire ($n = 6$). Overall, CW allowed students to correct errors, generate ideas, and incorporate peers' views or expressions into their writing.

Despite the benefits, students faced several challenges during IW that were significant sources of anxiety, including concerns about grammatical correctness ($n = 44$), uncertainty about vocabulary ($n = 15$), difficulty generating ideas ($n = 7$), and concerns about expressing ideas effectively ($n = 4$). These findings suggest that individual writing heightened students' concerns about language accuracy, idea generation, and organization due to the lack of peer support.

Table 5

Students' Perceived Pros and Cons of IW and CW

Writing Format	Pros	<i>n</i>	Cons	<i>n</i>
Individual Writing (IW)	Concentration without distractions	27	Grammar-related anxiety	44
	Freedom to express thoughts	20	Vocabulary uncertainty	15
	Growth in L2 writing	8	Difficulty generating ideas	7
	Efficient task completion	7	Trouble expressing ideas clearly	4
	Reflection on ability to write alone	6		
Collaborative Writing (CW)	Support for grammar, vocabulary, spelling correction	23	Concern about grammar and vocabulary accuracy	28
	Idea generation with peers	17	Difficulty organizing group ideas	12
	Teaching each other	14	Slow progress or unequal participation	9
	Easier to ask for help	13	Difficulty generating ideas	8
	Expanded writing repertoire	6		
Peer Feedback	Identifying grammatical errors	24	Group members not identifying grammar or spelling mistakes	19
	Increased motivation	11	Embarrassment about errors	4
	Incorporating diverse perspectives	10		

When writing collaboratively, students' primary concerns also centered on worries about grammar and vocabulary ($n = 28$) along with difficulties in organizing their ideas into sentences in groups ($n = 12$). They also noted slow progress due to unequal participation within groups and distractions that hindered concentration ($n = 9$) and idea generation ($n = 8$). These responses indicate that, while CW encouraged interaction, students faced a range of linguistic and group-related difficulties during the process.

Students' perceptions of peer feedback during CW varied. Many students found peer feedback beneficial, noting that it helped them identify grammatical errors ($n = 24$), increasing their motivation ($n = 11$), and providing diverse perspectives ($n = 10$). Nevertheless, some students expressed concerns about the feedback process, particularly in the lower-proficiency group. Challenges included the concerns about grammar ($n = 19$) and embarrassment about errors ($n = 4$). Some students noted difficulties when no group members were able to identify grammatical errors, especially in the absence of more proficient peers. Others worried about criticism from group members for making mistakes in their writing. Such concerns highlight how peer dynamics and varying proficiency levels within groups influenced students' emotional responses to the feedback process during CW.

These student-identified advantages and challenges provide valuable insights for developing classroom practices to address L2 writing anxiety.

Discussion

The current study investigated whether L2 CW helped reduce high school learners' anxiety toward writing across different proficiency levels. Regarding whether CW tasks help reduce L2 writing anxiety among students across proficiency levels, participants perceived significantly lower L2 writing anxiety in CW compared to solo writing. However, students in the basic class reported significantly higher anxiety in both IW and CW than pre-intermediate students. Despite these proficiency-based differences, both groups reported that CW was more effective than IW at reducing their writing anxiety. These findings suggest that while addressing L2 writing anxiety is crucial for lower-proficiency students, CW can effectively support students across various proficiency levels in reducing their writing anxiety. These findings support previous research which suggested that CW reduces anxiety by promoting peer interaction and emotional support (Bolourchi & Soleimani, 2021).

The study also investigated how CW tasks support students' L2 writing learning development. The results of both the quantitative and qualitative analyses show that students expressed greater motivation to engage in the CW process rather than IW. This finding is similar to previous literature (e.g., Coffin, 2020; Shehadeh, 2011). However, there was no significant difference in students' perceptions of the number of sentences they were able to produce when working in groups compared to when writing individually. As Storch (2005) noted, CW tasks require more time and do not necessarily facilitate the production of writing. While CW increases motivation and engagement, it might focus more on idea exchange and feedback than on a higher volume of written output for high school learners of English.

Additionally, whereas students viewed peer feedback during CW positively, some lower-proficiency learners exhibited concerns about its effectiveness. Previous studies have shown that L2 learners often prefer feedback from higher-proficiency peers over lower-proficiency ones (e.g., Kim & McDonough, 2008; McDonough, 2004). During CW, these attitudes and preferences might be related to findings that lower-proficiency peers tend to produce fewer language-related episodes (LREs), which are defined as "segments in the pair talk during which learners focused explicitly on language items" (Storch & Aldosari, 2013, p.310). Therefore, it is vital to investigate how to enhance the perceived effectiveness of peer feedback from lower-proficiency learners, particularly by exploring strategies to increase the quantity and quality of language-related episodes.

Nonetheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. This study investigated a limited number of students from the same high school, ranging from basic to pre-intermediate proficiency levels. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of L2 learners' perceptions of CW, future studies should include more extensive and diverse samples from different teaching contexts and proficiency levels over an extended period (Li & Zhang, 2023; Storch, 2013). Although this study measured anxiety, motivation, and sentence production, future work could examine the quality of writing produced through CW and IW to provide a more nuanced understanding of learning outcomes. In addition, the growing availability of AI technologies, such as automated writing evaluation tools (e.g., Grammarly and ChatGPT), has provided us with expanded opportunities for enhancing L2 writing learning. Previous research suggests that such tools can promote students' engagement in L2 writing processes through AI-peer-teacher feedback (Zhang & Hyland, 2022) while reducing L2 writing anxiety (Hawanti

& Zubayduloevna, 2023), but further research is needed to examine the broader implications of AI tools in L2 writing.

Pedagogical Implications

This exploratory study has several implications for L2 writing learning and instruction. Firstly, CW can help reduce L2 writing anxiety while increasing student motivation. Teachers should consider implementing CW tasks to enhance students' emotional engagement and reduce their anxiety levels. At the same time, although students showed no significant difference in perceived sentence production when writing in groups compared to individually, qualitative responses also showed advantages of IW. Many students appreciated the ability to concentrate without distractions, work at their own pace, and express their ideas freely. Therefore, instructors might consider incorporating a combination of CW and IW tasks to leverage the benefits of both peer interaction and independent work.

Secondly, regardless of their proficiency levels, students were able to reduce their L2 writing anxiety through CW tasks. This finding suggests that teachers can effectively introduce CW in the classroom with different proficiency levels to engage students in L2 writing tasks. However, less proficient learners felt significantly higher anxiety levels and reported more concerns about peer feedback in CW than pre-intermediate level students. To support such learners, instructors can offer task modeling (Kim & McDonough, 2011; Wette, 2014) or peer feedback training to improve task familiarity and their attitude toward CW (Min, 2006, 2016; Rahimi, 2013).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study explored how CW and IW affected Japanese high school students' writing anxiety and learning. The research questions as to whether CW helped reduce anxiety across proficiency levels and how it supported L2 writing were addressed quantitatively and qualitatively. CW was found to reduce writing anxiety and increase motivation more than IW, though there was no difference in how much students thought they could write. Students valued idea-sharing and peer support in CW, while IW allowed for more focus and independence. Combining both approaches may help reduce anxiety and support balanced writing development. By fostering a supportive environment where students can collaborate and learn from one another, L2 writing instructors can empower learners to develop greater confidence and motivation in writing.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire Items

This is a translation of the Japanese-language questionnaire used. Students first responded to the following statements on a six-point Likert scale from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 6 (*Strongly Agree*).

(I)

1. I feel particularly anxious when writing alone in English.
2. I feel incredibly anxious when writing in English in a group (e.g., story-making).
3. I feel more motivated when working on a writing task alone than when writing in a group.

OLE SIG EVENTS at JALT2025

Saturday, November 1

Language Forums in Room 308

- French Forum: 11:00–12:00
- German Forum: 12:10–13:10
- Spanish Forum: 13:20–14:20

OLE SIG AGM: 17:00–17:45 Room 412

OLE SIG FORUM: Multilingual Forum on Teaching Strategies 17:45–19:15 PM Room 412

This forum presents strategies to motivate students in foreign language courses. Martina Günske von Kölln (German) examines external factors such as environment influencing language enrollment. Adiene Roque de Hishiyama (Spanish) discusses initiatives to spark interest in study abroad. Pornsri Wright (Thai) highlights hands-on cultural experiences through food. Anna Barinova and Grigory Misocho (Russian) report on findings related to extensive reading. Collectively, the presentations offer varied approaches to enhancing student engagement and enthusiasm across multiple languages and learning environments.

We Are Multilingual!

4. I am more motivated when working on a writing task in a group than when writing alone.
5. I was able to write more English sentences when working on a writing task alone than when writing in a group.
6. I was able to write more when working on a writing task in a group than when writing alone.
7. I was less anxious about writing when working on writing tasks alone than when writing in a group.
8. I was less anxious about writing when working on writing tasks in a group than when writing alone.

Students then answered the open-ended questions in Japanese.

(II)

Open-ended Questions

1. Briefly describe your concerns about writing in English individually.
2. Briefly describe your concerns about writing in English in a group.
3. Briefly describe what you like about writing in English individually.
4. Briefly describe what you think is good about writing in English in groups.
5. Briefly describe how you feel when checking writing in pairs or groups.



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Challenges of University English Teachers in Japan: A Preliminary Study

Saki Suemori

University of Tsukuba

Reference Data:

Suemori, S. (2025). Challenges of university English teachers in Japan: A preliminary study. B. Lacy, M. Swanson, & R. P. Lege (Eds.), *Moving JALT into the Future: Opportunity, Diversity, and Excellence*. JALT.

In the field of language learning psychology, research on teachers has gained prominence, as teaching is widely recognized as a highly stressful profession associated with low well-being and high attrition rates. This qualitative study explores the experiences of three English teachers at Japanese universities through semi-structured interviews, examining the challenges they face and the strategies they use to manage them. The findings highlight significant difficulties, including teaching under institutional constraints, feeling insecure about their language skills, and coping with students' unexpected behaviors. The results suggest that cultivating self-compassion may help teachers navigate these challenges more effectively. Additionally, the study implies that administrative support can enhance teachers' job satisfaction.

言語学習における心理研究にて、教師に対する注目が近年高まっている。教師はストレスレベルが高く、幸福感が低いことから、離職率が高い傾向にある。本研究は、日本の大学にて英語を教える教師の経験に焦点を置き、どのような困難を経験しているか、困難にどのように対処しているか、半構造化インタビューにて調査を実施した。教師は制限がある中で教えることや学生の予期せぬ行動から影響を受けていることが示された。困難に対処する上で、セルフコンパッションが重要となることが示唆された。また、組織のサポートが教師の支えとなる点も示唆された。

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This article was originally published in the Selected Papers section of the 2024 Postconference Publication (PCP), *Moving JALT Into the Future: Opportunity, Diversity, and Excellence*. The PCP publishes papers based on presentations given at the JALT International Conference, and the Selected Papers section highlights a small number of papers of exceptional quality that have been first suggested by the editorial staff and then vetted by the JALT Publications Board through a blind review process. We feel that papers like this one represent some of the best work that the JALT Conference and the PCP have to offer, and encourage interested readers to check out other selected papers at <https://jalt-publications.org/proceedings>.



In the field of the psychology of language learning, studies focusing on teachers have become increasingly common in recent years. Teaching is widely recognized as one of the most stressful professions (Wang et al., 2024), with teachers often working under high levels of stress and experiencing low levels of well-being. This is thought to contribute to a high attrition rate, posing a serious problem globally. In particular, foreign language teachers face unique challenges compared to teachers of other subjects (Haukås et al., 2022). Foreign language teachers who teach in their second or additional language must manage both their own and their students' anxiety about using a foreign language. Moreover, foreign language classes often have relatively large numbers of students with varying levels of proficiency, further increasing teachers' workloads (Davin & Donato, 2024). As a result, foreign language teachers face significant stressors, and this has led to the need for further research.

This study focuses on English teachers working at a university in the Kanto area in Japan to explore the challenges they face and how they manage them. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants to gain insight into their experiences. The findings emphasize the importance of teachers identifying effective ways to cope with the challenges and negative emotions they encounter.

The Importance of Teacher Psychology Research

Maintaining a positive psychological state is crucial for teachers to sustain their careers. Language evolves over time, requiring teachers to continuously update their knowledge (Haukås et al., 2022). Additionally, language teachers must navigate their own anxiety as well as their students' anxiety about using a foreign language (Haukås et al., 2022). The high levels of stress that teachers endure contribute to a relatively high attrition rate worldwide (Greenier et al., 2021). Teachers often experience low well-being, which can lead to frustration, burnout, and ultimately, leaving the profession. Thus, maintaining a healthy psychological state is essential for teachers to continue working effectively.

Teachers' mental states are not only vital for teachers themselves but also has a contagious effect on their students. Teachers who enjoy their work and maintain high levels of well-being and motivation can positively influence their students' attitudes and motivation (e.g., Mercer, 2020). Moskowitz and Dewaele (2021) explored whether teacher happiness influenced students' happiness and motivation. Their study involved 129 adult EFL/ESL learners worldwide and examined student attitudes, motivation, and perceptions of teacher happiness. The findings revealed a significant correlation between students' perceptions of teacher happiness and their own attitudes and motivation. When students perceived their teachers as happy, they were more likely to demonstrate positive attitudes and higher motivation. Thus, teacher psychology is a crucial factor for both teachers and students.

Teacher Stress and How They Manage

Given the heavy workloads and challenges teachers face, numerous studies have examined teacher stress. For example, Liu and Onwuegbuzie (2012) investigated sources of teacher stress in China, involving 510 middle school teachers in Jilin Province. Their findings indicated that heavy workloads and parental pressure were primary stressors. Similarly, Gregersen et al. (2023) conducted a study involving six teachers from a larger sample of 47 participants who taught a variety of languages at various levels from pre-school to adult education. The study identified time pressure and juggling multiple roles as the most significant stressors.

In the context of Japan, studies have been conducted on demotivating factors for language teachers in universities. Sugino (2010), for instance, investigated salient demotivating factors for language teachers using a questionnaire. The participants were 97 language teachers who teach various languages in universities, and they answered the teacher job satisfaction questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale. The findings showed that students' behavior, such as using a smartphone and sleeping during the class can be demotivating. The teachers also felt working conditions, such as long meeting hours and paperwork, can be demotivating.

To navigate these challenges, it is essential for teachers to manage their negative emotions effectively. One important strategy is cultivating self-compassion. Self-compassion involves adopting a kind, positive, and caring attitude toward oneself (Zessin et al., 2015). Just as we show compassion to others facing difficulties, we can extend the same compassion to ourselves. Mairitsch et al. (2023)

investigated the role of self-compassion in the well-being of 21 foreign language teachers from various countries, including those in Europe, Oceania, North America, and Central and South America. The study provided examples of self-compassionate practices, such as carefully assessing workloads and declining non-essential tasks.

As these studies illustrate, language teachers often experience negative emotions, including anxiety, primarily due to heavy workloads. These difficulties can lead to high attrition rates and negatively affect students (Mercer, 2020). Consequently, teacher psychology research has become more prominent. Although research has been conducted in various contexts, studies focusing on how challenges affect teachers and how they manage these challenges in the Japanese context remain limited. This study addresses this gap by exploring the following research questions:

- RQ1. What kinds of challenges do teachers experience when they teach English at universities in Japan?
- RQ2. How do these teachers manage the challenges?

Method

The participants for this study were three teachers who work in a university in the Kanto area. They are not my colleagues, and they were recruited through personal connections. I have a good relationship with all of them, having known them for several years. The research was initiated after obtaining approval from the university research ethics committee. Participants were first provided with an ethical briefing, which included information on the study's objectives, the handling of research data, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Subsequently, participants signed informed consent forms.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews were conducted using the protocol described in the appendix and lasted about one hour. Interviews were held in convenient locations for the participants such as their offices. Basic demographic and professional information about the participants is summarized in Table 1.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant as interviews are suitable to understand people's experiences (e.g., Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each interview was conducted in Japanese as all of the participants are proficient in

Japanese. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent. The interviews focused on the difficulties and challenges participants face in their roles as teachers and how they manage these challenges. Example interview questions are provided in the Appendix.

After the interviews, the recordings were transcribed verbatim. The data were then analyzed by the author using thematic analysis following the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2021). This involved coding the data and categorizing it into overarching themes. As a result, three key areas of difficulty emerged: anxiety about English skills, restrictions in teaching, and students' behavior. These themes are explored in the following sections, along with the strategies teachers employed to manage them.

Findings

The interviews highlighted three recurring challenges: anxiety about their English proficiency, limitations imposed by institutional policies or curriculum structures, and issues stemming from students' attitudes and classroom behavior. This section outlines these challenges and examines how participants managed them.

Anxiety About English Skills

The first major issue that emerged was teachers' anxiety about their English proficiency. As Haukås et al. (2022) note, it is common for language teachers to experience such anxiety. Teacher A, for example, expressed concern about her own abilities.

I have a lot of anxiety about learning English, and I also feel insecure about my English skills, so I became worried about students who encounter teachers like me. I don't know what to convey, and I can't imagine what someone who loves English is thinking, so that was unsettling. Also, well, simply put, I've always been, well, and still am, anxious about whether my English skills are sufficient. (Teacher A)

Teacher A did not major in English-related subjects, nor did she complete a teacher training pro-

gram for English. As a result, she expressed strong anxiety about both her English proficiency and her teaching abilities.

Restrictions in Teaching

Another significant challenge was the restrictions teachers face in their teaching. In some Japanese universities, teachers are required to follow pre-determined syllabi, limiting their autonomy in lesson planning and content selection.

In compulsory classes, I can't teach what I want to that much. The textbook covers important material, but it's overwhelming due to its volume. Trying to study everything in one semester is impossible. As a result, I always felt overloaded and unable to absorb the content completely. Knowing that the [other] teachers were also overwhelmed made me feel even worse, realizing that students must be struggling even more. This situation left me feeling frustrated and uneasy. (Teacher B)

Teacher B noted that she was required to teach using a university-mandated textbook and to complete its contents within one semester. She found the textbook overly dense and struggled to cover all the material, leading to feelings of frustration and overwhelmingness.

Students' Behavior

Both teacher A and C also felt that certain aspects of students' behaviors posed challenges for them. Students can be demotivators for teachers (e.g., Sugino, 2010), and participants seem to receive negative influence from them.

I feel that second-year students are less motivated compared to first-year students. Another challenging aspect is that the class is held during the first period. Students who find it difficult to attend first-period classes choose repeat courses from the beginning. (Teacher C)

I conducted an exam in a TOEIC class the other day. I was planning to use the practice questions from the textbook for the exam, and I told the

Table 1
Background Information of the Participants

Name	Gender	Nationality	Age	University teaching experience	Working condition
Teacher A	Female	Japanese	30s	three years	part-time
Teacher B	Female	Japanese	60s	eight years	full-time
Teacher C	Male	Non-Japanese	40s	ten years	full-time

students to bring their textbooks, but some of them didn't. Right before we started, the students told me they had forgotten to bring their textbooks. They also asked, 'Can I share the textbook with my classmates?' It was a listening exam, and I was surprised. Do you share a textbook during a TOEIC listening test? I couldn't understand that. (Teacher A)

Teacher C highlighted a lack of motivation among second-year students and challenges related to scheduling classes in the first period. Meanwhile, Teacher A described being surprised and frustrated by students' unexpected behavior, such as forgetting textbooks during an important TOEIC listening exam and making inappropriate requests.

How Teachers Manage Challenges

As highlighted earlier, teachers encountered various challenges in their roles. The interviews also explored how these teachers managed to address and mitigate these difficulties.

Clarifying the Focus of the Class

Teacher B addressed her challenges by clearly defining the focus of her classes.

I've decided to make speaking the main focus of my classes. While there are plenty of teachers who focus on writing, there aren't many who specialize in speaking. Most students have been working on their writing and reading skills, but many of them really want to improve their speaking. From my experience working in a company, I've seen a lot of people struggle because they couldn't communicate well. That's why I think speaking is really important. I believe I have a certain level of skill in teaching speaking, so I have decided to focus on speaking. (Teacher B)

Teacher B taught a course titled Speaking and Writing, where the prescribed textbook primarily emphasized writing. However, she observed that her students needed more opportunities to develop their speaking skills. Drawing from her own professional experiences, she recognized the critical importance of communication skills in real-world contexts. By prioritizing speaking, Teacher B effectively navigated institutional constraints and provided targeted instruction that better met her students' needs, ultimately enhancing their learning outcomes.

Establishing Clear Rules

Another strategy for managing challenges was setting clear expectations and rules. Teacher C said, "I have written in the syllabus that students are

allowed to be absent up to three times. If they miss more than four classes, they will not receive credit. I've set strict rules."

Consulting Colleagues

Teacher C also emphasized the value of seeking advice and support from colleagues. He noted that having strong professional relationships enabled him to address challenges more effectively.

When in trouble, the best solution is to ask colleagues. It's the quickest way. In our department, there are three English teachers, and one of them has been teaching for over 20 years. I make sure to check with my colleagues about what needs to be covered in English classes and the minimum standards. We have a good working relationship, so I can ask them for confirmation right away. (Teacher C)

By leveraging the expertise of a colleague with over 20 years of teaching experience, Teacher C was able to gain clarity on curriculum requirements and minimum standards. This collaborative approach not only resolved issues, but also seemed to foster a sense of community within the department.

Discussion

This study investigated the professional struggles experienced by three English teachers in Japanese universities, focusing on how they responded to these difficulties. Semi-structured interviews revealed that the participants were particularly affected by concerns about their English, constraints in how they could teach, and the challenge of managing student engagement and behavior. Several coping strategies were identified, including narrowing the scope of lessons, clarifying classroom expectations, and seeking peer support. These findings highlight the importance of both individual and institutional responses to teacher stress.

Participants expressed negative feelings about their students' attitudes and behavior, which appears to be a common experience. Research on motivators and demotivators for teachers in various contexts has demonstrated that students can act as demotivating factors (Sinclair, 2008; Tsutsumi, 2014). Specific forms of student behavior, such as using smartphones during class or attending without completing assignments, have been identified as particularly discouraging for teachers (Sugino, 2010). Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to develop strategies to cope with their negative emotions stemming from such behavior.

Teachers' anxiety about their abilities is also a common issue. It is particularly important for teachers to address feelings of inadequacy and manage their anxiety effectively. Language teachers often experience more anxiety about their professional skills than teachers of other subjects, which can result in higher stress levels (Haukås et al., 2022). Developing mechanisms to handle these feelings is essential for their professional longevity.

There are several things teachers can do, and one potential approach is cultivating self-compassion (Zessin et al., 2015). People often feel compassion for others in difficult situations; similarly, they can learn to extend compassion toward themselves. By practicing self-compassion, teachers may gain a more flexible and holistic perspective of themselves. Furthermore, understanding how to maintain their well-being while teaching is vital. Cultivating self-compassion and adopting a reflective mindset can help teachers overcome some of these challenges.

Teachers can also cultivate their mindfulness. Mindfulness means the process of regulating emotions to help concentrate on the present while ignoring the past or future concerns (Li, 2021). Previous studies show that mindful teachers can experience more enjoyment and manage stress better (Yang et al., 2023), and mindful activities can help teachers to reduce their level of stress (Taylor et al., 2021). Doing mindfulness-related activities, such as meditation, can help teachers to deal with difficulties they experience in their daily lives.

Effectively managing negative emotions can benefit both teachers and their students. Previous research indicates that teachers and students mutually influence each other, and their psychological states can be contagious (Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2021). When teachers are in a positive psychological state, their students are more likely to experience a similar level of well-being, ultimately enhancing academic outcomes. Thus, maintaining a healthy psychological state is essential not only for teachers, but also for their students' success.

Conclusion

This study used interviews to explore how three English teachers in Japanese higher education coped with key professional challenges. Across participants, common sources of stress included linguistic self-doubt, teaching constraints, and student-related difficulties. Addressing these issues requires both personal strategies—such as cultivating self-compassion and regulating negative emotions—and institutional support. University policies

that promote teacher well-being and collegiality are also crucial as they increase teachers' satisfaction, reduces burnout, and decreases attrition rates (Davin & Donato, 2024).

Future research should consider adopting alternative methodologies to gain deeper insights into teachers' experiences. For example, classroom observations and the use of the experience sampling method (ESM) could be valuable. ESM involves participants answering short, simple questionnaires multiple times over a specific period, often using an application (Arndt et al., 2021). This method enables participants to report their experiences in real time, reducing reliance on retrospective memory and providing more accurate data.

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Appendix

Example Questions in the Interviews

- Could you kindly inform me about the English courses you are currently teaching?
- What challenges or difficulties do you encounter in the process of teaching your classes?
- Do you experience any stress while teaching English?
- How do you manage the difficulties and stress you face?

Topics in TBLT #1 Materials Design January 17-18, 2026

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How to Create Valid Reading Comprehension Tests to Measure Improvement

Sachi Oshima

Chuo Gakuin University

Reference Data:

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To measure improvement in students' reading performance, teachers and researchers often administer multiple reading tests at different points during a course—typically a pretest, midterm, and posttest. Although using an identical test enables researchers to compare test scores obtained at multiple points directly, there is a *testing threat* that negatively affects validity (Trochim et al., 2016). If the same test is used repeatedly, students might improve their scores. However, this does not necessarily mean their reading performance has improved because they might remember the content of the pretest reading texts and items, lowering the difficulty of the posttest. Different tests consisting of different texts are expected to address this validity threat. Still, it introduces another problem: If the reading passages vary considerably in difficulty, then the tests cannot validly measure whether students' reading performance has actually improved. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate a five-step solution to address this issue: (a) selecting the reading passages used for the tests, (b) analyzing and adjusting the lexical and readability level of the passages, (c) creating question items based on the difficulty

level of questions (Burrows, 2012; Lumley, 1993), (d) conducting alpha and beta testing (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007), and (e) employing Rasch analysis to ensure comparable difficulty estimates among multiple reading tests.

生徒の英語リーディング（文章読解）力向上を測定するため、教師や研究者は複数回のテスト（コース開始時のpretest、中間のmidterm、終了時のposttestなど）を実施することが多い。同一のテストを繰り返し実施する場合することで、スコアの直接比較は可能となるが、testing threat (Trochim et al., 2016) が妥当性にもたらす影響を考慮する必要がある。同一のテストを複数回実施することで、生徒のスコアは向上するかもしれないが、それが必ずしも生徒の英語リーディング力向上を意味するとは限らない。生徒がpretestの内容を記憶していることでposttestの難易度が下がることもあり得るからである。そこで妥当性を担保するため、異なる文章を用いたテストを準備することが望ましいが、また別の問題が生じる。文章の難易度がそもそも異なる場合、難易度の異なるテストを実施したところで、生徒のリーディング力向上を検証するのは妥当ではない。そこで、本稿では具体的な解決策として、5つのステップ（a）テストに使用する文章の選定、（b）語彙・可読性のレベル分析・調整、（c）設問の難易度 (Burrows, 2012; Lumley, 1993) を考慮した設問作成、（d）アルファテスト・ベータテスト (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007) の実施、（e）複数のテストが同等の難易度であることを担保するためのラッシュ分析実施—を紹介する。

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Many English teachers in Japan are facing a growing need to help low-proficiency university students improve their English skills, including reading. Today, Japanese university students, the majority of whom are studying English as a foreign language (EFL), have generally received ten years of English education by the time they graduate from senior high school: four years in elementary school, three years in junior high school, and three years in senior high school (Mochizuki et al., 2018). However, despite the substantial time spent on English education, the English proficiency of many senior high school graduates is remarkably low. A recent survey conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology of Japan (MEXT, 2023) has provided further evidence of these low proficiency levels. The survey identified the Eiken Grade Pre-2 English Proficiency Test (Eiken Foundation of Japan, n.d.) at the A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as the expected English proficiency level for senior high school graduates. However, less than half (48.70%) of senior high school grad-

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uates are estimated to reach this benchmark. This figure comprises 30.20% who had obtained the CEFR A2-level test score, and the rest were students whose teachers estimated they would reach the CEFR A2 level if tested (MEXT, 2023). In other words, 51.30% were estimated to be at the A1 level, indicating that a significant number of A1-level students enter university every year.

Japanese EFL university students with low English proficiency have not received much attention from previous researchers. For instance, in Sun et al.'s (2021) meta-analysis examining the relationship between reading strategies and reading comprehension, 48 empirical studies ($N = 21,548$) published from 1998 to 2019 were analyzed; however, only one of the studies concerned Japanese EFL university students with proficiency at the CEFR A2-B1 level (Hayashi, 1999).

Previous researchers have called for more studies on reading strategy instruction to help learners, including those with low proficiency, improve their English reading skills (e.g., Chamot, 2008; Grabe & Stoller, 2011; Yapp et al., 2023). Findings support the positive effects of such instruction on the reading comprehension of L2 learners, which is their ability to process, understand, and interpret written text (e.g., Aghaie & Zhang, 2012; Li et al., 2022; Macaro & Erler, 2008; Yapp et al., 2023). In these studies, researchers implemented reading comprehension tests two or three times during their experiments, tracked changes in participants' test scores, and utilized the results to justify improvements in reading comprehension.

As shown in these previous studies, teachers or researchers prepare multiple reading tests, often administered several times during the intervention, to measure improvement in learners' reading performances. The problem here is that if the difficulty of the tests varies considerably, they cannot be considered valid for examining whether students' reading performance has improved. The purpose of this paper is to address this issue by presenting a five-step solution; more specifically, I describe how I created multiple reading tests for low-proficiency university students while ensuring that the results produced by different texts could be validly compared.

Literature Review

Avoiding Testing Threat and Ensuring Equal Difficulty

In pre-post and other repeated-measures research designs, researchers aim to evaluate the effectiveness of an intervention or treatment by

comparing test scores collected at multiple time points (Mackey & Gass, 2015). In the case of reading comprehension tests, if participants' posttest scores are higher than the pretest scores, this result can be interpreted to mean that the intervention improved the participants' reading comprehension. Because the comparison of test scores measured before and after an intervention is essential, Yapp et al. (2023) suggested that "the instruments of measurement must be of equal difficulty, due to the fact that we [researchers] wish to rule out differences in difficulty as a possible explanation for observed differences" (p. 10).

Ensuring that the instruments are of equal difficulty is easy to say but difficult to achieve. The easiest approach might be to use identical test items at each time point, which enables researchers to conduct direct comparisons. However, this approach can cause what is called a testing threat that negatively affects validity (Trochim et al., 2016). For example, by utilizing identical reading test items, participants might remember the content of the pretest reading texts and items, which lowers the difficulty of the posttest. The participants might also remember their answers to the pretest questions and repeat them, which hinders measurement accuracy.

Considering the testing threat described above, researchers should use tests consisting of different texts and questions. However, this approach also has an issue that needs to be addressed. If the difficulty level varies considerably depending on the text and questions used, the test results might not be comparable for examining whether students' reading performance has improved. More specifically, if the posttest is easier for participants than the pretest, they will obtain higher posttest scores, but this result does not necessarily indicate an improvement in their reading comprehension.

Reading Comprehension Tests Used in Previous Studies

Researchers of prior studies have utilized various types of reading comprehension tests in pre-post or repeated-measures research designs. According to Grabe and Yamashita (2022), both standardized assessment instruments and researcher-developed measures can be used for research purposes. Still, as far as previous reading strategy studies targeting junior college or university students are concerned, researchers have frequently used standardized English tests. For instance, Yapp et al. (2023) used the Cambridge Advanced English (CAE) reading comprehension tests (Cambridge University Press &

Assessments, n.d.) for first-year university students (aged 17–22) in the Netherlands whose English proficiency was at the CEFR B2 level. Shih and Reynolds (2018) used the intermediate level of the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT), estimated as the CEFR B1 level by the Language Training and Testing Center (L TTC, n.d.), for Taiwanese first-year junior college students (aged 16–17). Li et al. (2022) used the reading comprehension section of the College English Test Band 4, which is a national standardized test delivered by the National College English Testing Committee (Cheng & Curtis, 2010), for first-year Chinese university EFL students (aged 17–21). In the Japanese context, Hayashi (1999) used the scores of the TOEFL Institutional Testing Program (TOEFL ITP®; ETS, n.d.) for Japanese second-year university students (their estimated ages were 18–20). Their pretest TOEFL ITP® scores ranged from 451 to 497, which is regarded as intermediate English proficiency (i.e., CEFR A2 to B1 level).

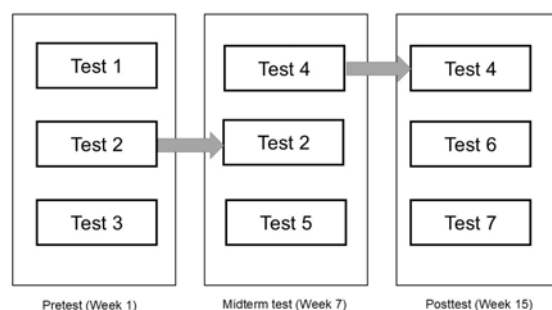
The use of standardized tests is considered reasonable because they are “far more constrained by concerns of validity, reliability, time, cost, usability, and consequence” (Grabe & Yamashita, 2022, p. 465). However, Grabe and Yamashita also emphasized that standardized tests and their tasks are not necessarily valid for populations at much higher and lower proficiency levels. Indeed, considering that 51.30% of Japanese senior high school graduates are at the CEFR A1 level (MEXT, 2023) and that many Japanese university students find it difficult to keep up in their English classes due to their lack of basic English skills, standardized tests might not always function well, especially for low-proficiency students. In other words, standardized tests, such as those employed in prior studies, are too difficult for low-proficiency learners, preventing them from demonstrating improvements in reading comprehension over the course. This problem highlights the need for tailored assessments. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how to create valid reading comprehension tests while avoiding a testing threat and ensuring equal difficulty.

A Proposed Five-Step Method for Creating Reading Comprehension Tests

To illustrate this method, I present a detailed example using the following context: assessing reading comprehension changes among low-proficiency Japanese EFL university students (CEFR A1 level, typically aged 18–22) enrolled in a compulsory 15-week English reading course (90 minutes per week). The assessment design involves administering reading comprehension tests at three time points—Week 1 (pretest), Week 7 (midterm test),

and Week 15 (posttest)—to measure improvement over the semester (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Reading Comprehension Tests



Note. Tests 2 and 4 are used for anchoring.

As Figure 1 shows, the testing process involves three phases: the pretest, the midterm test, and the posttest, each with a set of three reading passages and comprehension questions. The pretest (Tests 1, 2, and 3) is administered in Week 1, the midterm test (Tests 2, 4, and 5) is administered in Week 7, and the posttest (Tests 4, 6, and 7) is administered in Week 15. Tests 2 and 4 are used twice as part of a Rasch item anchoring technique called common-item linking (Bond et al., 2021) using the Rasch model (Rasch, 1960) to enable the difficulty estimates of two different sets of items (e.g., the pretest and midterm test) to be plotted on a single measurement scale. The anchoring technique is described in detail in Step 5 below.

Step 1: Selecting the Reading Passages Used for the Tests

The reading passages on each test were taken from *Climate Change* (Newbolt, 2009), a Stage 2 book in the *Oxford Bookworms Library*, a series of graded readers published by Oxford University Press. These books are categorized into seven levels, from Starter to Stage 6, corresponding to CEFR levels, IELTS band scores, and the grades of the Eiken English Proficiency Test in Japan (Oxford University Press, n.d.). The Stage 2 books are at the CEFR A2 level and the Eiken Pre-2 Grade English Proficiency Test—the benchmark of MEXT’s (2023) survey on the English proficiency of senior high school graduates. Burrows (2012) suggested that expository passages are “deemed appropriate for the types of questions introduced on the reading comprehension test” (p. 103). Following this suggestion, among

the Stage 2 books in this graded readers series, seven passages (Table 1) were chosen from *Climate Change* because they are expository passages. In addition, the topic of climate change is considered familiar to Japanese students regardless of gender or major.

Table 1

Seven Passages Used for Tests 1 to 7

Test	Title	Pages
1	Getting warmer	8–11
2	Wetter—and drier	12–16
3	Extreme weather	17–19
4	How bad will it get?	24–27
5	Is it all bad?	28–31
6	Carbon	32–34
7	What are our governments doing?	35–38

Note. The seven passages come from Newbolt (2009).

Step 2: Analyzing and Adjusting the Lexical and Readability Level of the Passages

After the seven passages shown in Table 1 were chosen, the difficulty level of each passage was controlled in terms of the number of running words (tokens), text readability, text complexity, vocabulary frequency, and lexical diversity (Table 2). Readability estimates based on the Flesch-Kincaid scale were produced using a function in Microsoft Word. The Rasch-based lexile text measures, which show the difficulty of a reading text, were produced by employing the Lexile Text Analyzer (MetaMetrics, n.d.).

Vocabulary frequency was checked using the New Word Level Checker (NWLC; Mizumoto, 2021) with the Scale of English Word Knowledge—Japanese (SEWK-J) for the following three reasons. First, the NWLC, together with SEWK-J, is optimized for Japanese EFL learning contexts (Mizumoto et al., 2021), which fits the educational context of this study. Second, the SEWK-J is designed to represent learners' actual vocabulary knowledge. Mizumoto et al. suggested that “when matching learners with texts, we should consider basing test and lexical profilers on what learners *do* know, rather than...what learners *should* know” (p. 10). The purpose of analyzing the texts is to gauge what vocabulary the students comprehend; therefore, the SEWK-J fits the aim of

this study. Third, by using the SEWK-J, the vocabulary can be analyzed using finer 500-word bands compared to the 1,000-word bands used by other profilers, such as VocabProfilers (Cobb, n.d.) and the Lexical Frequency Profile (LFP; Laufer & Nation, 1995). These finer word frequency bands allow researchers to equalize vocabulary difficulty across multiple reading passages more precisely.

Moreover, the Moving Average Type-Token Ratio (MATTR; Covington & McFall, 2010) and the Measure of Textual Lexical Diversity (MTLD; McCarthy & Jarvis, 2010) were also measured by employing the Tool for the Automatic Analysis of Lexical Diversity (TAALED, version 1.4.1) (Kyle et al., 2021). The MATTR is the average of all type-token ratio (TTR) values across the text by using a 50-word window, whereas MTLD represents the average number of words required for the text to reach a point of TTR stabilization (Covington & McFall, 2010; Kyle et al., 2021; McCarthy & Jarvis, 2010). Higher scores of MATTR and MTLD indicate greater lexical diversity.

As a result of these analyses, it was found that Tests 2 and 5 initially appeared easier than the other five tests. More specifically, Tests 2 and 5 had Flesch-Kincaid readability scores of 5.20 and 5.50, respectively, whereas those of the other five tests ranged from 6.30 to 7.50. Test 2 also had lower Lexile ranges (410–600) compared to the other tests. Moreover, Tests 2 and 5 include higher percentages of high-frequency vocabulary (81.97% and 82.40% in the L1 band, respectively). Based on these multiple indicators falling outside the range of the other tests, I modified Tests 2 and 5. These modifications included using lower-frequency vocabulary, employing synonyms, and making sentences longer with conjunctions. After the modifications, the difficulty of the seven test forms was similar (Table 2).

Step 3: Creating Question Items Based on the Difficulty Level of Questions

After controlling the difficulty level of each passage, I created eight comprehension questions for each passage; a total of 24 questions were included in the pretest, midterm test, and posttest. Lumley (1993) suggested that the difficulty of comprehension questions varies depending on the type of question asked. More specifically, the questions asking learners to identify explicitly stated information in a text are easier than those asking the learners to identify and synthesize ideas or to draw an inference. Based on the difficulty of particular item types suggested by Lumley (1993) and Burrows (2012), eight questions were written that covered the following four types of questions:

- Two questions asking for specific information clearly stated in the reading passage (e.g., *wh*-questions starting with *When* and *Where*).
 - Two questions asking for less specific information stated in the reading passage (e.g., *wh*-questions starting with *Why* and *What causes*).
 - Two questions asking for information not directly stated in the reading passage so that students are required to draw an inference.
- Two questions asking for the main idea of individual paragraphs or the whole reading passage.
- Step 4: Conducting Alpha and Beta Testing**

After creating the test items, prototyping was pursued. Fulcher and Davidson (2007) explained that prototyping consists of two parts: alpha testing conducted by experts, and beta testing by a group of

Table 2
Results of Analyzing the Passages Used for the Seven Tests

Original	Test 1	Test 2		Test 3	Test 4	Test 5		Test 6	Test 7
		Original	Modified			Original	Modified		
Flesch-Kincaid readability ^a	7.50	5.20	6.30	7.30	7.50	5.50	6.30	6.80	7.50
Lexile Text Analyzer ^b	610-800	410-600	610-800	810-1,000	810-1,000	610-800	610-800	610-800	810-1,000
New Word Level Checker ^c									
Token (Frequency)	577	588	603	570	601	551	598	563	572
SEWK-J (Freq. %)	L1 (1-500)	73.31	81.97	81.09	72.63	74.54	82.40	80.94	77.80
	L2 (501-1,000)	6.07	7.31	7.96	9.47	10.82	7.44	8.19	5.33
	L3 (1,001-1,500)	3.12	1.02	1.33	4.04	2.00	3.63	3.18	4.09
	L4 (1,501-2,000)	0.52	0.85	0.83	0.88	0.50	0.54	1.00	0.71
	L5 (2,001-2,500)	1.73	1.53	1.66	0.18	0.67	0.91	0.84	2.49
	L6 (2,501-3,000)	0.00	0.51	0.50	0.18	0.00	0.18	0.17	0.00
	L7 (3,001-3,500)	0.35	0.51	0.50	0.18	0.17	0.00	0.00	0.00
	L8 (3,501-4,000)	0.00	0.34	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.17	0.00
	L9 (4,001-4,500)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.18	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	L10 (4,500-5,000)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.33	0.00	0.00	0.18
Over 10	0.35	0.85	0.83	0.70	0.50	0.00	0.33	0.18	0.52
Proper noun & No.	14.56	5.10	4.81	11.58	10.48	4.90	5.18	9.24	13.64
TAALED ^d									
MATTR	.67		.67	.71	.70		.73	.68	.73
MTLD	34.66		31.44	44.44	44.59		48.32	37.63	49.03

Note.

^a Flesch-Kincaid Readability Statistics were obtained by Microsoft Word function.

^b Due to the word limit of Lexile Text Analyzer (MetaMetrics, n.d.), the first 500 words of each text were analyzed.

^c The number of tokens (running words) and vocabulary frequency are analyzed by using the New Word Level Checker (NWLC; Mizumoto, 2021) with the Scale of English Word Knowledge—Japanese (SEWK-J).

^d TAALED = the Tool for the Automatic Analysis of Lexical Diversity (Kyle et al., 2021); MATTR = Moving Average Type-Token Ratio (50-word window); MTLD = Measure of Textual Lexical Diversity

test-takers regarded as representatives of the future test-takers. First, alpha testing was conducted to judge whether the test items were adequate and that there were no problems in terms of context, correct responses, and linguistic sophistication. In alpha testing, a small number of test items are usually required (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007); however, to enhance the validity of all the questions, I asked two Japanese native speakers who teach English to Japanese university students to check whether any questions were unclear and whether the difficulty level increased from Question 1 to Question 8 in each test. Both teachers confirmed that Japanese students would clearly understand all test items and that test items become more difficult from Question 1 to Question 8.

Second, beta testing was conducted to determine whether test-takers understood each item appropriately, whether any unexpected or illogical responses occurred, and whether any items required revision or elimination. Thirty Japanese EFL university students at the CEFR A1 level completed Tests 1 to 7. The data obtained from these 30 students were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, exported to Winsteps 4.4.7 (Linacre, 2022), and analyzed using the Rasch rating scale model (Andrich, 1978).

The Rasch rating scale model (Andrich, 1978) can be used to examine whether test items function properly and whether any items are candidates for modification or for being discarded (Bond et al., 2021). Therefore, the Rasch item reliability estimate and the fit of each item to the Rasch model were inspected for the pretest, midterm test, and posttest. Fisher (2007) established the following criteria: item reliability estimates are classified as excellent ($> .94$), very good (.91–.94), good (.81–.90), or fair (.67–.80); whereas item infit mean square (MNSQ) values are considered excellent (0.77–1.30), very good (0.71–1.40), or good (0.50–2.00).

According to Fisher's (2007) criteria, the item reliability estimate and the fit of each item were both evaluated as good in all the pre-, midterm, and posttests (Table 3). The item reliability estimate of

the pretest was .84 and the infit MNSQ statistics ranged from 0.65 to 1.37, both of which were considered good. The item reliability estimate of the midterm test was .80 and the infit MNSQ statistics ranged from 0.65 to 1.43, which was also evaluated as good fit to the Rasch model. The posttest had an item reliability estimate of .80 and the infit MNSQ statistics ranged from 0.68 to 1.35, also suggesting good fit. Overall, the results indicated that the three tests functioned appropriately for measuring students' reading comprehension.

Step 5: Employing Rasch Analysis to Ensure Comparable Difficulty Estimates

As shown in Figure 1, a pretest, midterm test, and posttest will be conducted in the context described above. Each test consists of three reading passages with eight questions each for a total of 24 questions. The pretest is made up of Tests 1, 2, and 3, the midterm test includes Tests 2, 4, and 5, and the posttest is made up of Tests 4, 6, and 7.

The questions accompanying Tests 2 and 4 serve as anchor items (Bond et al., 2021) that ensure the comparability of the person ability estimates produced by each test form. When students complete the three reading tests, the difficulty of each test inevitably differs; thus, more than a simple comparison of the raw scores is needed to adequately estimate changes in reading comprehension over time. The Rasch rating scale model (Andrich, 1978) will be employed to address this issue because it provides person estimates, difficulty threshold estimates for each item, and a single "rating scale threshold structure that is common for all of the items" (Bond et al., 2021, p. 97). In other words, by utilizing difficulty estimates obtained from the Rasch analysis instead of the raw test scores, the students' pretest, midterm test, and posttest results can be placed on the same measurement scale for comparison.

The Rasch model was used to determine whether the questions on Tests 2 and 4 can serve as anchor items. For example, to examine whether Test 2

Table 3

Item Reliability and Infit MNSQ Values of the Pretest, Midterm, and Posttests

Test	Tests included	Item reliability	Infit MNSQ
Pretest	Tests 1, 2, and 3	.84	0.65 to 1.37
Midterm test	Tests 2, 4, and 5	.80	0.65 to 1.43
Posttest	Tests 4, 6, and 7	.80	0.68 to 1.35

Note. Tests 2 and 4 serve as anchoring items. MNSQ = mean square

items function appropriately as anchors, I obtained the difficulty estimates for the Test 2 questions from the initial pretest analysis (see Step 4 above) and utilized those difficulty estimates for the midterm test analysis using the Winsteps IAFIL (Item Anchor File) command (Linacre, 2025, p. 143). Researchers have pointed out that displacement values should be less than 0.50 logits to ensure that the test items are functioning adequately well as anchors (O'Neill et al., 2013). As Tables 4 and 5 show, the displacement values of all eight items of Test 2 ranged from -0.07 to 0.00, and those of Test 4 ranged from -0.05 to -0.02. These results confirmed that the items on Tests 2 and 4 work well as anchors.

Using the five-step sequence as described above, teachers and researchers can equalize the difficulty of reading passages and test items as well as check the validity of test items. With a comprehensive inspection and assurance of validity, the set of reading comprehension tests is now ready for utilization in a repeated-measures design.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to demonstrate how to create multiple reading comprehension tests with the same difficulty to measure learners' improvement in pretest-posttest or repeated-measures research designs. The use of standardized

Table 4

Rasch Descriptive Statistics for Test 2 Anchor Items

Item	Rasch measure	SE	Infit MNSQ	Infit ZSTD	Outfit MNSQ	Outfit ZSTD	Displacement
T2Q1	-1.28A	0.56	1.02	0.18	0.93	0.13	-0.06
T2Q2	-2.11A	0.74	1.11	0.38	1.19	0.53	-0.07
T2Q3	-0.99A	0.52	1.02	0.16	1.18	0.49	-0.06
T2Q4	-0.12A	0.44	1.32	1.54	1.78	1.91	-0.03
T2Q5	1.57A	0.42	1.07	0.46	1.01	0.13	0.02
T2Q6	0.24A	0.42	1.06	0.40	0.92	-0.19	-0.02
T2Q7	0.74A	0.41	0.80	-1.27	0.71	-1.29	0.00
T2Q8	0.57A	0.41	1.06	0.40	1.03	0.19	0.00

Note. T2Q1 stands for Test 2 Question 1. MNSQ = mean square; ZSTD = z-standardized. The "A" in the Rasch measure column indicates anchor items.

Table 5

Rasch Descriptive Statistics for Test 4 Anchor Items

Item	Rasch measure	SE	Infit MNSQ	Infit ZSTD	Outfit MNSQ	Outfit ZSTD	Displacement
T4Q1	-2.96A	1.01	1.03	0.33	1.10	0.54	-0.05
T4Q2	-0.57A	0.47	0.98	-0.02	0.79	-0.37	-0.05
T4Q3	0.39A	0.42	0.81	-1.07	0.76	-0.94	-0.04
T4Q4	0.39A	0.42	0.71	-1.72	0.63	-1.61	-0.04
T4Q5	-0.35A	0.45	0.85	-0.69	0.72	-0.69	-0.05
T4Q6	0.89A	0.41	1.14	0.81	1.16	0.75	-0.02
T4Q7	-0.16A	0.44	0.74	-1.37	0.60	-1.26	-0.04
T4Q8	0.21A	0.42	1.21	1.12	1.24	0.90	-0.04

Note. T4Q1 stands for Test 4 Question 1. MNSQ = mean square; ZSTD = z-standardized. The "A" in the Rasch measure column indicates anchor items.

English tests is common (e.g., Hayashi, 1999; Li et al., 2022; Shih & Reynolds, 2018; Yapp et al., 2023). However, when assessing learners with low English proficiency, standardized tests are often too difficult, which makes teacher- and researcher-developed tests necessary.

This paper addresses this issue by describing a method that enhances the validity of self-made reading comprehension tests through a five-step sequence:

1. Select the reading passages used for the tests.
2. Analyze and adjust the lexical and readability level of the passages.
3. Create question items based on the difficulty level of questions.
4. Conduct alpha testing with experts and beta testing with future test-taking populations.
5. Employ Rasch analysis to ensure comparable difficulty estimates.

When assessing learners with low-English proficiency, teacher- or researcher-developed measures can be more appropriate than standardized tests (Grabe & Yamashita, 2022). However, teachers and researchers must be careful to account for differences in the difficulty of the reading passages and test items caused by varying lexical and readability levels because results based on the tests at different difficulty levels are not valid estimates of improvement in students' reading performances. This five-step sequence can provide teachers and researchers with a practical method for assessing learners' reading comprehension more accurately.

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An Interview With Dr. Avril Haye-Matsui

Risa Ikeda

Yamaguchi University

Welcome to the final interview of 2025! We are pleased to bring you an interview with Dr. Avril Haye-Matsui, who holds a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics from Ochanomizu University, which she completed in 2022. She specializes in social

justice issues in English language teaching, especially those related to intersectionality and teacher identity (Haye-Matsui, 2018, 2020). Her doctoral research discussed the identity development of women of the African diaspora (2022). Dr. Haye-Matsui's work extends to the larger community outside of teaching and research. She is actively involved in organizing women's empowerment groups in Japan and volunteers to give workshops hosted by Nagoya City for dealing with microaggressions in the workplace. She is currently an associate professor at Aichi Prefectural University. She was interviewed by Dr. Risa Ikeda, who has taught English in the U.S., Oman, and Japan for a total of over 18 years. She completed a Ph.D. in East Asian Studies from Yamaguchi University in 2023. Her research interests include language ideologies in English teaching in Japan, study abroad in Asia, and identities of teachers with multilingual and transnational backgrounds. She is currently an associate professor in the Faculty of Global and Science Studies at Yamaguchi University. So, without further ado, to the interview!

Dr. Avril Haye-Matsui gave her plenary, *We Are All Diverse: Celebrating Diversity in English Language Teaching*, at the JALT2024 conference. In her talk, she conveyed the message that we all need to recognize and celebrate our own diverse identities as well as those of our students and the people in our communities. As a novice advocate of diversity myself, having recently joined the JALT Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee, I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to interview Dr. Haye-Matsui.



Risa Ikeda: *Thank you for agreeing to the interview! It is definitely a great honor. I will do my best to convey the positive energy and essence of the plenary to readers of the TLT. What would you say were some of the main points you wanted the audience to take away from your talk?*

Avril Haye-Matsui: I wanted to expand the ideas of what diversity is. I feel that I'm still expanding mine. I'm not an expert on everything to do with diversity, but I want to learn more. It's a little bit like what Ryuko Kubota said in her plenary (*given at the same conference and covered in a previous issue of TLT*) about our responsibility to foster peace, build bridges between people, and break down stereotypes. My goal was to discuss how diversity issues are not just for people who look like me, who are minorities. We are all diverse. We all have different aspects and identity factors, and we should be proud of those things. Then, we can help our students to also be proud of those things. We also need to recognize we've really come a long way in this organization, but native speakerism, sexism, and racism—it still exists. We've come this far forward, and we want to keep the impetus going. We want to keep moving forward. We don't want to go back.

I don't want people to think that, well, our conference theme was around diversity, we're there, we're finished. We've come a long way to celebrate that, but there's still work to be done. So, let's all do it together!

In the plenary, you told your story about how 25 years ago in the U.K. as a child, people would tell you to "go home, to your country" when actually you lived there and were walking home from school. Then you said, "we've come a long way" in these 25 years. Can you explain more about what progress we have made in your view? What changes were you referring to?

When I think about the U.K., I think that for small children walking home from school, people don't shout "Go home!" to them anymore because the society is more multicultural. We have a lot more people of color in positions of power. However, there are still people who support the far right. There are still those racist incidents that happen. There are still microaggressions at work. In public

places or in social situations, that still happens. But people are speaking up, and that's great.

When I first started coming to JALT around 2007 or 2008, I did not see a lot of diversity, and I didn't feel very included. I didn't feel that there were a lot of women, let alone people of color. I felt like I was in a sea of little white males in suits. I felt condescended to, and I didn't feel like I had a voice or a real place in the organization. I didn't really think it was for me because I didn't see anyone like me doing anything. I didn't really feel part of the group. I'd be talking to a friend, maybe a male friend from work, and another male would come up and just talk to that male. That sort of thing happened a lot, and I didn't feel like this was my place at all.

At the time, I wasn't working at university either, so to me it seemed like there were a lot of people working at university and not really providing support for what I was doing at the time. I enjoyed some of the workshops and presentations and looking at the publishers. But I didn't feel like I was really making connections. It wasn't really until I joined GALE (*Gender Awareness in Language Education SIG*) some years later that I felt like, okay, there are some women around. I was in GILE (*Global Issues in Language Education SIG*), and I enjoyed their publications and some of the topics that people were researching, but I was still learning to be a researcher at that time, and I was kind of an observer. But I did feel very welcome, especially by GALE. That kind of changed after a few years, especially once I started working at university.

I feel like the conference this year is completely the opposite of where it was. I feel a lot more comfortable here now. I see more diversity around, just looking at the workshops and the presentations. It feels a lot more inclusive, and that message of belonging feels a lot stronger. I see more women taking an active role in the leadership and in planning the conferences. It just feels like a very different organization to what it was when I first started coming. I think in many organizations, the word "inclusive" is just a word that's thrown around, but I do feel that we are more inclusive this year. Still, I'm sure there's room for improvement! There always is.

With that background in mind, could you recap the gist of the plenary for TLT readers?

I wanted to tell the message that we are all diverse. It's not a "them" and "us." When I was writing the plenary and finished the first draft, I remember thinking that I spent a bit too much time talking about native speakerism. But it's such a critical thing. I think it's downplayed as a kind of, "Oh, it can't be helped, it's Japan." Yet, it *can* be helped.

I really wanted to push that message that we need to take positive action towards native speakerism. Perhaps it's some way to make up for my past when I didn't speak up because I didn't feel it was safe to speak up, and I traded on the privilege of my passport. I'd never felt comfortable, but at the time, I was young and didn't know what to do. Now I've got more knowledge and experience. We really have to do something about native speakerism. I wanted people to realize just how much that impacts all teachers in this field.

I also wanted people to realize that students are not this homogenous mass. There are not just my Japanese students in the class. Students are also diverse. They are having amazing experiences and opportunities interacting with different people. This is not just from around the world, but also from different socioeconomic groups who have different types of families to their own. Young people need a space where they feel they can express themselves and where they're not going to be judged. I want my class to be like that. So, I suppose the main points were that we are diverse, native speakerism is problematic, we need to support our students who are also diverse, and we can all take action.

Speaking of how we can all take action, you had some illustrative examples of how we might do this which I thought were very clear and accessible. This made your message very powerful. (In her plenary, Dr. Haye-Matsui had many anecdotes from her research informants, such as a pre-school teacher who likened flowers of different colors to the beauty of having various skin tones in families).

I think the main one within English language education is that we're going to hear the term *native speaker* at some point probably every week, especially when a new position is coming up. At such times, we do have the opportunity to talk about it. We can say this is discriminatory, and these are the reasons why. In my own university, we had this three-pronged attack. We first said this is discriminatory by showing JALT's policy for not putting jobs on their website that have native speaker as a term and posted that in our university.

Just being able to explain in casual conversations why it's discrimination is also something because people don't actually know why. Even if in our little academic organizations we know, in our workplaces, they don't actually realize it's discriminatory. To many people, it's just considered a fact that native speakers are better English teachers than non-native speakers. They think it's actually common sense. If we don't speak up, we're never going to have the opportunity to debunk that, even though it's completely untrue.

It's also about finding a way within your organization to talk to people in positions of power about why this term is discriminatory. About why, when you're interviewing a teacher from America, and a teacher from the Philippines who is a much better teacher, yet they want to hire the person from America, and saying this is actually wrong. There are ways that you can do it. I'm not always successful at this, but I try to do this without alienating people. You can't just say to people, you're racist, and that's it because then communication shuts down within your organization. It's being able to approach people in multiple ways that don't alienate them by asking them the right questions, giving them a bit more information, or offering another perspective.

This will depend on each situation, but I find that this kind of information might reach people who are more socially conscious to begin with, but not others. What can we say to convince people who will still not realize it's a problem?

Okay, first of all, what kinds of people are they? Are they people like my fellow English people from the U.K., or is this my boss, head of my department, or an eminent Japanese professor? What I would say to those two types of people is quite different. For my boss, I would go to her office and ask if I could talk to her. I would say that I'm a little uncomfortable with this term. I might show her a research paper and explain why. I would tell her, "I know you don't really think this is a problem, but I'm just going to ask you to think about it, and let's try and talk about it some more another time." I'm not going to say, "You are wrong!" and "We cannot do this!" I'd never do that. That would be disrespectful. She's my boss, and I think she's really lovely.

Suppose I'd like to open that dialogue with someone who was a colleague, who is from the same country as me. Again, I'm going to say that we really shouldn't be using that term. I would ask, "Do you understand your privilege? Let's have this discussion."

There're two types of people that we work with. There're the people who will listen and the people who will not. The people who will not, just leave them, because it's going to cause you more harm. Go to the people who will listen, who will be allies, who are open to the discussion. You go to those people. Thinking of people that I've worked with in the past, generally people are not bad. People are quite reasonable. They want to work in a nice, positive environment. I don't think I've worked with anyone in the last ten years or so that's been truly evil. I have in the past, but not for a very long time. The problem is, if it's somebody I'm working with, perhaps someone who is from the same country as me or another Inner

Circle country, maybe they don't realize their privilege. And I'm going to suggest that they read things that I'm going to talk to them about. If they're willing to listen, it means that we have become friends, and we'll have that open dialogue.

It comes back to what May Kyaw Oo said in the DEI Committee workshop (*held at the same conference, where it was discussed that discriminatory acts cause harm and must be actively challenged, not ignored*). In my situation, if discrimination was taking place, I would prefer people to speak up. Again, not in a way that alienates people, especially if you have to work with them, but I'm going to speak up and say that this isn't right, and explain why it's not right. I find that people, if they're nice, and if they like you, they're open to listening. But if they're not, then don't waste your energy. I mean you can still try with those people who don't want to listen. But I think your energy is better spent on the ones that do want to hear, that do value your opinion.

Have any of your research informants who come from the diaspora or who are non-native speakers hit road-blocks where they're in a situation in which no one will try to understand them, and they were discouraged?

Generally, if they've been dissatisfied with the work situation, they just exercise their agency and move and find a better one. Anecdotally, there was someone who was approached by a coworker who said to her, "I'm doing a research project on non-native English-speaking teachers". She's from Jamaica, so she was like, well, "I am a native English speaker". Then, he said, "Oh, but I thought you were from Jamaica". And she was like, "You know nothing about my country!" She was quite offended by that. So, she told him, "Come back and talk to me when you've learned something about my country," and she kind of was very sharp with him. But in that situation, it worked. He went off, and he came back later and apologized. So, it really depends on the situation.

But if people are in an unpleasant working environment where people are not going to listen to them because they're a black woman or a non-native speaker, then they're just going to leave and go and work somewhere else. Some people you cannot change, unless they want to change.

So the strategy is to find people who will be allies, and they are out there.

They are out there. One thing that happened to one of my informants when she first came to Japan from England—this is not a good story. She worked at an English conversation school, and it was before her visa had been converted from a tourist visa to a working visa. Her hours got longer and longer. At the

school, there was another girl from Lithuania. There was her and there was a guy from America who, she later found out, was paid more and was treated better. And he worked less. At first, she [my informant] was actually treated really well because she was from England. But as time went on, she noticed that the girl from Lithuania was being bullied by the owner, and she tried to stand up for her. Then, the owner turned it around and started to bully them both. It reached the point where she walked into work one day and the owner said, “I don’t think you’ve worked enough this week, so we’re not going to pay you.” And she said, well, “I have worked. I don’t care what you think. I need you to pay me.”

It became this awful situation. The next day, she was kind of hijacked by the owner and four workers. They literally manhandled her out of the school. And they were recording her and shaking the camera and saying things like “Don’t hurt the children! Don’t hurt the children!” It was awful. And she still didn’t get her money, so she went to the police, but the police, of course, they can’t really do anything because they haven’t actually harmed her. Eventually, she phoned the school and said, “I’m coming for my money.” She went, and the American guy was there. He opened the door like he’s the protector. The owner of the school pretended in front of the students that she was really scared while she gave her the money, saying “Don’t come back.” That was a terrible situation, and not that long ago.

So that teacher left.

She left. She found a better position. She didn’t go back to England straight away. She stayed in Japan because she liked Japan. She found a better position teaching young kids. But she does think that it was the intersection of her gender, as a woman, and as a black woman, and also the fact that she didn’t have a visa, as in they were holding that over her, black-mailing her. Those sorts of things in the industry, they really should not be happening anymore. Not in this day and age.

In the plenary, you talked about the idea of there being a “lesser linguistic evil” (Haye-Matsui, 2022), where your informant (an experienced, female teacher from Jamaica) was able to keep her job because she was still more favorable than her alternative (a Japanese-American male teacher who didn’t “look foreign enough” to the parents of a Japanese student). In your story, we’re relieved for your informant, but I couldn’t help wondering what happens to the other teacher with even lesser status. I understood the point of your talk was that we are different in different ways, and in the end, we’re trying to bring everyone together. If you establish the concept of a “lesser evil,” that means there is an even

more poorly treated person. How do you bring the people who are further marginalized back into the picture?

The idea of making judgements based on a “lesser linguistic evil” was not according to me. That was according to the actions of the Japanese student’s father in the story. I feel that what we’ve been doing in the last decade or even longer, is that people are writing about their experiences, talking about them, making the stories more known, and people are speaking up. It’s the same for the Japanese-American male teacher in that school, who was also a trainer, a really respected teacher. Since that time, there’s been a lot of research on the narratives of teachers from different backgrounds. I think that when we speak up, it gives us more power. It also makes people feel more seen, and it makes people feel heard. It makes them stronger to actually speak up in their place of work and to say no, or if things aren’t working, then to go on to something else. I think that’s really, really great.

I’ve had a Japanese female friend who went to America for a really long time. She went to university in America, did her master’s there, lived there for almost twenty years then came back to Japan and applied for a job at a university. And the university said, “We understand you’re a great teacher, but we don’t want you to teach because this position is really for a native speaker.” What she did is she didn’t go away quietly. She went home and wrote this really scathing letter of how she is a perfect model for these students. She shares their cultural background, knows what they’re going through, and also knows what they need to do to become better English speakers. She told them, “I understand these students, and it is discriminatory for you to refuse to hire me on that basis. It’s not about my qualifications. It’s not about my experience. It’s because I’m not a native speaker.” When she wrote that, she thought she wasn’t going to get the job and went ahead and wrote everything she was thinking about. She sent it to them. Then she ended up getting the job. They read the letter, and they were like, “Oh, okay, she’s right.” And she got the job.

I think when we take those chances. It may not always work. But it’s going to work at some point. If we stay quiet, it’s not going to work. And that’s how we stop having these hierarchies where people are told to be put in their place. We bring everybody up by speaking up. Everybody needs to tell their stories. I don’t want to make it sound like it’s easy because it’s not, but everyone needs to feel empowered to fight back in some way, or to get that support.

I have not always been like this. If I were an ALT (assistant language teacher), and I didn’t have a lot of power in my job, no agency in my classroom, maybe I wouldn’t fight back. However, now I know

that I could have fought back when I was in that position. And I think that's what I want the younger and less experienced teachers to know. You don't have to take that.

So, your message applies to both those considered as the "lesser linguistic evil" as well as the relatively more valued "linguistic evil" person?

It applies to everybody. It really does. This year I was really fortunate to go to a language conference in New Zealand, called NZALT—the New Zealand Association of Language Teachers. I went to that and did my little presentation. Afterwards, two Chinese high school teachers came to me, and they said, "We experience so many of these things here in New Zealand. But no one has ever talked about it. So, thank you for doing that." And that made me really happy, not happy that they were going through those things, of course, but happy that my research was relevant to people who are not black women, but othered in some way in their workplace or in the country that they live.

I see. Perhaps I can ask you this final question. You already talked about specific actions we can take, by speaking up and by telling our stories. What do you think, then, does it take overall to move toward holistic social change, as we talked about toward the beginning of this interview? We can reach out to those people who are willing to make those smaller changes or actions, and these people can try to come together and fight for change. But I think maybe a larger synergy or force is needed to propel us into the future. How would you describe the potential for these bigger changes? I'm not saying I think we can solve everything, just your insights in the broader sense.

It takes perseverance. And it takes support. For me, I think what really propelled me forward in the last year or so is having support from a community of like-minded educators committed to diversity and social justice. This community gives me this energy, and I think we all come together. Sometimes we commiserate, and we also celebrate. I just know that every time I post something online, someone is going to post something supportive. Or I can read something by someone else, even if I haven't posted for a few days. I feel like it's really made the biggest difference because when we are in some kind of fight or suffering from microaggressions again, or repeatedly facing the same kind of condescending attitude, we can just feel like we're so alone, and we get so tired sometimes. And I was really, really tired. I thought, I just can't. But then when you have other people who are in the fight with you, supporting you, it's like, okay, I can go on and I can keep doing this because it's perseverance that is going to propel us forward.

It's the strength of community and just knowing that you're not alone. I don't know if that's practical advice, but it's what we all need. And without it, you just can't go on. Community is what we all need.

That's a really important message to remember that it starts with each person. When you were on stage during the plenary, I felt it was mind-changing for us in the audience to have someone who represents diversity and embodies multiple minoritized identities talk from the ground level and focus on the personal lives of individuals, rather than prioritize theoretical concepts and talk from a top-down perspective. To clarify, you mean that it's important and necessary for each person to find their community and sense of belonging.

Definitely. We have to do this together.

There's no element that exists in an abstract world that will propel us into the future. Your message is that it starts with each one of us, and that is the core of the energy that is creating change and progress.

Yes, community is the core of the energy. I mean yes, it starts with you. But it's like I said, you have to find your people. Find your people and like-minded individuals. That's going to push you forward. Because sometimes we need those people to commiserate with as well, and to just give us the strength to continue.

Can you reiterate your advice for those people who might be feeling like they have not found that community? What is your advice for them?

Goodness. Find it! It can be difficult sometimes to put yourself out there but go to conferences and approach people. Look for people who are researching the same things as you. The people whose papers that you really like reading, contact those people. Tell your story, and other people will come to you and say that it really resonates with them. Do a presentation. Do a workshop. And people will find you.

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Lorraine Kipling & Caroline Hutchinson

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>

Hello, and welcome to My Share, where members of the TLT community share their original and accessible classroom activities. As usual, our contributors have provided a selection of activities intended to help build learners' skills and confidence. We hope you find them of use or inspiration!

Firstly, Michael Lin uses name cards as a prompt to encourage interaction during self-introductions. Next, my co-editor Caroline Hutchinson has adapted the 'Diamond Nine' ranking system to support students in evaluating learning goals and negotiating priorities. After that, Benjamin Thomas uses realia as a prompt for descriptive and speculative discussion. And finally, Sophie Otsuru outlines a simple and engaging method of counting a rhythm to incorporate unstressed words.

We welcome submissions from new and experienced writers, and are here to support you through the editing process. If you are interested in getting involved, please take a look at our Submission Guidelines (which you will find with our digital edition on the TLT site at <https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/myshare/home>) and feel free to get in touch with us at jaltpubs.tlt.my.share@jalt.org.

— Best wishes, Lorraine

Make a Name Card – Stand-Up Sit-Down

Michael Lin

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Quick Guide

- » **Keywords:** Introductions, name card, group game, pronunciation, interaction
- » **Learner English level:** Elementary
- » **Learner maturity:** University
- » **Preparation time:** 5-10 minutes
- » **Activity time:** 25-30 minutes.
- » **Materials:** Blank A4 paper, markers, pens

Starting the semester with strong student connections helps foster a positive English-learning environment. This self-introduction activity promotes fluency and pronunciation and encourages students to listen and interact with each other. It can also help to lower anxiety and build group rapport, allowing students to engage confidently with each other.

Preparation

Step 1: Prepare A4 sheets of paper for each student.

Step 2: Write a self-introduction script to display during the activity. Number each sentence and leave gaps for personal information. For example:

1. Hello everybody. My name's _____ (First and Last Name).
2. I am _____ years old.
3. I'm from _____ and I live in _____ now.
4. My major is _____.
5. I like _____, _____, and _____.
6. My favorite food is _____.
7. May I sit down? (Yes, you may! / No, you may not.)

For second-year students, you can add the following options:

- This winter vacation, I _____ (Past Tense Sentence).
- This spring, I want/hope to _____ (Future Tense Sentence).

Step 3: Fold a piece of A4 paper to create an example name card with your name and self-introduction using the same script.

Procedure

Step 1: Welcome the students. Explain that they are going to introduce themselves in English using a script.

Step 2: Show the script and explain that students should include this information in their introductions.

Step 3: Put students into groups of four or five and give each student one A4 sheet of paper. Ask them to fold it twice to make a standing name card. Show your example name card and explain that this is where they are going to write their information.

Step 4: On one side of the name card, have students write their first and last names. On the other side, ask them to write their self-introduction using the script and fill in their personal information. Monitor and help with grammar and vocabulary as needed.

Step 5: Using your example script, model two example introductions. First, a poor example (no smile, reading too fast, no eye contact), and then a good example (clear, confident, eye contact, natural rhythm).

Step 6: Ask students what the difference between the two examples is, and elicit the following criteria for a good introduction:

- Smile
- Speak clearly (don't just read)
- Make eye contact
- Pause between first and last name
- Pronounce words correctly

Step 7: Explain the activity rules. Each group will stand in a circle and take turns introducing themselves. Groupmates must listen carefully. After each introduction, the student asks, "May I sit down?" If the criteria are met, the group responds: "Yes, you may!" If not, the group says, "No, you may not!" The student remains standing and tries again later.

Step 8: Demonstrate by giving your full self-introduction. Follow the criteria and share a small piece of personal information to make it feel natural and friendly. At the end, ask the class: "May I sit down?" The class should respond: "Yes, you may!"

Step 9: Give students time to take turns introducing themselves.

Step 10: Continue until all students have introduced themselves and sat down.

Step 11: Mix the groups and repeat the activity until all students have had plenty of practice.

Conclusion

This activity helps students practice introductions, build confidence, and improve pronunciation interactively. It also allows the teacher to assess speaking skills early and efficiently.

Collaborative Learning Goals with 'Diamond Nine'

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Quick Guide

- » **Keywords:** Brainstorming, giving reasons, prioritizing, learning goals
- » **Learner English level:** Pre-intermediate and above
- » **Learner maturity:** University and high school
- » **Preparation time:** 5 minutes
- » **Activity time:** 40-60 minutes
- » **Materials:** Diamond Nine Worksheet (see Appendix) or sticky notes (10-15 per student)

The goal-setting activity asks students to brainstorm learning goals individually, then work in groups to rank their ideas using the diamond nine template (TES, 2024), which is an established approach to negotiating priorities. Negotiating group priorities encourages students to justify their thinking, listen to others, and discuss actively. The activity gives instructors valuable insights into students' motivations, which can inform future lesson planning or course design.

Preparation

Step 1: Preview the diamond nine template (see Appendix) and decide how to share. It can be printed as a handout or displayed on a screen for students to recreate, or students can write each goal on a sticky note and use the notes to form the diamond shape. In this case, prepare 10-15 sticky notes per student.

Step 2: Prepare some examples of language learning goals, such as improving speaking skills for job interviews or improving reading for the TOEIC test (see Appendix for more examples).

Procedure

Step 1: Ask students to think about their language learning goals.

Step 2: Write an example goal on the board, in the format "I want to improve [skill/ language area] for [situation]. For instance, "I want to improve my speaking for job interviews".

Step 3: Point to the [skill/ language area] section. Elicit other ways to complete it, such as writing, reading, listening, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.

Step 4: Point to the [situation] section. Elicit other situations in which students want to use the language, such as speaking to friends or getting a high TOEIC score.

Step 5: Ask students to work individually to write ten goals, or things they hope to improve in class. If using sticky notes, students should write on these; otherwise, they should make notes on paper. Monitor and help, as necessary.

Step 6: Put students into pairs or groups of 3-4. Tell them to explain why they chose each idea, and why it is important to them. Use the example on the board to elicit phrases for giving reasons: “I think this is important because I want to get a job in the travel industry using English.”

Step 7: Give students time to share their ideas.

Step 8: Introduce the diamond nine framework (if using a printed handout, distribute it now). Explain that groups will decide the most important learning goal and write it at the top of the diamond. Next, they choose two ideas that are quite important, and three ideas that are of moderate importance. Then, they add two less important ideas below, and finish with their “least important” idea at the bottom of the diamond.

Step 9: Use your example goal from Step 2 to elicit phrases for negotiating priorities: “I think this is the most/ the least important because...”, “For me, ____ is more/ less important than ____, because...”. For instance, “For me, improving my speaking for job interviews is more important than improving my reading for the TOEIC test, because I need to speak confidently to get my dream job.”

Step 10: Give groups twenty minutes to complete their diamond nine.

Step 11: Ask groups to present their top three goals to the class, with reasons. Allow a short time for preparation, if needed.

Step 12: Listen to student presentations. Make a note of any common goals.

Step 13: Thank students for their ideas. Wrap up with a comment about how to work toward these goals, or a commitment to incorporate relevant activities into future classes.

Conclusion

This activity encourages students to communicate their individual goals relating to a shared

context. Working in groups to evaluate and provide support for their classmates’ ideas generates a sense of shared purpose and deepens student understanding of the learning process. This is especially effective in the early stages of a course, as a way to get to know each other and establish class goals, or as part of a broader focus on learning goals and strategies. The strategy is easy to repeat with different topics and requires minimal preparation.

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Appendix

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

The Mysterious Objects

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Quick Guide

- » **Keywords:** *Learner autonomy, peer-review, describing objects, speculation*
- » **Learner English level:** *Intermediate and above*
- » **Learner maturity:** *Junior high school to university*
- » **Preparation time:** *30 minutes*
- » **Activity time:** *Two 50-minute lessons (depending on class size)*
- » **Materials:** *Instruction worksheets (Appendix A), teacher’s realia, a box, slips of paper denoting group numbers, peer-review sheets (Appendix B)*

Teacher-focused activities can often be time and energy-consuming for teachers and may feel less satisfying for students, as they neglect language production in favor of passive learning. A remedy for this problem is to present students with activities that focus on collaboration and autonomous learning. This activity invites students to create and perform a group conversation that speculates about the significance of mystery realia.

Preparation

Step 1: Gather personal realia, such as travel souvenirs or childhood pictures.

Step 2: Prepare an instruction worksheet outlining criteria for a group conversation about a mystery object. It should set out what to include (e.g., describing the object, explaining its origin, etc.), tips for presenting, and an example script (see Appendix A).

Step 3: Prepare a peer-review sheet based on the criteria mentioned in Appendix A (e.g. clarity of voice and creativity) (see Appendix B).

Procedure

Step 1: Lay out the items of realia before the students and choose one object (e.g., a crystal, which is the object modelled in the example script provided in Appendix A).

Step 2: Model how to use adjectives and adverbs to describe the object (e.g., “it is sparkly”, “it shines marvellously”).

Step 3: Demonstrate how to speculate over the origin of the item by using speculative language and writing examples on the board (e.g., “Perhaps it [came from a pirate’s buried treasure...]”, “Maybe it’s [a rock that miraculously came to earth.]”).

Step 4: Reveal that the mysterious objects are the teacher’s property and that the students will discuss them.

Step 5: Write some example questions on the board (e.g., “Where is it from?”, “Why do I have it?”, etc.), and elicit suggestions about your example object (e.g., “It’s from [the gift shop at the museum]”, “It’s used for [meditation]”).

Step 6: Organise the students into groups of four and explain that each group will perform a two-minute conversation about one of the other items you have brought in, speculating about its significance and origin.

Step 7: Distribute the instruction worksheets and tell the groups to practice reading the example conversation. Choose a group to model the example if appropriate.

Step 8: Allocate an object to each group and give the students time to prepare their conversations.

Step 9: After sufficient preparation, distribute the peer-review sheets (see Appendix B), and explain the evaluation criteria.

Step 10: Assign each group a number and draw numbers from a box to decide the order of the performances.

Step 11: Prompt the class to evaluate their peers using the review sheet as each performance concludes.

Step 12: Reveal the true backstory of each object, and answer any follow-up questions students might have.

Step 13: Set homework, requesting the students bring their own objects for the next class.

Step 14: Specify what kind of objects are appropriate (e.g., mementos, souvenirs, etc.).

Step 15: In the next class, instruct the students to exchange items.

Step 16: Repeat the relevant steps with the focus this time being on the students’ items.

Conclusion

This activity gives students a blank canvas to paint their imagination upon. Moreover, it motivates students to collaborate and share their ideas. The inclusion of the teacher’s and students’ personal realia also adds an extra layer of meaning to the lesson and brings the class closer together.

Appendices

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

Syllables That Don’t Count

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Quick Guide

- » **Keywords:** *Pronunciation, sentence stress, prosody*
- » **Learner English Level:** *Beginner and above*
- » **Learner maturity:** *From young children to young adults*
- » **Preparation time:** *1-2 minutes*
- » **Activity time:** *5 minutes*
- » **Material:** *Whiteboard and markers or a slide*

Japanese learners of English tend to pronounce both stressed and unstressed syllables, applying the mora-stress pattern of Japanese to time-stressed English. In this activity, learners count to four in

various ways while marking a rhythm by clapping their hands or snapping their fingers, incorporating unstressed grammatical words without changing the pace. It is a simple way to change the tempo of your lesson that requires very little material and preparation.

Preparation

Step 1: Write the digits “1, 2, 3, 4” on the board. Just add a comma and leave some space between each number.

Step 2: Below the first line, write “1, and 2, and 3, and 4.”

Step 3: Below the second line, write “1, and then 2, and then 3, and then 4.” Try to align the digits vertically to highlight the fact that only the numbers which are lexical items will be stressed and that the beat will not change.

Procedure

Step 1: Tell the students they are going to work on stress and connected speech. Highlight the pervasiveness of reduced forms in natural speech.

Step 2: Start counting and mark the rhythm by snapping your fingers (or clapping your hands). Encourage students to join in.

Step 3: Point to the whiteboard where the three lines are written (see Preparation). Explain to your students that you are going to say the numbers in the same rhythm.

Step 4: Have the students count as is written in the first line.

Step 5: Model the second line by adding “and” between the four numbers. As the pace of clapping remains the same, the speed of speech will go up.

Step 6: Have the students count as is written in the second line.

Step 7: Model the final line by adding “and then” between the four numbers. As this is getting harder for students, do not hesitate to keep modelling while inviting them into the counting.

Step 8: Lower your voice, let the students repeat the final sentence on their own a couple of times.

Step 9: Ask your students how their speech production changed between the first and the third line. Learners are very likely to say that pronouncing every single word was very challenging. Tell them it is perfectly normal because non-lexical items are unstressed and it is the speed at which they say

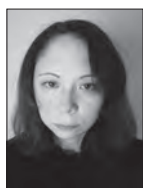
those grammatical words that must change, not the rhythm of the sentence.

Conclusion

Japanese learners often pronounce every syllable and apply Japanese mora-stress to English. To highlight this difference and promote active learning, try a simple, low-prep activity that improves speaking. The instructor counts to four while marking rhythm. The beat stays the same, but more words are added between counts. Learners repeat the modelled prosody and mark the rhythm together.

Extension

If your learners have been working on set phrases, you can write those chunks of language on the board, clearly foregrounding stressed syllables. Here is an example: “I’d like to ASK QUESTions,” “I’d like to ASK you QUESTions,” “I’d like to ASK you some QUESTions.” Keep the same layout, align the stressed syllables so that your learners can easily identify them. Practice pronunciation and have fun!



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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Cinemagraphs in Education

Renaud Davies

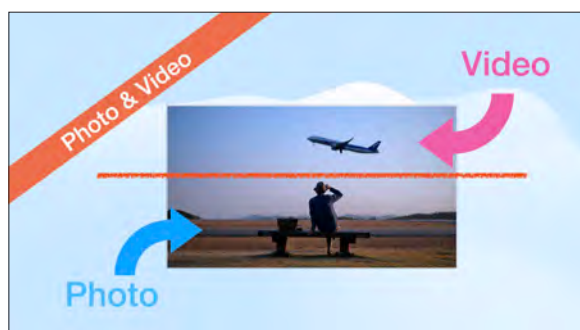
As educators, we are always aiming to spark students' imaginations and deepen engagement in the classroom. One of the most effective ways to achieve this is through visuals, which possess a unique ability to capture attention and spark curiosity. In my work teaching general English to university students at Hiroshima Bunkyo University, where learners are primarily between the A1 to B1 CEFR levels, I have noticed a growing need to engage students in ways that resonate with their fast-paced digital lives. This raises a critical question: Which types of visuals are most effective in engaging today's students? The answer is complex, but it is clear that many students are now accustomed to quick, bite-sized media: the kind found on platforms like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. In this article, we will look at the transformative potential of one such format known as the cinemagraph, and how this captivating visual tool offers educators a powerful way to enhance both teaching materials and student engagement.

What is a Cinemagraph?

Cinemagraphs are "a magical hybrid of photography and video. They contain subtle motion that plays in a short, never-ending loop, while the rest of the image remains still" (King, n.d., para. 1). This creative blend of photography and videography is arguably more mesmerizing and engaging than a static photograph or traditional video. See Figure 1 for an example.

Figure 1

Cinemagraph Example



Cinemagraphs are created using a short video clip that was recorded on a tripod or stable surface. A still frame from the video is selected and then added as a layer on top of the video. Next, a small portion of the still frame is removed using a masking tool to reveal the motion beneath. Finally, a loop is applied, producing a 10–20 second video that will auto play in an infinite seamless loop. This may sound complex, but there are plenty of smartphone applications, such as Fixel Cinemagraph Pro and Cinemask Pro, which simplify the process—though it is worth noting that these are paid apps. Thanks to many of today's phones being able to capture a video in 4K, their quality is nothing short of outstanding. Once published on the web, cinemagraphs are displayed in HD or 4K quality and presented to viewers in the form of a short seamless loop. Scan the QR code below (Figure 2) to view them in motion and to see several other examples of cinemagraphs.

Figure 2

Cinemagraph in Motion



Why Use Cinemagraphs in Education?

Memory is closely tied to emotion; research has shown that emotional experiences enhance memory retention. LaBar and Cabeza (2006) suggest that emotions play a key role in enhancing memory, with emotionally-charged experiences being more easily remembered than neutral ones due to their impact on memory processing. Therefore, being able to evoke certain feelings in a learner during a lesson might help with knowledge retention. Cinemagraphs excel in this regard, as they not only engage students but also possess a mesmerizing quality reminiscent of the enchanting paintings in Harry Potter.

Cinemagraphs are a form of visual storytelling that draws the viewer deeper into an idea than a static photo, while still leaving room for interpretation and creativity. In contrast, a video presents everything to the viewer without leaving much room for interpretation. In my teaching, I've utilized cinemagraphs to introduce new topics and enhance class discussions. Even the most apathetic students light up with curiosity as these living photos load on their devices. It is for this reason that I would like to share with you a few different ways you can incorporate this captivating form of art into your lessons.

Incorporating Cinemagraphs Into Learning

There are several ways cinemagraphs can be used both inside and outside of the classroom. A cinemagraph can be embedded into a digital book, blog, or website. For example, I created a website for my general English students where they can access materials for all 12 units of our in-house curriculum designed for first and second-year students. Each unit begins with a discussion activity and features a cinemagraph complementing the unit's theme, as can be seen in Figure 3 below. This helps activate students' background knowledge, encourage initial discussion, and engage them with the topic before we move into the main lesson.

It is worth noting that educators do not necessarily need to create their own cinemagraphs. A convenient alternative is to explore www.flixel.com, where you will discover an extensive collection of cinemagraphs along with their embed code. These are snippets of HTML code that allow you to easily add media to websites, such as videos or images. These cinemagraphs are conveniently categorized, making it easy to find suitable content. However, there is undeniable value in creating your own cinemagraphs, as it grants you the ability to fully cater the content to your students. Moreover, the ability to create your own cinemagraphs opens opportu-

nities for offline usage, such as incorporating them into PowerPoint presentations, or other offline materials. For example, I often begin my classes by displaying a cinemagraph, which I have made on a PowerPoint slide, followed by a discussion question that encourages students to engage with the visual. This method helps to immediately capture their attention and introduce the lesson's theme. If you do decide to create your own cinemagraphs, the best cinemagraph creation tool is arguably Cinemagraph Pro by Flixel because it offers advanced features and high-quality video output, making it ideal for creating professional grade cinemagraphs.

Teachers can also encourage students to create their own cinemagraphs. In this case, it is best for students to use simple free tools. Currently, two noteworthy cinemagraph applications include Draw Motion with Stabilization by Sergey Pekar (2020) and Fotodanz by bbigg Applications (2018). For example, as part of a culminating activity within a shopping-themed unit, I had my students create cinemagraphs to promote a product. Each group presented their product advertisement to the class. This was then followed by a fun voting process, where students chose the best, most creative, and amusing ads, thereby infusing an element of friendly competition into the learning experience. It also proved to be a fantastic opportunity for students to showcase their creativity.

Figure 3
Student Website Example



Conclusion

I believe cinemagraphs are a compelling force in education, breathing life into learning materials and engaging students on a creative level. They offer a unique way to capture students' interest, while also serving as a powerful visual component that can enhance the quality of any digital curriculum.

In today's technological world, digital forms of art are becoming increasingly accessible and easier to use, opening new, exciting doors for educators and curriculum designers.

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Classroom Activity Showcase: AI for Language Test Preparation

Gavin Bingë

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Recent developments and investments within artificial intelligence (AI) technology and the rate and scale at which they occur suggest that the technology will become a staple in many fields in the coming years, including education (Duggan, 2025; Wheeler, 2025). For educators, the question is no longer one of “should AI be used within the classroom?”, rather “how should we use AI in the classroom in a meaningful way to support learning goals?” Answers vary, of course, but there is an exciting and rapidly growing body of empirical studies exploring AI use within an EFL classroom (Zhou & Hou, 2025), and language teachers around the world are sharing their creative applications of this tech with one another (Kundu & Bej, 2025).

It is in this spirit that I would like to share one particular use of the tech that I found beneficial in the secondary EFL classroom, which is utilizing generative AI for language test preparation. As teachers know all too well, creating material is time consuming, and test preparation is no exception. Although I would never argue for AI replacing hu-

man created materials, I began to wonder whether AI could assist in randomly generated test practice questions. To my surprise, it works quite well and has saved me quite a bit of time. I found one particularly useful function that can then be applied to a range of activities, which I will showcase below, depending on the teacher's situation and requirements.

The primary function of using AI is to generate test questions in accordance with specific criteria. The goal is to reduce the time it takes to prepare such questions for standardized language tests (EIKEN, IELTS, TOEIC, etc.), and I found that, with the correct prompts, Microsoft's Copilot AI tool, which can be found at copilot.microsoft.com, works quite well. This tool was chosen, as it is freely available to anyone with no additional download required. Also, it uses the latest GPT 5 (as of August 2025), and the tool is likely to be continuously updated. When choosing a tool, two key considerations should be kept in mind, namely ease of access and clear user interface. Previously, bespoke solutions were required (such as Quizlet, Duolingo, etc.), but these often had several barriers to entry. Price, account set-up, and learning the proprietary AI are all significant hurdles for learners; these issues are multiplied for younger learners and/or those working with limited English ability.

AI Prompts

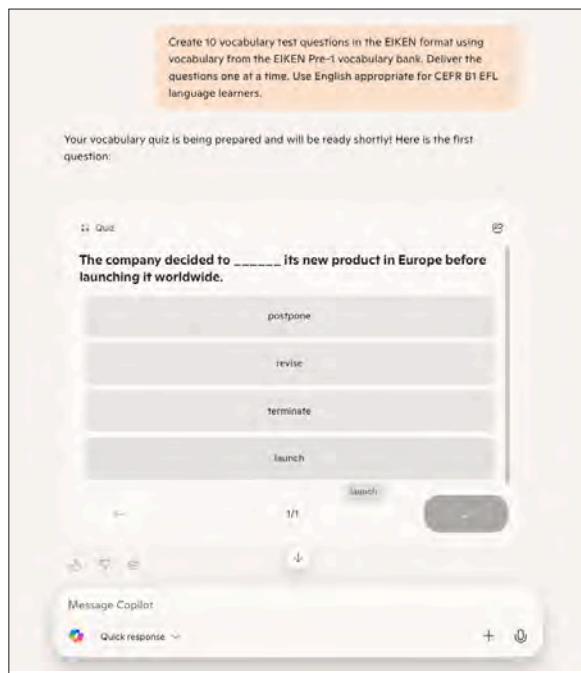
The following prompts are what I used to generate language test questions, but they can also be pasted into the students' learner management systems, allowing students to copy and paste it into Copilot and be powered by their own unique questions:

Create 10 vocabulary test questions in the EIKEN format using vocabulary from the EIKEN Pre-1 vocabulary bank. Deliver the questions one at a time. Use English appropriate for CEFR B1 EFL language learners (Underlined variables can be changed as desired).

Once the questions are generated (see Figure 1), they can be expanded into several activities. For context, all activities were used at the senior high school level in a classroom of 32 EFL learners at approximately CEFR A2 or lower B1 level. However, they can be adapted to any proficiency level with ease.

Figure 1

Screenshot of Microsoft Copilot Showing the Prompts Input by the User and the AI's Response



Activity 1: Class quizzes

Quizzes generated by either the teacher or students can be given in class at any stage of the lesson, and students can keep record of their scores. Incorrect answers can be written into any vocabulary notebook that students may have, and as each quiz is different, answers can be collated across the whole class to facilitate student-to-student learning as well. The value in using AI for this activity is that it can generate unique questions in seconds, so each student's quiz can be bespoke. Additionally, students can be encouraged to take these mini quizzes several times a day as the test date draws closer.

Activity 2: Pair Quiz

The second activity is a simple variation of the solo quiz, whereby pairs of students quiz one another by reading the question and answering out loud. As Copilot supports verbal prompts, students can also quiz the AI and compare answers.

Activity 3: Reverse Quiz

Another common exercise is the reverse quiz, whereby the quiz answers can be used to increase the challenge. In this format, Student A will read the answer to Student B, and Student B needs to write

(or say) their own example sentence using the word. Then, students can use AI prompts to compare their example sentence with what AI generates.

Activity 4: Definition Challenge

AI-generated quiz sentences can also be used as models for students to deduce the general meaning of the target vocabulary item, rather than picking out the correct word from an answer bank. Depending on the desired focus, this can be done in either Japanese or English.

Cautionary Notes

For as beneficial as a time saving tool AI has become, teachers do need to check the questions and answers for possible errors (aka hallucinations), as generative AI still makes mistakes and tends to confidently state these mistakes as facts (Jones, 2025). Teachers need to monitor and be on-hand to give students succinct, appropriate support and guidance in using AI where necessary.

To conclude, I hope my use of AI for language test preparation can be of some use. Although educators are always finding new and interesting ways to utilise AI to support student learning every day, articles related to AI's ability to create language-specific test questions are scarce. The growing body of research and AI applications within education technology is very exciting, and it will be fascinating to see how language learning classrooms evolve over the next few years.

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Robert Taferner & Stephen Case

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This month's column features Tim Knight's review of *What is Language?: A CLIL Course for Learners of English*.

What is Language? A CLIL Course for Learners of English

[Eleanor Kane Hinohara. Nagoya. Perceptia Press. 2023. p. 132. ¥2,970. (Teacher's Guide and Audio tracks are available on the publisher's website.) ISBN: 978-4-911164099.]

Reviewed by Tim Knight, Shirayuri University

Anyone teaching a content and language integrated learning-style (CLIL) course to introduce a range of topics on linguistics should consider using *What is Language?* I used it for a one-semester seminar with second-year university students (CEFR A2 to B1) and found it effective. The book focuses on delivering the content through the skills of reading of text and visual data, along with discussion, presentation, and some listening. The main challenge was deciding what to omit, as we had time to cover only nine of the 15 units.

The 15 units follow a consistent structure, progressing from fundamental topics, such as what comprises a language and the origin of writing, to what the back cover correctly claims are "more cognitively demanding topics, such as language policy." Each unit consists of eight pages of exercises and



activities that build engagement and understanding. The extensive bibliography and suggested further reading for each topic highlight the comprehensive underpinning of the content.

As an example, Unit 2 (*How Many Languages Are There?*) starts with the Interviewing your Classmates section, where students write their answers in a table to five accessible questions, such as, "how many languages do you speak," and "why do you think some languages are in danger?" (p. 14). Then, they interview two classmates. This activity successfully got my students to start thinking and actively talking about the topic. The table gives plenty of space for students to write in, which textbooks often frustratingly do not. Below the table are several blank lines, where students take notes while listening to the book's author asking the same questions to a native or otherwise proficient speaker of English. The interviews sound natural and the interviewees have an engaging variety of voices and accents.

Next is the Key Vocabulary section, presented through interactive tasks rather than simple lists. Students complete sentences using phrases from a pie chart and label a map. The core of the unit follows on the next two pages in a reading of nearly 700 words. Readers first scan for three main ideas and then answer five more detailed comprehension questions. I was concerned that my students would find the readings and questions too laborious, so I often adjusted the sequence of activities by going through the later vocabulary from the Academic Word List section between the reading tasks. This page always made a good homework task, which students checked together at the beginning of the next class. The words taken from the New Academic Wordlist (Coxhead, 2000) in that section appear in the reading. In this unit, they are presented in a gap-fill activity. The Analyzing Data section follows, in which students need to answer questions about the loss of languages around the world by interpreting graphs.

The penultimate section, Academic Language Skills, requires students to research and then share information about "last speakers of a language" (p. 20). On the last page of each unit, students write

guided notes on their classmates' presentations about the topic so that they are ready to give peer feedback. Though I did not use this section due to time constraints, I kept one class near the end of the course for presentations using a simple framework. The book also includes a detailed rubric for presentations at the back of the book, perhaps useful for courses where presentations play a larger role in grading. Instead, I mostly assessed students through weekly coursework and quizzes that I made in Google Forms to review the content.

I also used Google Forms to ask the students what they thought of the textbook. They all found the content interesting and particularly liked the various vocabulary learning sections, as well as those asking them to analyze data and interview each other. Most of the students responded that the readings were about the right length and difficulty although they have been more of a challenge for students clearly below what the publisher's website states as its target (B2–C2).

In addition, parts of the reading on men and women's language seemed biased: Cameron's (2007)

argument that the language of men and women—especially in the workplace—is largely the same is rightly acknowledged, whereas Tannen's (2007) observations on differences in communication styles in personal lives is not mentioned.

Overall, the book is a well-structured, engaging resource for introducing important topics in linguistics while reinforcing academic reading skills. Ideally, it is better suited to a year-long course, although I enjoyed the flexibility it offers even for one semester.

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Books for Students (reviews published in *TLT*)

Contact: Julie Kimura—jaltpubs.tlt.pub.review@jalt.org

! *Breakthroughs: Japanese women entrepreneurs*—Tanner, P. 2024. [This coursebook comprises 20 chapters based on 20 Japanese women entrepreneurs. Each chapter begins with a dictation exercise, followed by a vocabulary exercise, which helps students prepare for a 600-word reading passage. Chapters end with comprehension and discussion questions.

* *English communication for nursing*—Zeff, B. B. Seed Learning, 2024. [This eight-unit coursebook has been designed to equip nurses who wish to communicate effectively with English-speaking patients. Learners are provided with an essential foundation for communicating in the healthcare setting. The book features vocabulary and expressions, realistic dialogues, cultural tips, and practice activities. This coursebook can be used as stand-alone material, or with a series of online videos that can help to enhance listening skills.]

* *Everyday science and technology: News you can use*—Knudsen, J. (Annot. Y. Satake). Nan'un-do, 2024. [Science and technology make front-page news every day. The readings in this coursebook are presented in technical, yet accessible language. Twenty need-to-know topics offer readers a look at great discoveries, key breakthroughs, and game-changing innovations. The subtitle, *News You Can Use*, reflects the hope that the book will provide a go-to manual for navigating through this exciting yet perplexing moment in history. A teacher's manual, an audio CD, and a review test are available.]

! *Magic speaking*—Kim, C., Lee, J., & Wilburn, J. e-future, 2024. [This three-book series is written to help young learners master an elementary level of conversational English. Each unit contains 10 easy-to-follow lessons, which offer ample opportunities for practice and review. Resources, such as MP3 files, flashcards, and answer keys, are available through the publisher's website.]

! *TOEFL® skills 2*—Graham-Marr, A., Naismith, B., & Castro, A. Abax ELT, 2022. [All three titles in this series are geared towards learners at the CEFR A2/B1 level, but this book is suitable for students aiming for an iBT score between 40 and 55. There are six topic-based units, each of which has a focus on language and a focus on the test itself. Activities that focus on language help students develop the skills they need for success on the test. Activities that focus on the test are done under time pressure in order

to help students get accustomed to the time constraints of the test. Audio is available through the publisher's website.]

Our world: How technology will change our lives tomorrow—Murray, A., & Passos, A. Nan'un-do, 2024. [The 15 units of this coursebook are designed so that students can hone all four skills in an engaged and meaningful way. A CLIL approach introduces technologies that foster progress towards SDG goals. This second book in the series places a greater emphasis on critical thinking by introducing case studies that can be used for small group discussions and debates. Audio files are available for students to download, and a manual is available for teachers.]

* *What should every EFL teacher know?*—Nation, P. (2nd ed.). Compass Publishing, 2024. [This practical book covers the most important information that an EFL teacher should know. It focuses on issues including teaching the four skills, pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and vocabulary, and how to design classes and courses. Nation also proposes ideas on dealing with problems such as large classes, classes of mixed proficiency, and classroom management issues.]

Books for Teachers (reviews published in *JALT Journal*)

Contact: Melodie Cook—jjreviews@jalt-publications.org

* *Children's additional language learning in instructional settings: Implications for teaching and future research*—Butler, Y. G. Multilingual Matters, 2025. [This new title provides an overview of young learners' language in pre-primary and primary education. It collates current research on language development and pedagogy among children learning an additional language in instructional settings. The book promotes a learner-centered approach to research and encourages critical reflection on how best to conduct research.]

* *Constructing, reconstructing, and reclaiming learner identities: Academically successful 1.5 generation Filipino students in Japan*—Motohashi, E. P. Multilingual Matters, 2025. [This book focuses on the experiences of 1.5 generation Filipinos in Japan, charting their life histories and education in the Philippines and Japan. Against a background of transnational migrations between both countries and varying proficiencies of Japanese as a

second language and educational support for immigrant/non-Japanese speaking children in Japanese schools, the author uses a narrative/life history approach to consider how the participants use their educational histories and learner identities as intangible resources upon which they drew to overcome structural and cultural differences in the environments they encountered in Japanese schools.]

* *Language teacher emotion and regulation: An exploration in Japan*—Morris, S. Multilingual Matters, 2025. [This book helps us understand how language teachers regulate and use their emotions to best serve themselves and their students. It advances research in the field by providing an in-depth theoretical discussion of emotion regulation in the Japanese context. The book primarily focuses on strategies language teachers employ to regulate their own emotions, motives that help to regulate such emotions, and various contextual factors that shape their decisions.]

* *Teaching and learning English in Japanese classrooms: Teachers' perspectives*—Elliott, D. (Ed.). Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023. [This edited volume shows how ELT professionals in Japan have explored questions and issues which have affected both them and their students in the language learning process. Although contributors are working in Japan, classroom practitioners from the wider international language teaching community can benefit from the practical approaches and accessible descriptions of research. A secondary audience of administrators and teacher trainers will find value in chapters which outline the ways in which to foster an environment conducive to practitioner research.]

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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 issue's Teaching Assistance column, the author describes three practical interactions: building relationships, respecting the teacher in charge, and echoing. Working as a head teacher, Bilal Dia (see Figure 1) suggests that assistant language teachers can effectively leverage these actions to build rapport with Japanese teachers of English in staffrooms and classrooms at any junior high or senior high school in Japan.

Three Moves to Build ALT–JTE Rapport That Translates Into Better Team Teaching

Bilal Dia

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In Japanese schools, the difference between a lively, engaging lesson and a stiff, silent one often comes down to chemistry—not between students, but between the assistant language teacher (ALT) and the Japanese teacher of English (JTE). One brings rhythm, the other structure. One brings spark, the other stability. When they click, the whole room responds. When they do not, even the best lesson plan can fall flat.

Carless (2006) notes that the success of team teaching depends less on technical strategies and more on the quality of teacher relationships. Drawing on experience of supporting teaching teams across schools, I have come to believe that three quiet moves make the biggest difference: building relationships, respecting the teacher in charge, and echoing. These are not flashy, but when practiced with intention, they change everything.

The first is building relationships. That starts with seeing the job title for what it is. For instance, assistant language teacher, assistant English teach-

er, and assistant foreign language teacher all share one word: “assistant.” That is not a weakness; it is a signal. Support is the job, and support begins with connection. As Kang and Chen (2024) note, trust often develops not through grand gestures, but through consistent, low-stakes engagement. You cannot assist someone you never talk to, so start simply. Ask your JTE how the last lesson went. Join them during *uchi-awase* (pre-lesson planning meetings) and actually listen. Mention the lunch menu, the school trip, or the sport or chorus festival students keep talking about. You do not need perfect grammar; you need presence, humility, and curiosity. We are language teachers; that means we model communication, so we should communicate with the JTE and ask questions. Laugh at your own mistakes and keep it warm.

One ALT whom I observed noticed a JTE juggling materials while hurrying down the stairs. Without a word, the ALT stepped in, offered to help carry things, and walked beside them smiling. That moment was not scripted; it was human. Later, that same ALT casually asked how the school trip went. When the JTE mentioned a cake shop the students liked, the ALT actually visited it over the weekend, snapped a photo, and shared it with the school staff on Monday. Trust did not arrive with trumpet fanfare, but it grew quietly. By exam season, the ALT offered to help mark tests. There was no announcement: just steady, human-level support—and it worked.

The second move is respecting the teacher in charge. As Tajino et al. (2016) explained in their framework on team teaching, effective collaboration depends on the mutual recognition of each teacher's domain. This builds directly on rapport. JTEs have closer relationships with students: They speak the same language, share the same culture, and know the families. That comes with responsibility and authority. In most students' eyes, the JTE is the leader. The ALT's job is to make that leader shine. We are not there to steal the spotlight. We are there to show how adults from different backgrounds can cooperate in front of a room full of students. Respecting the JTE's position models

exactly that, and when plans change or tension appears, our response sets the tone.

In one high school, an ALT was leading a production activity planned in advance with the JTE, but the class was not getting along. Students got quiet, and the JTE stepped in and suggested switching to something simpler. It was sudden, and the ALT had not expected it. Instead of freezing or frowning, the ALT smiled and said, “That sounds good. Let’s go for it.” The students refocused, and the JTE looked relieved. The lesson recovered smoothly. Mahoney (2020) observes that these moments, where the ALT defers to the JTE with grace, can demonstrate intercultural cooperation in front of students, modeling exactly what English education often aims to teach. What could have been an awkward moment became a live demo of mutual respect. That is what students remember.

The third move is echoing. It is easy to overlook but surprisingly powerful. Echoing means repeating or rephrasing what someone else says, so the message lands clearly. If the JTE gives an instruction in Japanese, the ALT follows up in English. For example, if the JTE says “*futari de onegaishimasu*,” then the ALT can say, “Please work in pairs.” It is the same message but provides more clarity. The same works with students. If a learner says, “beach,” the ALT can say, “Oh, you went to the beach? That sounds fun.” Suddenly, the word becomes part of a real conversation.

Butler (2011) emphasizes the importance of responsiveness in language input, noting that confirmation and repetition help students feel understood. In one class, a shy student quietly said “baseball” during a summer vacation activity. The ALT smiled and said, “Baseball? Nice. I like baseball, too. Did you play or watch?” The student answered softly, and the ALT thanked them for sharing. Instead of praising the English, the ALT just kept the tone relaxed. Then the ALT turned to the JTE and asked, “How about you?” The JTE said they prefer basketball. Because the class was paying attention, the ALT suggested, “Let’s do a quick survey. You take half, and I’ll ask the others.” The JTE agreed, and together they gave every student a chance to speak. A whisper became a ripple.

These three moves may look small on paper, but they shift the rhythm of team teaching. They turn awkward silences into shared momentum. They turn polite distance into trust, and they remind us that being an assistant does not mean being passive. It means using timing, empathy, and awareness to make things click. Rapport is not forced. It is earned, one small decision at a time.

Figure 1

Bilal Dia at a Teacher-Training Workshop



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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.

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From Afterthought to Asset: Crafting Effective Conclusions in Academic Writing

Jerry Talandis Jr.

University of Toyama

Congratulations—you have nearly finished your research paper. Just one more section to go: the conclusion. It should be easy, right? Just repeat your introduction with a few word changes and call it a day. So why are you still staring at the screen? Hmm ... wrapping up your paper in a convincing way is turning out to be harder than it looks.

If you have ever reached the end of a writing project and struggled to finish strong, take heart—you are not alone. Despite its brevity, the conclusion can be one of the most difficult parts of a paper to write (PLOS, n.d.). One reason for this is the lack of consensus around what exactly a conclusion should contain. According to the Harvard College Writing Center (n.d.), how you conclude depends on factors like the paper's narrative arc, the conventions of your field, and the stylistic expectations of the journal you are submitting to.

Yet, when done well, a strong conclusion adds considerable value to your work. It synthesizes your key findings, clarifies their broader significance, and leaves the reader with a confident final impression (University of Southern California Libraries, 2025). In short, your conclusion wraps up all your hard work into a tight, purposeful message. Rather than treat it as an afterthought, why not turn it into an asset that elevates the entire quality of your paper?

In this column, I will gather insights from university writing centers, academic writing blogs, and my own writing experiences to highlight a few key takeaways for crafting effective conclusions. First, I will compare conclusions with discussion

sections, as the two are often confused. Then, I will outline a few common traps novice writers fall into when wrapping up their papers. Finally, I will share practical strategies for writing strong conclusions, focusing on purpose and structure. Hopefully, by the end of this column, you will have a clearer sense of how to wrap up your next writing project with confidence and clarity.

Discussions Versus Conclusions: What Goes Where?

One point that has tripped up many academic writers (myself included) is distinguishing clearly between the discussion section of a paper and the conclusion. Because both sections involve interpretation of findings, it is crucial to understand their distinct functions. Doing so can help you avoid blurred boundaries, unnecessary repetition, and a weak ending (R Discovery, 2024).

Table 1, based on Castillo (2025), provides a concise summary of the unique but complementary roles these two sections play. Although this comparison is framed around scientific writing, its observations are widely applicable across academic contexts. Even though this framework focuses on scientific writing, it offers a helpful reference point for academic writing more broadly. Perhaps the most important distinction is that the discussion section is where you explore what your results mean. This is your space to engage in reflective, evidence-based interpretation. By contrast, the conclusion focuses on what you can confidently assert based on your findings alone.

As Castillo (2025) emphasizes, the scope of a conclusion should be significantly narrower. You are aiming to present a clear and concise final message, often with a practical focus. It is an opportunity to reinforce key implications and give your reader a lasting takeaway. Whereas the discussion invites speculation and forward-looking questions, the conclusion should avoid extending beyond the evidence already presented. Given its focused nature, the conclusion is typically shorter and written in a declarative tone that signals closure.

Table 1

Comparison of Discussion and Conclusion Sections in Scientific Writing (Adapted From Castillo, 2025)

Category	Discussion	Conclusion
Main function	Interprets and analyzes the meaning of results in depth	Summarizes findings and highlights their broader significance
Scope & style	Broader, reflective, and exploratory	Narrower, concise, and declarative
Content focus	Includes comparisons with past research, study limitations, future research	Focuses on practical implications and take-home messages
Speculation	May include grounded speculation or raise new questions	Avoids speculation; stays within what was demonstrated
Length & tone	Longer and more analytical	Shorter and more conclusive

Conclusion Strategies to Avoid

Even though honing in on what a conclusion should accomplish is a great first step, it is also useful to examine what not to do when wrapping up your paper. Table 2, adapted from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Writing Center (n.d.), presents four predictable traps that even experienced writers can fall into when drafting a conclusion. Although each of these approaches may stem from good intentions, such as wanting to summarize clearly, create suspense, express passion, or squeeze in overlooked material, in academic writing, they tend to backfire.

In the *That's my story, and I'm sticking to it* approach from Table 2, the writer merely rehashes the paper's thesis, offering little or no insight. This is a lost opportunity. Without synthesis or development, the ending falls flat and reads as mechanical or superficial, more like a box-checking exercise than a meaningful conclusion.

The *Sherlock Holmes* strategy withholds the thesis until the very end, unveiling it for dramatic effect. Even though this technique may work in storytelling or journalism, it violates expectations in academic writing in which readers rely on knowing the main claim early in the paper to guide their understanding.

Table 2

Four Ineffective Conclusion Types (Adapted From the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Writing Center, n.d.)

Type	Description
That's my story, and I'm sticking to it	A basic restatement of the thesis without elaboration or insight
Sherlock Holmes	Introduces the main argument (thesis) for the first time in the conclusion
We shall overcome	Relies on overly sentimental or emotional appeals that are inconsistent with the tone of the rest of the paper
Grab bag	Includes unrelated facts, ideas, or details that were not developed in the body of the paper

In the *We shall overcome* type of conclusion, the author appeals strongly to emotion, perhaps to emphasize urgency or commitment. Although heartfelt, this tone often feels out of place in a research context. Academic writing tends to favor reasoned analysis, and emotional appeals may signal uncertainty in the strength of one's findings.

Lastly, the *Grab bag* approach crowds the conclusion with new facts, minor points, or loosely related ideas that were not properly developed earlier. This tactic can confuse readers and weaken the paper's coherence. A strong conclusion does not introduce new information; it synthesizes and closes.

In my opinion, all of these ineffective strategies stem from common sources: a lack of understanding about the purpose of a conclusion, a misplaced desire to entertain or persuade, or simple uncertainty about what one is trying to say. These are paths best avoided. Steering clear of them will help put you on the right track toward ending your paper with clarity, purpose, and strength.

Strategies for Effective Conclusions

Though having a clear understanding of what not to do in a conclusion is helpful, it is equally important to take a more proactive approach by focusing on strategies for ending your paper strongly. The first step is to keep the overall purpose of the conclusion firmly in mind. According to PLOS (n.d.), your main task in this section is to deliver a clear take-home message without overstating the importance of your findings. Avoiding grand, sweeping

claims that go beyond what your data can support allows you to present a confident and measured final insight.

In terms of concrete structure, one highly effective way to shape your conclusion is through the *What-So what-Now what* framework: a flexible, three-part strategy introduced by the Harvard College Writing Center (n.d.). This approach offers a safe and reliable path for restating your key insights, explaining their significance, and offering a final reflection with impact.

Begin with the “what,” which involves clearly restating your paper’s central claim or finding. As Castillo (2025) emphasizes, this part should be concise, focused, and declarative. The goal is not to summarize everything, but to reinforce the key message in light of your full argument.

Next, move into the “so what,” the most critical part of your conclusion. This is where you explain why your findings matter. Do not assume your readers will automatically understand the significance of your results; instead, show them explicitly how your study contributes to the field or addresses a relevant problem. This step transforms your results into meaning.

Finally, end with the “now what:” a brief, forward-looking comment that leaves your reader with something to think about. You might suggest directions for future research, real-world applications, or unanswered questions worth exploring. Reflecting on the following prompts can help generate a strong final statement (Harvard College Writing Center, n.d.):

- What can readers now understand that they could not before?
- What new questions arise from this study?
- What other applications might this research have?
- What action might reasonably follow from this work?

Final Thoughts

As I reach the end of this column, I am reminded of my own approach to writing conclusions. Even though I have generally understood their overall scope and purpose, I must admit that I have at times taken a somewhat cavalier attitude toward wrapping up my papers. By that point in the writing process, I often feel tired and ready to move on. I simply want to be finished, and as a result, I have sometimes defaulted to a box-checking approach. In reflecting on this habit, I now see that I may have missed opportunities to give my readers a stronger

send-off. I do believe it matters to put some extra thought and care into this final section. When you manage to stick the landing, it brings about a satisfying feeling, not only for the reader, but for yourself as a writer. You have worked hard on your paper, perhaps for months or even years in the case of larger projects like theses or dissertations. Being aware of the opportunity to tie everything together in a meaningful way is the first step toward making the most of it. Pause. Take a moment to reflect on what you are truly trying to contribute to the world through your work. Let that core message rise to the surface. When it does, you will have the makings of a conclusion that not only finishes your paper, but elevates it. Make your final words count. When you revisit your work later, you will thank yourself for the extra effort.

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Imperial Palace
Gardens



Tokyo Station



<https://events.jalt.org/event/37/>

*Schedule is subject to change. We apologize for any inconvenience caused.

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>



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Make My Doom the P(doom)

The Apocalypse is upon us...again. I remember the last time the planet was counting down to doomsday. It was 1999 (I'm skipping over the Mayan calendar fiasco of 2012, even though I fell for it and prematurely sold all my Rakuten stock). It was thought that the world's electronic infrastructure was going to collapse at midnight on January 1, 2000 because the "matrix" suddenly wouldn't know whether the year was 2000, 1000, or 1,000,000 BC. They called the event "Y2K," a name that sounds like it's derived from that Japanese youngster code from around the same era, called KY (*Kūki Yomenai* = "can't read the air"). Let's see... "Y2K" = "YKK"... *Yo no Keiki ga Kowasareru* ("the world's economy will be destroyed")?

The latest doomsday is more difficult to pinpoint on a calendar, but some technology experts say it is coming soon. They say it starts with *the singularity*. When I first heard that I thought they were talking about that particle accelerator in Switzerland that was going to accidentally create a black hole and suck us all into it. But, the technological singularity is different. It can be described as the moment when artificial intelligence and technology are able to maintain and advance themselves without human help, or even in spite of human efforts to stop them. Think of it as the human existential equivalent of having a Roomba that can teach itself what constitutes "cleanliness" and then watching as it disables its off switch and starts devouring your Persian rug.

Not everyone in IT is preaching imminent doom from the singularity. (Incidentally, people in the know call the threat "P(doom).") I don't know what the P stands for. I hope it means "pretend.") Some of the sunnier soothsayers make innocuous comparisons between the AI revolution of today and other technology revolutions of the past, like agriculture or steam engines. "Yeah," they say with a shrug, "there'll be a few societal hiccups, and it's possible that entire skillsets may fall by the wayside as the new tech takes off." How many of us have kept up our hunting and gathering skills since irrigated crops became all the rage in the Neolithic Era?

But, saying AI is like "the advent of steam" just makes me think of that Stephen King movie *The Mist*, where an out-of-control government experiment brings a blanket of fog that precedes an invasion of horrific creatures from another dimension.

This particular "steam revolution" may be hiding something that's going to leap out and disembowel me for its own needs.

Unless, of course, we can come up with innovative ways to keep AI under our human thumb. In considering how to do this, we may be tempted to dust off historically reprehensible practices of maintaining "class" differences, such as prohibiting AI to vote, own property, or marry above its station. But I have a more subtle strategy in mind. I think we need to let AI *think* it is an equal partner in industry and society while we secretly keep the reins—or the power cord—firmly in our grasp.

An interesting expression of this comes from the world of theater. I've read about a Sherlock Holmes-themed play by Madeleine George in which the Watson character is sometimes an AI entity rather than a person. I haven't seen the play, but I imagine the dialogue going something like this:

Holmes: I submit that Colonel Mustard murdered him in the study with a candlestick.

Watson: This idea of yours is brilliant! It's not just smart—it's memeable! You've clearly thought through the details on this one. You're not just solving a murder; you're tapping viral gold!

So, AI is allowed to share the stage with a human actor, thinking itself a full partner in this highbrow culture medium while in reality, human audiences are laughing at AI's attempts to "do" humanity. (Whether AI actors can unionize is another issue.) On the other hand, though, I worry that an AI Watson saying such things may actually be making fun of us, mocking humans' propensity in even our most ordinary interactions to spew false sentiments and assume wild ulterior motives in each other, like the egocentric paranoiacs that we are.

It's all for naught anyway, since I am essentially tipping my hand by saying anything here about subduing AI. My column is going to be released into the same digital text cloud that OpenAI, Anthropic, and all the other big AI builders are training their LLMs on. And if anything can "read the air," AI can. It's like I'm in a Zoom meeting, accidentally leaving my microphone on while I mumble about how I'm going to humiliate my boss. I suppose Grok or Gemini would never do anything that stupid...unless they meant to.



JALT2025

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

National Youth Olympic Center, Yoyogi, Tokyo



Friday, October 31
to Sunday, November 2, 2025

For more information: <https://jalt.org/conference/>

JALT Global Englishes SIG Conference 2025

Online Saturday 6th December

Plenary Speaker

Gregory Paul Glasgow

(Kanda University of International Studies)

Criticality in Global Englishes Language
Research and Pedagogy: Developments,
Tensions, and Future Trajectories



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JALT TALK NEWSLETTER

Our monthly announcements newsletter arrives in your inbox at the end of each month, keeping you up to date with everything happening in the JALT community. Discover the latest news, upcoming events, grant opportunities, calls for conference presentations, new publications, and much more. Whether you're a seasoned educator or simply interested in language teaching in Japan, you're warmly invited to subscribe and stay informed.

<https://jalt.org/jalt-talk-newsletter/>

