

ADVANCING LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY ONE ARTICLE AT A TIME



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## Introduction to the Eighth Volume

### **The year 2021—surprisingly similar to the year 2020!**

I began the introduction to the previous volume of this journal with the speculation that preparation for the 2020 issue was probably the most challenging that Osaka JALT Journal had ever faced. That was, needless to say, the year that COVID-19 became a global pandemic, and students and teachers across the globe were hurled into online teaching, to name a minor example of just one of the many hardships we faced that year. I admit that at the time, I thought (or hoped, at least) that 2021 would be different. I hoped that through good practices, vaccine availability, and the natural progression of the virus, that new infections would finally fall to a very low level or maybe even zero. I hoped that the rich social and academic life at university campuses in Japan and around the world would mostly return to normal. I hoped that we could travel easily and safely again. I hoped that we could meet each other at in-person conferences.

As it turned out, that mostly did not happen. In many ways, this past year unfolded in much the same way as the year before. Even as I write this now, at the end of 2021, the recently emerged Omicron variant of COVID-19 is pushing new infections to record levels in several regions of the world and has led to new travel restrictions and other disruptions of daily life. And so, this time I think speculation is no longer necessary: this has been another challenging year for the Osaka JALT Journal, and for nearly everything else as well.

We continue on, despite the challenge. In this volume, we continue to expand the type of articles that the journal publishes. Last year, for the first time, we published a book review. In this issue, we offer an interview for the first time—with none other than JALT president Dawn Lucovich, conducted by Timothy Ang. Following the interview, Argel Davis Corpuz offers a narrative study of some high school language learners. Lars Martinson looks at collocations and offers a task-based approach for teaching them to upper-intermediate learners. Denver Beirne addresses the issue of how to teach the neologisms that develop on social media. Robert Nagaro examines the team-teaching experiences of ALTs and teachers in elementary schools. Chie Nakabayashi contributes a case study on the teaching of suprasegmental features of pronunciation by non-native teachers. Mariko Boku looks at the impact of different feedback styles on student motivation. And finally, we have two contributions by Hitomi Otani—a personal reflection on social and cultural diversity in picture books used in language learning contexts, and an introduction to the practice of cooperative learning and its potential benefits. In total, we are publishing nine articles here in the eighth volume of the Osaka JALT Journal. Each article represents the hard work of the authors and reviewers. I offer my deepest thanks to everyone who has helped to make this issue a reality.

In addition to considering new types of articles, this year the journal has made a few other significant changes. First, we no longer have submission deadlines. We now consider submissions on a rolling basis and publish articles individually online whenever they are

ready. Going forward, we intend to continue making each article of the journal available individually on the Osaka JALT website, as well as publishing a year-end volume that contains all of the articles for that year. Secondly, 2021 will also continue to see an expansion of article types for this journal, including reflections, opinion pieces, and short research articles presenting preliminary results. The primary goal of this journal is to serve as a forum for the Osaka JALT community and beyond by offering valuable and thought-provoking contributions to the literature surrounding the practice of language teaching, even when those contributions come in forms other than empirical research studies.

And so, this introduction to the eighth volume of the Osaka JALT Journal should close with an invitation: this is *your* journal, and we welcome your contributions. While of course we cannot promise to publish every contribution that we receive, we strive to set our publication standards in a way that provides the greatest possible benefit to the community we serve. There is a great conversation that surrounds the practice of language teaching, and that conversation is benefited by encouraging more voices.

Thank you again to all of our authors and reviewers. Best of luck in 2022.

Robert Swier  
*Publications Chair*  
*Osaka JALT*

## An Interview with Dawn Lucovich

**Timothy Ang**

Kansai University

In January of 2021, Dawn Lucovich took office as the new president of JALT. This interview was conducted online in December, 2020. The interview covers topics including leadership, curriculum content, diversity in membership, and the new president's plans for the future of JALT.

Dawn Lucovich completed her Ph.D. coursework in Linguistics at Temple University and has a Master's Degree in Education from Columbia University. She has been involved with JALT in various capacities, including serving as president for both the Tokyo and Nagano chapters and serving as a Peer Reader for the Writers' Peer Support Group. She has extensive experience in language education and has taught in Korea, the United States, and several universities in Japan. She is currently an assistant professor at the University of Nagano.

This interview has been edited for clarity.

**Timothy Ang:** *How did your interest in teaching English get started?*

**Dawn Lucovich:** During university, I did a short placement in the United States, teaching high school literature, and also with the Intensive English Institute at my alma mater, working with Korean and Japanese exchange students.

*What made you decide to run for JALT president?*

Maybe the same thing that made me decide to run for Tokyo chapter president or Nagano chapter president—I was asked by someone and recommended by someone who suggested that it would be a good move for me to run for president.

*In terms of being a leader, what are the qualities that you think that people look to you for?*

Honestly, to get a really good answer for that, you probably have to ask the people who recommended me or suggested that I take these positions. But first and foremost, I'm around, I'm there, I'm present so I think that counts for a lot. My advice for people who are interested in this kind of leadership position is to basically put yourself out there and be around and be available for these kinds of things.

*I think that involves a lot of helping other people, and at the same time, networking is a big part of it wouldn't you say?*

I think so. Networking, cultivating relationships, not only between yourself and someone else, but between people, I really take a lot of pleasure in connecting people who would

benefit from knowing each other. I think that probably helps as well.

*What do you think is the current state of English teaching jobs?*

That's a good question, I think it's much larger than even this interview could cover. We are an organization in transition not only because of the time period—being a 21st-century organization—but because of the pandemic and also the changing demographics in society, our organization, and also the people who we serve.

*What types of opportunities and problems are there for JALT as an organization?*

Of course, every organization has its issues or challenges, but there are also opportunities. Obviously, right now the digital and online landscape is huge. And so many opportunities are there for us in that. Challenges will be the way that we adapt, especially as people's employment status changes.

People may not find organizations such as ourselves to be as relevant as they once were, or conversely, they might find them *more* relevant because employment will be extremely competitive. So I think one of the main challenges for us is to make sure that we continue to stay relevant.

*Speaking of ways to stay relevant, aside from what JALT is currently doing, like the annual conference, is there anything in particular that hasn't been done before?*

Well, the international conference that we pulled off a couple weeks ago was a huge step in remaining really relevant and also broadening our appeal and our reach and our accessibility to people overseas who may not have considered coming to an in-person meeting before. So that's one huge way that we can continue to do that and in general, adapt and change and pay attention to what's going on around us in society.

*You mentioned something a while ago about certain changes, like jobs, in which some people are in a state of flux right now. I was reading somewhere that the English market here is bottoming out in terms of the number of opportunities as well as the current salaries and benefits. What is your take on that?*

I think exactly what you said is true. And that's what's happening to the market now, so we need to really think about the way that we structure ourselves in terms of membership and who we are appealing to and who we are accessible to. I think broadening that base and welcoming a wider range of people in more diverse contexts will be crucial for us, and it also will strengthen us as an organization.

*And when you say broadening, what's included in that? Are we talking about more non-native speakers or people related to English teaching?*

I think both and all. There are all kinds of groups here that may in the past have been thought of as tangentially related or as kind of peripheral members, but I honestly don't see it that way. I see us all as being part of a language education or teaching community.

I think, again, really widening our scope and widening who we might consider as potential members is something that we should do.

*During the JALT 2020 conference two weeks ago I noticed that there were a couple of sessions devoted to English conversation schools (eikaiwa) and I thought that was actually really good because getting them more exposure is definitely in line with the whole broadening concept.*

I also felt the same way. Actually, one of my doctoral cohort mates, Natasha Hashimoto, was one of the co-editors and book chapter authors for one of those books, which was one of the presentations. I think really bringing a scholarly focus to *eikaiwa*—especially in that context because it constitutes such a large number of people, including ALTs and JETs—I think that will show people or demonstrate that these people should also be welcome as members of our community.

*That's a very good line of thinking. The demographics for ALTs and JETs are relatively younger and I would say for JALT, it tends to be more of those people that are slightly older, I guess, from the age 30 bracket and above. In terms of getting more younger people to join, what would you suggest?*

Well, not just for this demographic, but really any demographic that we want to appeal to, and also for our learners, we need to meet people where they're at, so we need to use the things that they use to communicate.

We don't have a large presence on Instagram. We use Facebook and Twitter a lot now. But if we want to expand our reach to people who are younger, we need to consider other avenues. So I think that's quite important.

*And that's something I believe Bill Pellowe, who's in charge of public relations for JALT, would definitely be trying to work more on.*

Yes, certainly. We don't want it just being an older demographic. I want the younger demographic working with us, and we should use whatever tools they're using to reach out to their peers.

*It seems like you have a great mix of young and old teachers. It's going to be a very interesting dynamic on how to just bring everybody together like that.*

And a lot of that is addressed in how we have senior memberships available now, whereas in the past, we didn't. Because we also don't want our senior members to go away. We don't want them to leave just because they've retired. That's letting a lot of institutional knowledge walk out the door so it's really important for us to retain our older and senior members as well.

*Are there any new subjects that you think should be taught in English at the university level?*



I think the field in general is moving towards English as a medium of instruction and content-based teaching, so we'll continue to see more subjects and programs in higher education being offered in English.

*What's a topic you feel needs to be taught more these days?*

I don't know if I'm the best person to ask about this, because I actually went 100% paperless last year and I had been steadily working up to it. I was at 99% the year before and 95 the year before that, so I think I was much better positioned to transition into online teaching than most people.

Up until this year, I really felt that digital literacy in university students was lacking. Even in kind of a meta way, even among instructors, they weren't really sure of how to deliver content or the best way to pace it. So I think in terms of topics, digital pedagogy, how to deliver something effectively online, or by digital means is something that we all need to investigate and learn more about.

*How do you promote leadership within an English classroom?*

I would say that it's difficult to teach leadership. It's something that you just have to do. It's one thing to read a book about it, but it's really something you have to do. So I make my students take leadership roles in every single class. They can read all they want to about leadership or autonomy, but it's better to just learn by doing.

*What are your other goals for JALT and what are your timelines for them?*

I can only speak about this really unofficially—personal goals that I have for the organization. So first and foremost, it's really to broaden and widen the spectrum of people who are interested in the organization or who have access easily, and that includes creating events which are appealing to them—different topics, or different ways of delivery, that might be interesting to them.

Another thing is having kind of set pathways so that people know how to become a leader in the organization. They're not just waiting for, you know, someone to invite them as perhaps I had to, and kind of taking that invitation and induction, and making that a formalized thing. Those are two of the main goals.

*This is a loaded question. What would you want to do differently compared to the last group of people in charge?*

That's a loaded question, because JALT has a long history of a lot of people. There's nothing consciously that I would want to do differently, but just by nature of who I am and my priorities, it *will* be different. The leadership will be different, the organization might be different.

In general, the approach with every new president is very different and because of the pandemic, it will be especially different next year. People will be more connected online

and we'll be able to do a greater range of things across a greater geographical area because of that.

*If you had one crazy personal goal for the job, what would that be? Something that you think is almost impossible to reach but if people did get together, it might actually be possible? It's called—and I'm referring to a very old book—a big, hairy, audacious goal (BHAG).*

That's a great acronym, and I would say, probably double our membership and raise percentage points of people who are not currently represented in the organization by a proportional amount. This would be critical.

*I'd like to tie that in with the next question. In terms of success metrics—apart from membership numbers—is there anything else that you would include?*

Right now, we're focused on the satisfaction of members in general. I think that we need to do more internal research about the organization to see what kinds of things people are satisfied with and not satisfied with.

*Why do you think people leave the organization? I think one of the reasons is because possibly the dues or ideological differences.*

Yeah, I would imagine. Some are purely practical, financial, and then others, as you say, are ideological. People may find another organization that suits their thinking or their practices much better and that's fine. But I think that we should also consider why people leave and what kinds of conflicting ideologies there might be.

*Change in organizations in Japan in general takes a long time. Do you feel that JALT is similar to that state of affairs? Or could there be possibly a tipping point?*

Honestly, I've never worked in a Japanese company. So I cannot really speak to the rate of change in a Japanese company. And also, I work at a brand new university. So, *change* is our watchword—everything that we do is new and pioneering and different. I think that a lot of changes are coming whether we want it or not.

*Last question. If you wanted to publish a book, what would the title be and what would it be about?*

I do want to publish a book. Many books. Of course, most are academic in nature. But, incidentally, I was awarded a poetry scholarship and specialized in creative writing during my rhetoric degree. The book title would be the same as my upcoming Toastmasters talk: 'Travel is No Substitute for a Life'—and it would be about how travel has been an integral part of my life and how the world has changed now that all travel has stopped.

*Thank you so much for your time!*

# Struggles and Successes of High School Students Studying Second Language: A Narratology Study

**Argel Davis Corpuz**

Ateneo de Davao University

## **Abstract**

This paper examines five high school students' language learning experiences, grounded in the three-dimensional analysis of narrative research. Oral histories are organized in thematic structure to probe the struggles and successes of high school students learning a second language. The study concludes that three major disruptions occur, mainly in the aspects of lexicon and language function features, grammatical and syntactic features, and socio-communicative features. The students overcame these challenges by employing strategies that were effective to them. Learners' interactions, place of study, and conception of the English language significantly influenced their motivation to engage in the study of a second language. The interview results call for reforms in language instructors' pedagogical strategies and school policies in designing English curriculums for all courses in public and private high schools.

**Keywords:** ESL Struggles, ESL Success, Language Learning Strategies, Japanese English Education

An MIT study (Hartshorne et al., 2018) has found that challenges emerge, and learners will not reach the same proficiency in English similar to that of a native speaker, unless a learner starts to study as early as the age of 10. He further elaborated that since there is a shorter window before their learning ability declines, learners who start to study between ages 10-to-18 will still learn the language quickly, but they are less likely to attain native-level mastery. In contrast with other English language learning countries (those who started teaching English as early as kindergarten, such as the Philippines), Japanese public elementary schools introduce English to students in the third grade. Assuming that the learners have not encountered the English language by attending international kindergarten and have English speaking parents, Japanese students typically have their first encounter with the language three years after starting their formal education.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) is dedicated to removing the education gap and to implementing the English Education Reform Plan corresponding to Globalization (MEXT, 2002). Japanese students are now spending a tremendous amount of time studying English as a foreign language. MEXT, as it aims for full-scale development of English Education in Japan, laid out new reforms in the current education system. They have recently produced and reconstructed new guidelines for the study of English, hoping to pave the way for confidence in communicating using the language geared toward hosting the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

With the new changes, students are now pressured to have a certain English proficiency level at every education level. The expectation for junior high school students is that they should have, by the time they are in the third grade, Eiken 3 certification, or

an understanding of English at the A1 level in the CEFR framework. On the other hand, high school learners are encouraged to pass the Eiken Pre-2 or Eiken 2 level exams, as they are the benchmarks for the high school level, which are equivalent to CEFR A2 and B1 levels, respectively. Students being pressured with the expectations, not only from the institutions they attend but also from the education system itself, are having difficulties coping with the aggressive trend of language learning in Japan. The Japanese education system is well known for its prescribed curriculum, challenging exams, and rigid conformity (Martin, 2004). Students in both public and private schools are expected to acquire the ability to communicate fluently and coherently in English by the end of their six years of English education. Students in Japan must take English for three years in junior high school and three more years in senior high school (Amaki, 2008). With the several years of exposure to the language, some of the students have a reasonably large vocabulary, and some can also understand many expressions, but “their communications skills were mainly limited to examples provided on the tapes or in their textbooks” (Amaki, 2008, p. 60). According to Martin (2004) however, despite the amount of money, effort, time, and energy exerted, the search for a student who can engage in an even marginal dialogue with a speaker of English could be a complicated matter. “Although many of these learners may have the linguistic competence necessary to communicate, many are uncomfortable and unable to communicate with people from cultures different from their own,” Cutrone wrote in 2010 (p. 11).

In the search for the truth regarding the nature of English study undertaken by the typical student, this paper gives an overview on the experiences of students in their English education (from the first day of encountering the language to the present) by listening to the untold stories of five high school students. The researcher aims to discover the aspects of high school students’ journeys through language education and understand the underlying issues they have faced along the course and the steps they took to overcome those challenges. It is intended to investigate the student’s successes in language learning and bring to light effective learning strategies that will allow more learners to achieve a higher English level. The paper lastly aims to discover the student’s perspective of language learning as it is influenced by their peers, their institutions, and society.

### **Research Questions**

The researcher is prompted to search for answers to these research questions to achieve the paper’s aims.

1. What are the struggles of the students in learning a second language?
2. What are the events in their course of study, in which they have considered themselves successful?
3. What are the learning strategies employed in learning that is proven effective?
4. What is their frame of action in response to the challenges in their study of the English language?

### **Literature Review**

The difficulties in second language learning are still a mystery for many scholars as well as language teachers. Investigating this aspect of second language acquisition requires a great deal of effort and resources since the factors that affect learners vary from every position and are also unique, according to individuals. Ehrman (1996) expressed the

possibilities of investigating this aspect through research, but after reviewing about 10 articles, there is still a discrepancy in students' successes and struggles in acquiring a second language.

Huang (2005) pointed out that "learning difficulties/constraints are also often concerned with insider's perception of teacher-learner roles and relationships, which are grounded within a certain culture of learning" (p. 3). In principle, teaching styles, strategies, and techniques play a vital role in learners' development. For example, students exposed to the direct language teaching method are often active and are expected to initiate communication in class in contrast to those taught with the grammar translation method. The roles in the latter are very traditional (Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Students learn what the teacher knows because they were instructed by an authority, which is the teacher. Meanwhile, students using the direct method are less passive. The teacher and the students are in a partner role where the teacher directs students, and they are learning the language in the process.

Martin (2004) highlighted that cultural and linguistic influences are fundamental impediments to EFL success in Japan. It is true that the student's orientation/motivation majorly affects what to learn and what is being learned. In the Japanese setting, they view English education as an option, not a necessity. The absence of an environment where L2 is required to be spoken is a significant concern in the field because, without its presence, the students fail to distinguish the importance of learning the language.

On the other hand, Fithriani (2019) discussed in her paper that "students believed that grammar was a problematic aspect to learn as they needed to memorize rules and apply them." Grammatical concepts, by default, are one of the significant stressors for ESL students when learning the new language, not to mention that learners are also expected to have a good grasp of communication using English. The pressure to speak L2 in a non-English speaking environment is also a factor of students' poor performance in class or demotivation. These aspects of the study are the cause of strain in obtaining a high competency level in the second language.

The literature above discusses the students' struggles through different lenses, their relationship in the classroom, how society affects the study, and last, students' perspective toward the language. Acknowledging the complexity of second language acquisition, we can presume that during the entire course of studying a second language, these are not the only occurrences of what one must go through to achieve fluency; instead, these are just some fragments of a more significant phenomenon, be it struggles or success, in the intricate process of language learning.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research is grounded on the three aspects of the narrative research approach developed by Clandinin and Connely (2000), deeply influenced by John Dewey (1938), which Wang & Geale (2015) have discussed. These three dimensions—interaction, continuity, and place—are used as an analysis guide to uncover hidden implications from the stories gathered. In the interaction aspect, the researcher investigates the participants' positions and their interactions outside personal spaces to understand further how their emotions, conceptions, and the influence of their social group affect their study of the English language. In the continuity aspect, on the other hand, the participants are expected to tell stories about their: (a) past experiences on language learning, (b) their current situation and progress in their language education, and (c) their future outlook on learning

the English language. Understanding the past, present, and future will unravel the complex nature of the inter-related stories they have provided. In the place aspect, the researcher hopes to understand how the location or the place where the learning is happening impacts language learning.

### **Method**

Narrative inquiry is employed in this paper. Using a narrative format to present findings, a researcher can access rich layers of information that provide a more in-depth understanding of the participants' perspective (Wang & Geale, 2015). Using this approach allows the participant to convey their stories in an accessible or uncontrolled manner; thus, it gives the researcher the ability to analyze the specific subject and the spectrum that will pave the way to a clear understanding of the subject matter. The participants' stories are arranged chronologically to present the flow of their development and use thematic structure to explain the learning experience relationship.

Teaching in Japanese schools for three years gave me access to understanding the concept of Japanese language education. The participants in this study are five high school students who have answered the request to narrate their stories regarding their English education and the experience that comes with it. The form in which the stories are gathered is through oral history. The students are asked to elaborate and talk about every aspect of their English study from elementary school to senior high school.

### **Data Collection**

The collection of data in the paper involves blended face-to-face interviews and social network communication. The data were collected primarily through 30-to-40 minutes of one-on-one or group interviews, but if additional information was needed, social network messaging was used to ask for further clarification. Using the semi-structured interview method, which Iwai (2008) used, the students were asked to recount their language learning experiences. They were also asked to express their perspective on language strategies. Open-ended questions were used so that "they could provide their honest voices, thoughts, and experiences and have opportunities to reflect on their experiences regarding" (Iwai, 2008) second language learning.

Since there were still some difficulties for students to express themselves in English, the interviews were conducted in Japanese. By doing so, the students were free to convey their outlook and elucidate critical information.

The questions below are the interview prompts used:

1. Please describe your learning experience, from your first encounter until the present.
2. What are the difficulties that you have faced in studying the language?
3. What are the things that you consider successful during the study?
4. What are the solutions you have found to succeed in your learning difficulties?

The prompts listed from one to four are the main prompts used in the interview. Additional comments and follow up questions are also present to gather more information or stimulate the respondents into providing more in-depth information.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Participants were past students of the researcher. The members had attended the

researcher's class for two years in junior high school and have a good relationship with the researcher. Their participation in the study was purely voluntary after answering the intention survey online. The study participants were informed about the place, time, length, and content of the interview. Since the stories gathered in this study are personal, the researcher chose not to reveal any names in writing this paper to protect the students' privacy. The information and data collected were agreed to be used solely for this paper.

### **Participants' Profiles**

The volunteer respondents of this study were five high school students currently attending different schools across western Japan. Four were in the Osaka area and one was from Shimane Prefecture. Each participant is identified by a pseudonym.

#### ***Student H***

Student H is a 16-year-old student in a public high school in Shimane Prefecture. He belonged to a sports track. Unlike the other participants, his course did not focus on English. However, he attended English class three to four times per week, which is typically divided into two classes: a grammar class and a communication class.

#### ***Student R***

He was a second-grade high school student in the greater Osaka area. At the age of 17, he had experience with English from the age of three. He was attending a private school with specific courses for sports, English, and general studies. When he was a first-grade student, he was in the English course, but he was transferred to the university preparatory course upon promotion.

#### ***Student M***

Student M was a 17-year-old female student attending a private university high school. Attending the global course, she had the most advanced English skills among the five respondents. Her language journey was set in motion when she was four years old by enrolling in an English conversation school. She was pursuing her study with the view that English, just like any other toy, is a tool for communication and fun.

#### ***Student F***

He was a 15-year-old high school student in a private university high school department in Osaka. He belonged to a course whose focus aimed to enter a distinguished university. His strand was called the "Tokushin course." It was a course where students were asked to study rigorously to safeguard their success in entering an acclaimed university. With his peers' influence at junior high school, his English learning motivation increased, and his objective was to enter the English department of his chosen university.

#### ***Student RK***

Student RK attended the same private school as student R. He was in the university preparatory course, too. He started learning English when he was in the fifth grade of elementary school. He was a 17-year-old male and hoped to go to university by recommendation, not by taking the regular university entrance examination.

## Results

Participants recalled their experiences and retold their stories providing extensive details of their encounters in their journey to second language acquisition. The students' five narratives gave a more straightforward prospect on the sophistication of second language acquisition. Although they possessed different views, attitudes toward learning, motivation, and studying techniques, I observed some common areas to all the stories. Their stories are arranged chronologically and thematically to understand what constitutes and affects their language learning endeavors. The collected and arranged oral histories are presented in the following section.

### *Student H's Story*

The required hours for third grade in elementary school to study English are 36 hours divided across the academic year. The third grade is when Student H started his encounter with the study. The English class's aim in elementary did not require students to acquire any grammatical ability or language competence. Instead, they were held to get used to the language. He said they were mainly taught to memorize words, speakeasy conversations, and group activities to allow students to have a real feel of the language use. He was successfully seated as a champion in an English Quiz event, and from that time, he thought of studying English further. His junior high school involvement was different. His class was divided into two classes: the JTE's (Japanese Teacher of English) and Native Speaker Class, or the Alternative Language Teachers' (ALT), class. The JTE class was reserved for grammar class. In the class, they were taught grammatical rules, structures, and others.

On the other hand, the ALT class was for the application of knowledge from the JTE class. The communicative class was designed for the students to have an environment where they could practice spoken interaction with their peers and native speakers. He mainly liked speech activities because they allowed him to convey his thoughts. Although it was hard for him to construct one because of the challenging grammatical rules, not to mention language syntax, successfully doing the speech in front of the class with proper pronunciation and confidence is what he considered a milestone in his studies. The challenge, though, had just started because upon entering high school, English was on a different level. His verb conjugation studies, inflections, and forms in JHS were doubled, and he had difficulties in language functions. He elaborated that it is hard to understand or translate a sentence if one does not know the contextual meaning of words embedded in the sentence because of this aspect of English. He found ways to solve these issues to seek his teachers' help or reach out to the internet for quick answers to his confusion. Comparing his L1 and L2 grammar also helped him correctly understand the difference between the two languages. The high school dilemma about language functions was successfully overcome by teaching contextual meanings by providing practical examples.

Moreover, according to him, the teacher also expanded the words to different contexts and provided various proper usage examples. Music also played a vital role in his study since his hobby of listening to foreign music gave him a more vital interest to engage in the study of the subject. His curiosity to learn the meaning of the lyrics of a song allowed him to motivate himself successfully. Furthermore, he also saw himself traveling abroad and thought it would be useful for him to communicate in English during the trip. His drive to study the subject was growing substantially, and his thinking was that he needed to work harder to learn the language successfully.



### ***Student R's Story***

Influenced by his parents, whose jobs involve occasional English use, Student R started his journey when he was a third grader by attending English lessons at a cram school. Cram schools play a vital role in the supplementary or advanced education of students in Japan. They provide lessons that either complement the classroom lectures or conduct a higher-level lecture to prepare future studies students. Taking part in the classes for at least once a week, Student R had his most significant achievement in the study after a year, that is, passing the Eiken level 3 exam (CEFR A1 Level). He also mentioned that during his study in the said cram school, the teacher had spoken English throughout the lesson when giving instructions and explaining grammar, although he was Japanese. He mentioned that he had difficulty understanding the teacher's statements but recognized that his listening and comprehension capabilities had increased and, thus, he had earned his English level certificate. When he entered Grade 6, he started learning the language formally at his local elementary school. The presence of a native speaker teaching the lessons helped him improve his intonation and other speaking abilities. He was enjoying the study because it involved a lot of games and fun activities. His amusement in the language study however slowly diminished when he started taking classes in junior high school. Mentioning past tense, past perfect, future perfect tenses, and other tenses that constitute the different languages' different components, he expressed his difficulty in mastering those concepts due to the vast number of existing principles. He had a dire experience in the more in-depth study of the language concepts. Nevertheless, he felt a sense of fulfillment during the spoken activities conducted in the classroom. One of the most memorable experiences in his junior high school English study was his delight when the ALT in the classroom understood the message he was trying to convey. Homonyms had also caused troubles, according to him. He was perplexed with multiple-meaning words or Homonyms. He argued that one word in the Japanese language has only one meaning while words in English, depending on the usage, connote different meanings other than how they are defined in the dictionary.

In junior high school, as the student moves up to a higher level, the degree of language study is also expected to thrive drastically. Linguistic abilities in these timelines are expected to improve because the high school entrance examination contains onerous language-related sections, and vocabularies must be expanded, which means one must be receptive to learning complicated terms. Pronunciation is also affected in lexicon improvement, which sometimes results in difficulty vocalizing these profound locutions. The intervention made by both the JTE and ALT had allowed him to overcome these challenges and move forward in his course. Unfortunately, with all the speaking skills improvement he had in junior high school because of the consistent production of language in the classroom, facilitated by the teachers creating a real-life situation where students were asked to converse or do some acts, dexterity for good communication gradually shrank upon entering high school. Depending on the strand or the student's course study, the amount of attention given to English education varies. Students in English courses received more hours of English study compared to those of the standard courses. Although attending the English course for a year, his high school concern was that teachers were bombarding students with great quantities of language concepts such as modals and passive sentences, which would help them to pass their university entrance exams. "It is tedious," he said. The lesson only involved studying syntax, after which were tons of writing exercises that students needed to answer. "I want more speaking in

the class,” he added. Recently, most young learners have begun perceiving a foreign language necessary and a necessity in entering society. He said he sees himself in the future in a position where he can communicate freely with other people using English. The lack of communicative learning in his classroom is one of the main reasons his skills have lowered in these past few years.

On top of that, when he asked the teachers for clarification, they would answer back in Japanese even though he asked them in English. This had discouraged him because he sought to start a conversation in English to practice speaking and listening, yet he got the answer in his native language. When asked to compare his English before and currently, he said, “It is getting worse, I think I need to work more now.” Aware of his progress, he was continuing to exert effort to learn the language required for tertiary education.

### ***Student M’s Story***

At the age of four, her mother sent her to an English conversation school. The primary purpose was not learning the language but for making friends with other kids. Having fewer peers in her early childhood, *eikaiwa*, or English conversation, school was her mother’s solution. Unknowingly, this was the start of a more extraordinary endeavor that allowed her to attend a prestigious high school with advanced pedagogy in the international language. She continued to attend the said school for several years, and when she turned 10, she was able to pass the Eiken Grade 5. From then, she continuously took the exams, leading her to pass the Eiken Grade 2 exam in her third year in junior high school. During her study days, remembering vocabulary was one of her struggles, but she overcame this challenge by diligently doing her assignments and making the extra effort for her English studies.

Her early childhood days of learning the language, as she described, was full of amusement. As they were not engulfed with the study of grueling language structures, their class was brimmed in songs and games, which led her just to enjoy the learning of the language. In third grade, she formally began the in-depth study of the language. Facilitated by the homeroom teacher and a foreign assistant teacher, students studied different expressions. This kind of study load was doubled upon entering junior high school. Nevertheless, she continued to show exemplary performance in learning the language. Determined to achieve fluency in the language to communicate effectively, she even attended the municipal English recitation contest that she considered a success despite not bagging any award. Being chosen from almost 400 students to speak in front of different school representatives, not to mention with almost 70 native speakers who watched the contest, having the courage to speak in a language one has not mastered is a triumph. Dictation, shadowing, and recitations are just a few of the activities she had run into in the school. The studies that gave her the grasp of idiomatic expressions and communication gave her the ability to express her sentiment effectively. Compared to reading and writing, her listening and speaking were most refined among the language’s four macro skills. She could even hold a dialogue with a native speaker. Her present situation, on the other hand, was quite strenuous. More so than in junior high school, she was spending ten hours a week to study English (grammar and communication). Being in a global course or English course was one factor of this demanding schedule. Yearly, her school allowed its students to participate in exchange studies in other countries like New Zealand, Malta, Tazmania, Canada, Australia, and the United States. She stated that the most challenging thing to do in attaining fluency was having the mindset of English

speakers. Japanese speakers are well known to be shy, timid, and most of the time, they choose to be quiet to refrain from any form of argument. English speakers (not in general) are instead the opposite. The atmosphere is always bright, light, free, and fun. This aspect of communication affected by the cultural barrier is, indeed, a matter in which years of experience is needed. Her effort to carefully understand the language and the culture that comes with it resulted in obtaining a score of over 900 in the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) exam. High school English is demanding; students are asked to read a large amount of literature aggregating to 50,000 words in a three-month term. English ability was highly valued in her institution, as almost half of the students attending the course go in and out of the country to pursue international exchange opportunities. Meaning, spelling, forms, and registers are things she had difficulty with even in high school.

Nevertheless, by asking the teachers and engaging herself in a conversation with native speakers in her school, she struggled with these hardships little by little. Teaching her classmates and being praised by the teachers for her exquisite aptness in the language were the moments where she felt satisfaction and victory. Despite the lack of influence from home, the improvement of skills of the people who went to international exchange and her school critical apprehension to English studies kept her motivated to develop her linguistic abilities more. When she was asked to rate her confidence in speaking the language, she gave a staggering 85 percentage. The rating is phenomenal because high school students often rate themselves substantially lower in the usual scenario. Recording one's voice when speaking and reviewing it later could improve pronunciation and intonation, she said. Knowing the different types of English spoken in different parts of the world is also what she considered a great platform to improve one's English ability.

### ***Student F's Story***

Starting in sixth grade, student F took his first step to second language acquisition through the usual public elementary school program. Without any interest in the language, he participated in the classroom activities that involved vocabulary drilling and casual dialogues initiated by the teacher. In the usual practice, classes done in the sixth grade below did not focus on the language's accuracy aspect; instead, it focused on fluency. Activities were directed towards developing the students' communicative abilities such as pronunciation, intonation, and interactional confidence. The lesson's format allowed him to immerse himself and foster his curiosity on the language without the usual stress of lexical or grammatical anxieties. Junior high school immersion is a different side of the story. The pressure to get a high score on the test is why he continued to work hard toward learning the language. In junior high school, students are usually composed of groups of three or more surrounding elementary school graduates, providing a more diverse population to the student body. The environment offered a system wherein students could see the difference between their skills and the skills of other students, not only for English but also in other aspects. Seeing his classmates explore English with higher development, he was encouraged to a state of earnestness to compete with those high caliber peers equally. His peers' social position in English competence buoyed up his drive to step up and aim for higher aptitude. His effort was supplemented by going to a cram school for nine hours a month. Parental paragon is also a facet in his study that motivated him to continue to pursue his language activities.

The nature of his parents' work as company employees, their connection, and the

situation at work that his mother and father narrated to him were some of the ideas that made him contemplate his future direction. Indeed, society is changing, and with the decreasing population of the country, opportunities for domestic and international placements are radically proliferating. The junior high school ambiance was the genesis of this mindset. Classes that involve regular communication were the culmination of fastidious grammar and syntax studies; he said that he always found it attractive. Despite the adversity to understand meanings because of how syntax and context affects the meaning of words, the increase of his lexical bank and the ability to put them into practice were just bits of what he perceived as a personal triumph. He valued his study; it was not because it was a requirement of the educational system but because he saw himself in the future using the language. His perspective in language learning also changed through the years, he would have lost an opportunity to travel abroad and communicate with people who share the same speech. Entering high school in 2021, while he could not get into the global or English course of his school, he still actively tried to get the best out of his studies by asking the teachers when there were misconceptions. The course design for a typical high school is a study in which they are prepared for university, representing his learning situation. Fast-paced schooling usually starts with a short introduction and practice of grammar after problem solving and translation. Since speaking is what he considered his language success, he missed talking in the classroom. The common practice to arrange words and form sentences, read texts and find answers, translate Japanese text to English and vice-versa, and answer numerous English quizzes were just examples of underrated learning tools that his teacher used. His conception of learning a language is that students are trained to communicate with English speakers competently, and he sees the traditional method a burden in attaining his self-concept of English study. Qualifying to enroll in the university's English department is his primary motivation in high school. Memorizing vocabulary and asking for teachers' intervention are just small parts of the techniques he used to overcome the strains in his studies. When asked if he can recommend techniques to successfully learn the language, "Study everything and spit it out. It is faster if you use your vocabulary when speaking," is what he answered. Indeed, producing the language orally is a good method of reinforcement and a lack of such activity could lead to lesser retention of language knowledge among learners.

### ***Student RK's Story***

Student RK spent an hour a week studying English while in grade six as part of the school's curriculum. He was immersed in skits, chants, and songs. Word memorization was the most basic form of learning that he undertook. One mandate for assistant language teachers when conducting their classes is that they must not use Japanese in instruction. Student RK, in his early exposure to the language, found it difficult. They were asked to repeat words, imitate sounds, and even memorize sentences without adequately understanding meanings. Beginning in junior high school, he started learning basic expressions. The concepts of sentence construction and interpretation of meanings had begun. In a way, they gave him the ability to understand context. The songs that the teachers played before and during the class was his method of remembering words. In this activity, the teacher made a worksheet with missing lyrics. Then the students needed to listen to the music to complete the lyrics of the song correctly. Like any other beginner, grammar for him was complicated. One specific aspect he mentioned was the use of infinitives. Using the word "to" to express plans and future endeavors was confusing

because of the elements needed to complete the sentence. There are also verb conjugation that is specific to such structures. Reading long English stories, texts, and scripts were the activities that he was not interested in. Reading and comprehending the passage's content and answering the comprehension check questions were part of this style.

Moreover, they were also asked to translate some parts of the reading and explain it to their understanding. With a limited lexicon and grammatical knowledge, he was made to exert enormous effort. Looking at the bright side, he attained communicative skills that helped him to express his opinions. Using the grammatical structures that he learned, he gained the confidence to speak with native English speakers. Being understood, he said, is always fulfilling. Unlike the other students, nothing influenced him to study. Classes were required, so he attended them. Seeing his parent securing an excellent job with zero English ability gave him the perception that it is unnecessary to study the language if one's future involves staying or living in the country. The students around him who thought otherwise were very inclined to study. Despite this, his mindset did not interfere with the study of the language. Admitted to a private school for high school study, when I spoke with him, he was attending a course that successfully prepares students to enter a university. Recognizing the aim of the course, English study in his program entailed a traditional style of teaching. Grammar translation was the dominant method, accompanied by a copious amount of practice tests which the teacher believed would help students retain learning. Immersed in a communicative style of learning in JHS, his study habits and motivation for learning English was slowly declining because he did not receive the chance to produce the theories that he studied. He valued interaction because he could test his skills, not only of speaking, but also other aspects like vocabulary, comprehension, and context understanding.

Moreover, since the study was advancing rapidly due to university test pressures, simple grammar was being incorporated with the passive voice, modals, and idiomatic expressions. However, one benefit for the students, despite Student RK's dissatisfaction with the teaching style and classroom activities, was one-on-one study/consultation before test. Teachers of English in high school also affects the students' communication aspect because they use Japanese more than English. Furthermore, even if they speak English, they speak with Katakana English, which is not a good influence on communication because of its improper sound production. He was not captivated by language learning when we spoke, but he yearned to communicate effectively using a second language.

## **Discussion**

After hearing the stories of the students' personal experiences, I analyzed their descriptions. Discovering aspects that are an essential part of the narrative landscape, students' struggles, and success in their second language learning came to light. The framework laid out in this paper is used to interpret different occurrences to relate the pieces of their study histories.

### ***What are the struggles of the students in learning a second language?***

Students or non-native speakers engaged in the study for second language acquisition in the early days of their acquisition will experience different significant difficulties, not only because of the difference in the language components but also because of the background. Students in high school learning a second language in the center of the study

revealed three significant language learning difficulties.

The first struggle is difficulties in lexicon and language function features. The most basic learning unit is vocabulary. Without enough word stock, a learner will fail to fathom utterances in the second language. According to Mulder et al., “Building a rich vocabulary in a second language (L2) is essential to gain a sufficient level of L2 proficiency and, therefore, entails a large part of L2 education” (2019). The ability of a student to communicate and comprehend effectively in L2 is proportionate to lexical knowledge. Vocabulary does not only affect the ability to understand spoken words but also the contextual meaning of statements. The students mentioned that they struggle to comprehend contexts because a small change in word unit, even in sentence with the same structure, can affect the whole meaning. The knowledge of language functions is also critical. Interpreting implication based only on one meaning of words is a mistake that is common in L2 comprehension. Because of the lesser knowledge in application of words and concepts, learners often perceive the words as they see them without considering contextual meaning. As an example, students with essential vocabulary usually understand the sentence “How are you?” as a question asking for about someone’s emotional state. On the other hand, the question “How old are you?”, due to its similar feature with just addition of the word “old”, causes students to sometimes answer with their feeling instead of their age. Perfetti & Hart (2002), in their lexical quality hypothesis, wrote that elaborate semantic, phonological, and orthographic representations of words in the mental lexicon facilitate language ability.

The second struggle is grammatical and syntactic features. Grammar is the most common problem among learners of a second language. The difference in the syntax of learners’ L1s and L2s influence the learning significantly. Students who are taught using the grammar-translation method occasionally translate the words in a sentence as they see them. This can result in a preposterous composition. Usually, when people talk about grammar, the first thing to come to mind is the arrangement of words in a sentence. However, grammar means more than that. Grammatical knowledge also covers structures and facets like verb conjugations, verb agreement, adjective inflections, and other parts of speech that constitute a sentence. Respondents in this study mentioned that using the passive voice, modals, infinitives, and other language features, cause difficulties, especially when taught by teachers who give fast-paced lectures on these aspects of language study. The study of the grammatical features of a language requires a huge amount of motivation and teachers should be responsible in devising ways to teach grammar with ease to further engage students. Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam write, “Since the 1970s, attention has shifted from ways of teaching grammar to ways of getting learners to communicate, but grammar has been seen to be a powerful undermining and demotivating force among L2 learners” (2011). Indeed, because of dominating preconceptions about grammar, the students in this study perceived grammar learning as difficult and tedious.

A third cause of struggle was sociologic-communicative features. Speaking remains the most wearisome ability to master for most second language learners. Students are very composed in the Japanese setting when they are tasked to showcase their language ability in terms of writing, listening, and reading. The atmosphere changes, though, when speaking is involved. Cultural factors, individual attitudes, and communication levels are some of the reiterated factors affecting underperformance which led to the creation of communication-based instruction but, still, approaches such as communicative language

teaching (CLT) which are designed to improve learners' communicative skills, fail to address the belief that "Language is best learned when the learners' attention is focused on understanding, saying and doing something with language, and not when their attention is focused explicitly on linguistic features" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 27). Students' skills either improve or decline in high school settings because of the scarcity of this language teaching strategy. Student M also mentioned that, aside from the difficulties of pronunciation, having the native mindset to respond in conversations entirely is a skill that is difficult to develop but helpful if attained. Native mindset is a thinking skill in L2 communication where the L2 speaker remodel his logical philosophies into that of a native to properly comprehend the conversation and respond in an appropriate manner.

***What are the events in their course of study in which they have considered themselves successful?***

The *Jitsuyo Eigo Gino Kentei* (Test in Practical English Proficiency, or *Eiken*), is the most common test high school students are required to pass before they go to their university. Having a certificate of proficiency from test institutions signifies that a learner has passed the standard like that of the CEFR. While three out of five respondents only possessed certification, all of them were vying to get the certificate of the Eiken 2 level or CEFR B1. Respondents viewed that having a certificate from the TOEIC, Eiken, or other English ability certifying exams is one primary indication that they have succeeded in acquiring standardized language abilities. Aside from this, for the participants effectively expressing themselves and being understood in their second language was also a significant leap in their study. It is well known that speaking is the hardest part of language learning. However, speaking and understanding a language is a triumph to celebrate, considering the absence of an environment where L2 practical application is required. Gaining confidence through teachers, classmates, and partners during skits and communicative acts helped the participants to heighten their mettle in language production. At the end of the day, the participants' ultimate goal was to gain communicative competence. Using the language is more important than just knowing about it (Al Hosni, 2014) because "there is no point knowing a lot about the language if you cannot use it" (Scrivener, 2005, p. 146). A learner demonstrating that he can utilize L2 when talking with native speakers or other speakers of the L2 who are fluent, is the highest exemplification of successful language learning.

***What is their frame of action in response to the challenges in their study of the English language?***

***More knowledgeable other (MKO) intervention***

MKO means more knowledgeable others. MKO is a concept based on Vygotsky's ZPD or zone of proximal development. "MKO is an important concept that relates to the difference between what a student can achieve on his own and what the student can achieve with the guidance and encouragement from a more skilled partner" (Lim Abdullah et. al., 2013). MKO intervention in the stories is observed when students who have difficulties understanding materials consult their peers or teachers and attain enlightenment in the difficulties they are experiencing. MKO intervention is present in

the stories among all respondents and can be deemed as their fundamental method in solving their suffering brought by diverse linguistic challenges. As the primary MKO in the class, the teacher gave them further clarification about their doubts. In case of an unavailability of the primary MKO, a peer who is more likely to understand that material functioned as a secondary MKO. MKO intervention in learning is also a form of scaffolding technique, so it is beneficial because learners' knowledge is reinforced while seeking further elucidation.

### ***Internet consultation***

The internet now is the biggest library being considered. With the massive amount of open educational resources on the internet, students can search for their answers during the study with just keywords and one click. Students who cannot consult a teacher during off lecture hours are usually browsing the internet for the answer. One respondent said that the internet helps him understand the meaning of words in different contexts because the search results provide the answers specific to the question and dispense various meanings related to the answers. The availability of these answers in easy access allows the student to solve the problems themselves. ScVrtič (2012) writes, "The development led from free content that one can individually teach himself, to social learning, where users have the possibility of mutual communication and exchange of opinions". Furthermore, Islam (2011) argued that "learners obtain knowledge on the Internet instead of lonely dependence on teachers and books. Learning resources from the Internet not only are very colorful, but also multi-channeled, multi-perspective, multileveled and multi-formed. In addition, it is very quick and timely. We can choose learning materials from the extensive resources we need on the Internet, thus which easily aroused keen interest in learning initiative" (p. 1084).

### ***Music in language learning***

Songs have become an integral part of our language experience (Schoepp, 2001). People learn a second language sometimes to learn the meaning of the lyrics of a song. Music became a platform for three of the respondents to remember vocabulary and work harder to study the language. By listening to English songs, students can learn words that are useful in communicating. Songs also are a form of expression. Students can learn the art of expressing themselves by listening to music and understanding the meaning of words used in literary, arts, and communicative settings. Israel (2013) writes that "Music and singing enables the speaking of English in a more relaxed and non-threatening context similarly, music allows for the learning of language structures and words, thus improving conversational and social communication skills." The linguistic features of music expose the students to authentic English, which is an essential factor in promoting language learning. According to Schoepp (2001), "it relates directly to both the affective filter and automaticity. If students are exposed to songs they enjoy, more learning will occur since they may seek out the music outside the classroom. The repetitive style of songs then promotes the automatization of colloquial language."

### **Conclusion**

Language study is a complicated process, and it involves mastering a wide array of skills set to successfully acquire the second language. During the study, learners will experience success and failures. Trials and errors are other formulas of effective acquisitions, so a



learner must be earnest enough to endure the study's hardship. In terms of the high school students who are learning a second language, they encounter difficulties and successes that are not only caused by the second language (L2) itself but also from these three different dimensions.

It can be observed through the stories that students whose parents encountered the language in their work provided motivational factors that made the students in this study realize the importance of learning the language. The students whose parents did not utilize English, on the other hand, said the opposite. Correspondingly, their classmates served as models. Seeing other students to confidently communicate in English become a good drive for others in the study. Thinking that their classmates are like them, that they are born and live in the same environment, learners foster the belief that what their classmates can do, they also can do. In addition, teachers have the most significant influence. Teachers who encouraged English in the classroom created a learning environment where students could communicate freely using the second language. On the other hand, traditional teachers could not create a communicative classroom because they only focused on grammar-translation. Their methods resulted in the decline of student communicative ability.

Furthermore, the students' perceptions of the language changed through the study's course depending on their orientation and exposure. Learners who did not possess an interest in the language in the past, through different fun learning activities, were able to appreciate the study of the English language. They were also able to motivate themselves to improve their skills further. However, students who had enjoyed their class when they were in elementary and junior high school and were suddenly exposed to a classroom whose focus was passing a test, and who only had opportunities to slowly answer and read, slowly lost their interest in the language.

Finally, it was observed that the pace of study had an impact on the development of the English skills of students. Analyzing the five students' stories in the study, the school was the most significant influencer or motivational source. Five of the students drastically felt an increase in their motivation when they were in junior high school. The reason is because of the fun activities, communication practice, linguistic games, and performance acts. These events in their junior high school created a sense of interest in the language because, through the application, they understood that they were learning; their success in communication was proof that they could acquire a second language. Because of the practice of some institutions to focus on the university entrance examination, they lost the communicative component of language learning upon entering high school. Instead of pair works, group activities, and collaborative language learning, they began to keep their eyes focused on the textbooks and their hands working on a mountain-like pile of practice tests. The learning method in high school caused a decrease in their interest and motivation in the language. If their drive to study before was because they enjoyed using the language, then the reason for studying in high school was to pass a test. It is ironic because the Ministry of Education aims to produce students who can communicate in English competently. Yet, high school institutions seek to produce students who will go to prestigious universities rather than highly competent language learners.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study is limited to the stories of five high school students. Their stories mirror what is happening in real classrooms, but they do not reflect the whole population's experiences.

Furthermore, the students in this study were attending different courses of study, so learners' learning experiences in ordinary school courses could be different from those in specialized global or English courses.

### Implications

Knowing students' backgrounds in their second language learning paves the way for institutions and language teachers to rethink their language teaching methods. Freeman et al. (2003) laid out four vital strategies for academic success. The third key is the most applicable to second language learning. They proposed that instructors should organize collaborative activities and scaffold instruction to build students' academic proficiency. We live in a technology-dominated society, and the strategy where students sit to wait for the teacher to transfer knowledge is obsolete. Teachers, either young or old, should update their teaching techniques to help learners get a deeper understanding of the language while employing up-to-date teaching strategies.

Similarly, high schools should redirect their focus in designing their policies and curricula toward English language education. Institutions should have the capacity to know their own students' interest in the language, such as how motivated they are, their expectations, their goal to learn the language, and how they want to learn. Schools should use this information to elevate the students' enthusiasm in developing their communication skills in the second language. While the school's reputation depends on the high acceptance rate in university entrance examinations, they should remember that building communicative competence among students is indispensable.

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# Introducing Collocations to Japanese Learners: A Task-Based, Corpus-Informed Approach

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## **Abstract**

This paper presents a proposal for introducing collocational concepts to upper-intermediate Japanese learners. It is structured around the description and discussion of: 1) fixed expressions, 2) binomials, 3) semi-restricted collocations, 4) polysemy, and 5) semantic prosody. A complementary five-stage pedagogic sequence is proposed using multi-word items taken from a New York Times article (Brody, 2017) and supplementary linguistic data gathered from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (Davies, 2008). These sources are used in order to promote reflection about broad lexical tendencies found in authentic contexts. Most of the activities proposed are task-based, and many of them provide students with the opportunity to investigate collocational relationships using tools at their immediate disposal (e.g., commercial search engines and smartphones). This approach is intended to foster learner autonomy by encouraging students to both notice and investigate collocational relationships inside (and hopefully outside) of the classroom.

**Keywords:** collocations, corpus linguistics, task-based learning

Collocations are combinations of words that tend to appear in close proximity to each other more frequently than can be accounted for by chance (Carter, 1998, p. 51-53). This paper describes collocations identified in an authentic text and offers a proposal for how they could be presented to a class of Japanese university students at the upper-intermediate level. Particular attention will be given to how these examples might be used to help students develop an awareness of the constraints of word combinations and to motivate them to notice and investigate collocations autonomously.

## **Methodology**

### ***Text Selection***

The text explored here for pedagogic use is the first eight paragraphs of a New York Times article entitled “Hooked on Our Smartphones” (Brody, 2017). This text was chosen based on its salience to Japanese young adults, the vast majority of whom (96%) own smartphones (Taylor & Silver, 2019, p. 13). The article is critical of frequent smartphone use, arguing in a somewhat dismissive manner that it is symptomatic of misplaced priorities. This perspective may run counter to the students’ beliefs and it is hoped would engage them by providing the opportunity to consolidate and/or reevaluate their attitudes regarding this ubiquitous technology.

### ***Identification of Collocations***

Word combinations in the text that seemed to represent collocations were first identified based on intuition. These were then checked against the Corpus of Contemporary American English (Davies, 2008), also known as COCA, to ensure that their collocational

relationships were significant. Those that held up to corpus evidence were then considered for their salience in the service of introducing students to important collocational concepts. Using these procedures, a total of thirteen collocations were chosen for presentation.

### **Organization**

Moon (1997, p. 47-48) describes the difficulty in categorizing multi-word items, arguing that truly discrete lexical categories are a rarity and that some overlap is inevitable. In consideration of this, there has been no attempt to categorize the identified collocations canonically. Instead, they have been grouped opportunistically based on how they might be exploited as a part of a pedagogic sequence.

Five categories have been designated for this purpose and have been organized here in the same order as they would be presented to students. The first three categories (fixed expressions, binomials, and semi-restricted collocations) are collocation types adapted from those described by Carter (1998, p. 70-71) and Alexander (1984). The final two (polysemy and semantic prosody) are characteristics commonly associated with collocations, as described by Carter (1998, p. 12-13) and Partington (2004) respectively.

Each collocation category will be discussed in three parts, starting with 1) a *description* of both the category and the specific instances identified in the text, 2) a proposal for its *presentation* to students, and 3) a *rationale* for both its place in the pedagogic sequence and for the techniques suggested.

### **Disclaimer**

The proposed five-stage pedagogic presentation described below has not been formally tested and as such no claims about its efficacy can be made. It has been provided primarily to serve as a tangible example of how one might introduce collocations to students and as such is intended to be illustrative rather than prescriptive.

## **Fixed Expressions**

### **Description**

Fixed expressions as described by Carter (1998, p. 65-68) are multi-word phrases that possess the following three qualities:

- A) *syntactic irregularity*, or a failure to conform to conventional grammar rules (e.g., the phrase *the more the merrier*),
- B) *semantic opacity*, or having a meaning that cannot be logically construed from the expression's component parts (e.g., *kick the bucket*), and
- C) *a resistance to modification*, be that via inflection, syntactic alternation, or substitution of the expression's component parts.

Carter (1998, p. 68-70) acknowledges that fixed expressions possess these qualities in varying degrees, and that they might best be considered on a cline of fixity. The following two examples taken from the New York Times article are not exemplars for fixed expressions according to the criteria described above, but they would fall squarely on the fixed end of a cline:

- **No doubt** you've seen the following scenarios... (Brody, 2017, para. 2)  
This usage of *no doubt* functions as what Swan (2005, p. 20) categorizes as an adverb of certainty. It is somewhat semantically opaque in that it merely means that something is probable or likely but not certain; an expression such as *there is*

*no doubt that...* can be used instead to express complete confidence (Swan, 2005, p. 353).

- **Don't get me wrong**. (Brody, 2017, para. 5)  
This phrase isn't entirely fixed in that it allows for some modification through substitution and inflection (e.g. *don't get us wrong* or *you got me all wrong*). That said, it is partially restricted in that it doesn't allow substitutions of its final word (e.g., *\*please get me right*), and when used as in the text, *don't get me wrong* functions as a relatively fixed discourse marker.

### **Presentation**

Introductory tasks are designed to center around processing the gist of the text for meaning. This includes a discourse-level task that addresses *don't get me wrong*. Students should first analyze each paragraph in the text to determine its main topic and whether the author's appraisal of that topic is positive or negative. This could be used as a springboard to discuss how *don't get me wrong* functions to introduce discourse that qualifies or softens statements made immediately prior.

Following these exercises, *no doubt* should be explored. Students should be provided with a randomly ordered list of adverbs of certainty with which they are already familiar (e.g., *probably, maybe, definitely, and probably not*) and arrange them on a cline. They should then be instructed to make predictions about where *no doubt* should be inserted based on its usage in the text. This cline could then be used to contrast *no doubt* with *there is no doubt* to emphasize that the meaning of *no doubt* is not completely logical and that it might best be considered as an unevaluated, atomic vocabulary item.

### **Rationale**

Fixed expressions can serve as an introduction to collocations in accordance with the principle that language should be processed for meaning ahead of form (see Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p. 182-194). Fixed expressions can be evaluated with minimal grammatical analysis (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2012) and since *no doubt* and *don't get me wrong* function to introduce longer stretches of discourse, they might best be exploited in context as a part of introductory, meaning-centric tasks.

### **Binomials**

#### **Description**

Binomials are semantically related word pairs that tend to collocate in a specific order (Malkiel, 1959, p. 113). For example, *facts and figures* is far more common in authentic contexts such as the COCA than *figures and facts*. Binomials can be either free or fixed depending on how rigid their syntactic tendency is. Those that are completely fixed are called irreversible binomials (Malkiel, 1959, p. 113) (e.g., *spic and span*, which cannot be rendered as *span and spic*). The following examples of three binomials and one trinomial taken from the New York Times article are freer in that they would still be meaningful in the opposite order, but COCA indicates that they have a strong preference for a particular order:

- **men, women and children** (Brody, 2017, para. 1)
- **time and effort** (Brody, 2017, para. 5)
- **facts, figures** (Brody, 2017, para. 5)
- **friends, acquaintances** (Brody, 2017, para. 6)

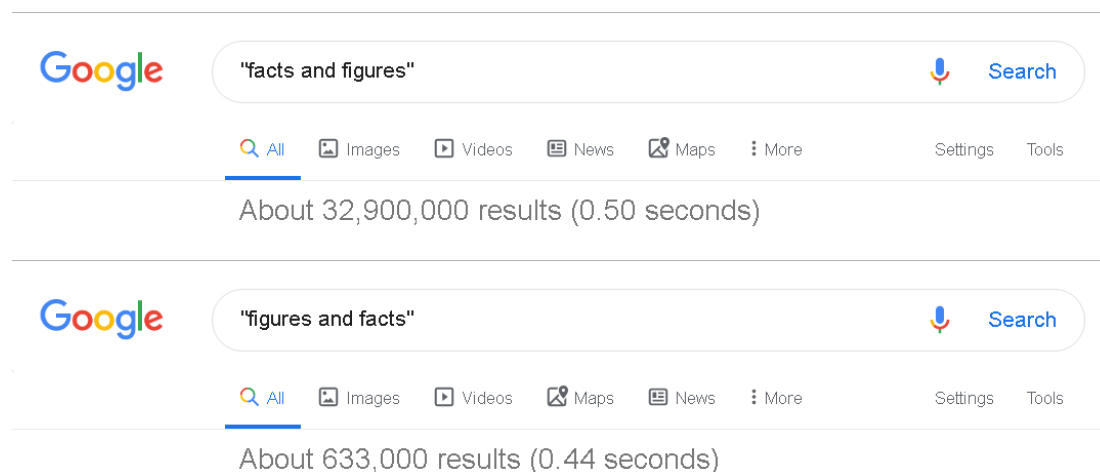
### **Presentation**

The concept of binomials could be introduced by relating them to functionally similar compound words in the students' first language of Japanese (see *Rationale* below). Following this, students should set aside the text and not refer to it for the following tasks. They should be provided with a worksheet containing a jumbled list of lexical words comprised of the constituent parts of the binomials from the text. Students should group related words together and then organize each word pair in the order that seems most appropriate. This determination could be based either on the students' recollection of the text or their intuition.

Students should then test their predictions by using their smartphones to conduct internet searches for both syntactic possibilities of each word pair (e.g., *facts and figures* and then *figures and facts*). Search terms should be put in between quotes so that the results are restricted to only the exact phrase as entered (Figure 1). Students should then record the number of results returned for each combination on their worksheet. In the case of the binomials listed above, the preferred syntactic order offers at least twice as many search results as the non-preferred order, providing a strong indication of which variation is more common. Finally, students should be introduced to the "Me First" principle, which states that binomials tend to be ordered in accordance to their relevance to the "prototypical speaker" (Cooper & Ross, 1975, p. 64-67). Following this principle, *friends* precedes *acquaintances* because the former is more closely related to the prototypical speaker than the latter.

Figure 1

*Comparison of quantity of search results for facts and figures (top) and figures and facts (bottom).*



### **Rationale**

Binomials were chosen to come second in the pedagogic sequence (following fixed expressions) because they are fairly straightforward and have numerous equivalences to compound words formed by two kanji characters in Japanese. Binomials often have the same syntax as their Japanese counterparts, such as in *husband and wife* (*fū-fu* 夫婦) and *before and after* (*zen-go* 前後). There are also contrasting examples in which the word order is reversed. *Black and white* is rendered as *white [and] black* in Japanese (*shiro-*

*kuro* 白黒), and the term *supply and demand* occurs as *demand [and] supply* (*ju-kyū* 需給). With an abundance of both complementary and contrastive examples, kanji compound words might help students to appreciate the importance of word order in natural language use.

The search engine task is intended to encourage learner autonomy by providing students with tools to conduct informal research on the words and phrases that they might encounter on their own. Granted, commercial search engines do not offer the same granular search options as fully-featured corpus software suites. But for something as straightforward as binomials, search engine results are consistent with the syntactic tendencies reflected in corpus data. Additionally, search engines are easy to access and use, which may encourage students to experiment with them as a linguistic research tool on their own. This might serve to facilitate the eventual migration to more sophisticated (if less user-friendly) language research tools in the future.

Finally, the “Me First” principle was selected for presentation as this has been found to positively influence Japanese university students’ ability to make accurate predictions about binomial word order (Morita et al., 2014).

### Semi-restricted collocations

#### *Description*

Semi-restricted collocations offer more possibilities for modification than fixed expressions in that they are often syntactically regular and relatively semantically transparent. But as their name suggests, semi-restricted collocations are constrained in the sorts of words that they tend to “associate” with. The following two examples from the New York Times article illustrate this type of collocational relationship:

- **avid** reader (Brody, 2017, para. 1)  
*Avid* tends to modify nouns related to leisure activities; thus *avid reader* or *avid golfer* are common, whereas *avid worker* is not.
- **transforming** modern society (Brody, 2017, para. 4)  
*Transform* collocates with nouns that represent things that are complex and of great consequence. Among the three most common collocates in COCA are *lives*, *society*, and *economy*.

#### *Presentation*

The following procedure illustrates how *avid* might be pedagogically exploited, though *transform* could be similarly explored. Students should work in pairs and, with the aid of a worksheet, make binary judgements about *avid* based on its use in the text (e.g., whether it is positive or negative, whether it describes behavior or appearance, and whether it modifies people or things). Following this exercise, students should be provided with a number of dictionary definitions with the headword removed. These should be comprised of definitions for difficult words from the text with *avid* being among them. Students should be instructed to predict which is the correct definition for *avid*, after which the correct answer should be revealed.

Having established a general sense of the meaning of *avid* both through context and a conventional dictionary definition, students should be provided with a fill-in-the-blank (cloze) exercise comprised of a simple sentence such as “He is an avid \_\_\_\_\_”. This should be accompanied by a word bank containing randomly ordered words of three types: A) those that would be grammatically incorrect if inserted into the blank, such as



*reading* or *work*, B) those that are grammatically correct but collocationally atypical, such as *worker* or *dentist*, and C) those that are both grammatically correct and collocationally typical, such as *reader* or *golfer*. Students should work in pairs to determine which words could be appropriately inserted into the blank. They should then come together as a class and form a provisional consensus. The instructor should provide explicit correction only if the students selected any words that were grammatically incorrect.

Students should then be provided with a corpus-based word frequency list for [*avid* + noun]. Based on this data, they should be tasked with generalizing about the types of words that keep company with *avid* and finally be given an opportunity to revise their guesses from the previous cloze activity.

### **Rationale**

Willis (1990) notes that no pedagogic grammar could ever capture how language actually works, and that it is important for students to develop learning strategies independent of grammatical description. In a similar vein, Sinclair (2004, p. 133) argues that decontextualized dictionary definitions are incapable of capturing contextualized word meaning, stating that “many, if not most, meanings require the presence of more than one word for their normal realization”. *Avid* can serve as an illustration for these two observations. *Avid worker* is grammatically acceptable, and if one were to define *avid* as “extremely eager or interested” as the Cambridge Dictionary (Cambridge University Press, n.d.-b) does, a language learner could be forgiven for overextending its usage and assuming that *avid worker* was appropriate.

The pedagogic techniques described above are intended to help students gain an understanding that while dictionary definitions and traditional grammatical descriptions can be a valuable resource, they do not provide a complete picture and should be supplemented with other strategies in order to develop a more nuanced sense of lexical relationships and word meanings.

### **Polysemy**

#### **Description**

Polysemy is the phenomenon of a word or phrase having more than one meaning. One of the ways this can occur is through what Carter (1998, p. 12) refers to as “figurative extension”, by which a word that describes something concrete is used metaphorically to conceptualize something more abstract (also see Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). An example is *to grasp*, the original meaning of which (to seize and hold tightly) has been extended to mean “fully understand”, as in *grasp an idea*. The following three polysemous words found in the text have had their meanings extended in a similar fashion:

- **busy** streets (Brody, 2017, para. 2)  
Students are almost certainly familiar with *busy* in the sense of having a lot to do. They may be less familiar with it in the sense of full of activity as it is used in the text. This sense of the word frequently collocates in COCA with nouns related to transportation infrastructure (e.g., *road*, *intersection*, and *airport*).
- **avert** countless embarrassing errors (Brody, 2017, para. 5)  
*Avert* was first used to mean to “turn (something) away” (Harper, n.d.-a), and COCA shows that this usage is still common, particularly in fiction (e.g., *he averted his eyes*). In the text, *avert* is used to mean “to prevent something bad from happening” (Cambridge University Press, n.d.-a). This represents a

figurative extension as preventing something might be thought of as metaphorically “turning away” from it. This sense of the word typically collocates in COCA with abstract nouns such as *war*, *disaster*, and *crisis*, and COCA shows that this usage is common in periodicals, newspapers, and academic contexts.

- **bombarded** by bells, buzzes and chimes (Brody, 2017, para. 7)  
The verb *bombard* was originally used to mean “to fire heavy guns” (Harper, n.d.-b), and this sense collocates with words such as *missiles*. Its use in the text represents a metaphorical extension of this concept, meaning “to inundate with”. In this capacity it is used almost exclusively with undesired forms of communication, collocating in COCA with words such as *questions*, *images*, and *messages*. This sense of the word is in fact more common in COCA than its original meaning in general contexts.

### **Presentation**

Students should be shown the top Google image search result for *busy*, which is an illustration of a woman with eight arms frantically doing office work. The instructor should elicit descriptions of the image and ask students to guess what the search term was. The correct answer should then be revealed after which students should be asked to locate *busy* in the text. They should then be asked to do an image search for *street*, which mostly returns photos of empty roads. The instructor should then show both the images for *busy* and *street* and ask students to imagine what the results for *busy street* will look like before asking them to verify by searching for the term themselves.

Students should then be provided with a list of word frequencies for nouns that collocate with *busy* taken from COCA and should be asked to organize the words into two categories. Category A would be for nouns related to “having a lot to do”, and Category B would be for everything else. After the class reaches a consensus about which words belong where, the students should be asked to find a pattern for the words in Category B and devise a provisional rule for its use.

The words *avert* and *bombard* could be explored using a similar procedure. First the original literal meaning of the word would be introduced, then it would be related to its metaphorical use in the text, and finally students would formulate hypotheses about how the extended meaning typically functions.

### **Rationale**

Polysemy was chosen to come fourth in the pedagogic sequence because it expands upon concepts introduced earlier, as all of the examples chosen to illustrate polysemy are also semi-restricted collocations. Since the identified collocations have had their literal meanings extended through metaphor, concrete examples are available to present to students to assist them in conceptualizing one of the processes through which polysemy occurs.

Activities include those that require inductive reasoning, as studies have suggested a number of benefits to this approach (Felder & Henriques, 1995, p. 26). The use of activities involving students accessing search engines on their smartphones is again to encourage them to consider different ways of researching language using the tools at their immediate disposal.

## Semantic prosody

### Description

Semantic prosody is the phenomenon of a seemingly neutral word or phrase having a positive or negative collocational tendency in authentic contexts (Partington, 2004). An example noted by Sinclair (1987, in Partington, 2004) is the word *happen* which despite not being explicitly evaluative tends to be used in reference to negative events. The following two examples of semantic prosody were taken from the text:

- Mr. Miranda’s observation **bodes ill** for the future... (Brody, 2017, para. 2)  
Conventional definitions do not allude to a prosodic leaning for *bode*, with the Cambridge Dictionary defining it as “to be a sign of something good or bad for the future” (Cambridge University Press, n.d.-c). In authentic contexts it tends to be used in the negative sense. Unlike in the text, *bode well* is the most common collocational relationship in COCA, but it is usually preceded by a negative auxiliary verb (e.g., ...that *doesn’t* bode well for...).
- ...she has **encountered** many people who have become “disconnected from what really matters... (Brody, 2017, para. 3)  
One sense of *encounter* is defined in explicitly negative terms as “to experience something, especially something unpleasant” (Cambridge University Press, n.d.-d). *Encounter* in the sense that it is used in the text is defined in more neutral terms as “to meet someone unexpectedly” (Cambridge University Press, n.d.-d). An examination of corpus results for [*encounter* + *people*] suggests that this sense of the word also has a significant negative semantic prosodic trend, as the people described tend to be disadvantaged and/or negatively evaluated.

### Presentation

The instructor should first divide the whiteboard into three sections labeled “positive”, “neutral”, and “negative”. Students should be asked to predict which category *bode ill* belongs in based on its use in the text. Following this they should then be introduced to the expression *bode well* by examining concordance lines taken from a corpus. These should be used to look for patterns in how *bode well* is used. As it is almost always qualified with some form of [auxiliary verb + *not*], it should be clear that while *bode well* has an explicitly positive meaning, it is still usually used to express negative meanings in authentic contexts.

*Encounter* should be explored by giving students a decontextualized list of collocating nouns. They should categorize each noun based on whether it has a positive connotation, a negative connotation, or is neutral. Students should then be asked to look for patterns in the words contained in the neutral category, almost all of which describe different kinds of people.

Attention should then return to the New York Times article, with the students being asked if the author is positively or negatively evaluating the people who were encountered. While the word *people* itself is neutral, it is post-modified to reflect a negative evaluation. The instructor should then attach an index card containing this sentence from the text to the “negative” section of the whiteboard.

Each student should then be provided with two to three different concordance lines from COCA for [*encounter* + *people*]. Each of these should be separated on loose index cards that would include expanded context to help students evaluate them. Students

should be tasked with determining whether the people are described in a way that is positive, negative, or neutral. They should then discuss their provisional categorizations in pairs and finally attach their index cards to the board under the appropriate section, providing the class with a visual representation of the prosodic leaning for this usage of *encounter*.

### **Rationale**

*Bode well* and *bode ill* were chosen to introduce semantic prosody because they are fixed expressions and their usage is fairly restricted, allowing for a straightforward illustration of the concept.

Semantic prosody itself was chosen to be presented last in the pedagogic sequence because an exploration of *encounter* benefits from an understanding of both semi-restricted collocations and polysemy. The proposed activities combine several of the techniques from earlier stages, including those designed to promote inductive reasoning. These are meaningfully expanded by introducing concordance lines and giving students an opportunity to work with authentic contextualized language data.

### **Summary**

The pedagogic activities described above are intended to serve as a broad introduction to the importance of collocation in authentic language use. They were designed to foster learner autonomy through the promotion of inductive reasoning and to demonstrate to students some of the ways that their smartphones could be used as informal research tools. It is hoped that these activities would help students better understand not only the specific words and phrases studied in the lesson, but also serve as a springboard to empower them to notice and reflect on collocational relationships that they might come across on their own.

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# Teaching Social Media Language

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## **Abstract**

Young people spend a significant proportion of their time communicating online, yet the stylized language used on social media is rarely studied in the EFL classroom. This paper outlines a method to address the issue by teaching students to understand the abbreviations and netspeak used online. The process gives learners a toolkit to assimilate novel internet lexis on an enduring basis. The students gain practice decoding, creating, and using netspeak, with a range of activities that consider the appropriate tone for each context. The method gradually builds students' confidence and competence. Thus, learners can become more comfortable using social media platforms as an integral part of their language learning.

**Keywords:** abbreviations, netspeak, register, social media

Social media has become an indispensable tool for many people. This phenomenon is especially true for teenagers and young people; a survey published on *Statistica* (2020) found that 46 percent of people in Japan aged between 17 to 19 years old spent between one to three hours per day on social media. The finding illustrates that the internet is a space where a substantial volume of young people's communications occurs. Therefore, young people need to understand how the English language is used online to communicate effectively with peers in English.

The internet has its own language, in part driven by the applications' affordances - their possibilities or limitations. For instance, *Twitter* has a 280-character limit, and thus long-form content is not possible on the platform. This design feature has the effect of prioritizing short, snappy messages that circumvent the character limit with abbreviations and referential forms of communication like hashtags, images, and video clips. *Twitter* is just one example of the many ways online communications are shaped by the underlying architecture and design of the platforms. The issue is compounded further by the very nature of mediated communication on smartphones, tablets, and computers, which adds another layer of protocols to the picture. The ability to understand and employ these affordances successfully is defined as *digital literacy*. Jones and Hafner (2012) describe these digital literacies in detail, citing skills such as the ability to navigate (online worlds/linked text), evaluate mass information, and create multi-modal documents of words, graphics, audio and video. The most relevant of these aptitudes for language learning is the multi-modal documents such as *YouTube*, *Twitter* and *TikTok* posts that often use highly abbreviated and stylized forms of language. Therefore, students must become competent in this style of English to communicate effectively online. Moreover, given that the evidence suggests young people spend so much time on the internet, these skills are especially pertinent for the younger generation.

The abbreviated and non-standard forms of English used online could be seen as inappropriate for the classroom, as they degenerate the language and diminish students'

ability to speak and write correctly. However, there is another view, based on the sociocultural model of orthography as described by Sebba (2007), who argues that spellings are not stable or neutral instruments but that they have always shown some degree of variation, flexibility, and development. Consider the difference between British and American spellings or archaic versions of words such as *old*, previously spelt as *olde* or *auld*, to give a few prominent examples of these processes. Furthermore, according to this outlook, abbreviations and respellings are principled and meaningful. Consequently, they convey additional or alternative meanings that could not be transmitted through the conventional spellings; for example, according to *Urban Dictionary* (n.d.), an online listing of slang definitions posted by users, *phat* is defined as, 1. Cool, 2. Pretty Hot And Tempting, whereas the more conventional spelling refers to oil or body fat (Marriam Webster, n.d.). In addition to semantic meaning, particular words and phrases create associative meanings around tone, relevance and even the character of those using the terms. For example, take acronyms such as OMG, LOL, YOLO or FOMO. These abbreviations can often be used in spoken interactions, where the benefit of abbreviating is questionable, and deployment is more of a stylistic choice. Furthermore, the use or misuse of one of these terms can communicate social prestige or conversely ineptitude. This observation is demonstrated in the *Urban Dictionary* (n.d) entries for *YOLO*, variously described in the following ways: "The dumbass's excuse for something stupid that they did...An overused acronym for 'You only live once'...A term people should have stopped using last year." Therefore, it is essential that young learners understand the necessity of netspeak but also the risks of incorrect usage.

### **Purpose**

This paper describes a method for increasing students' understanding of the alternative meanings in the respellings and netspeak found on the internet. Therefore, assisting learners in using terms suitably and thus transitioning more smoothly from the classroom to authentic social media communications. Moreover, students gain practice varying their communication style for the context of each activity. Thus, gaining a greater understanding of the levels of formality in English and the appropriateness of different styles for varying situations. In sum, the specific goal of the method is to give students an understanding of netspeak/abbreviations in (online) English to create a toolkit to decode and deploy terms in the appropriate tone for the situation.

### **Procedure**

The method listed below could be suitable for both secondary and tertiary level students, with due consideration for their ability with appropriate amendments where applicable. The activities described have been employed with numerous classes of first-year English majors containing 15 – 25 members. All the students in the classes use iPads and have access to Wi-Fi. The technology is expedient, as many activities use shared *Google* documents formatted to resemble *Twitter*. However, these documents could be recreated as paper worksheets without losing the central point of the tasks. At the same time, valuable online resources such as *Urban Dictionary* (n.d.) could be accessed via students' smartphones. These netspeak/abbreviation lessons take around four or five 90-minute classes to teach and have previously formed a section within a wider social media unit. The broader unit is not essential to understanding the netspeak section; however, it does give context and greater depth to the learning. The netspeak learning can be divided into

six steps, which are detailed below.

### ***Definitions - context & register***

The first stage highlights the fact that individuals' communication styles vary depending on intention, context and method of communication. There are several frameworks to explain this concept, such as *genre*, *style* or *language varieties*. However, *register* was chosen as perhaps the most efficient model for students to grasp the idea. Formally, according to Martin Joos' model (1962), register has five levels: frozen/static (e.g., religious texts), formal, consultative (e.g., teacher/student or doctor/patient), casual and intimate. It could be argued that the categories are invalid, unjustified, or simply out of date, but as a framing for students, it is very intuitive and easy to understand. For these classes, it is only necessary to explain the concept of register in as much as it could apply to social media, in contrast to a more formal situation or mode of communication. Students are shown the slide in Figure 1 to introduce the idea of register.

Figure 1  
*An inappropriately formal tweet*

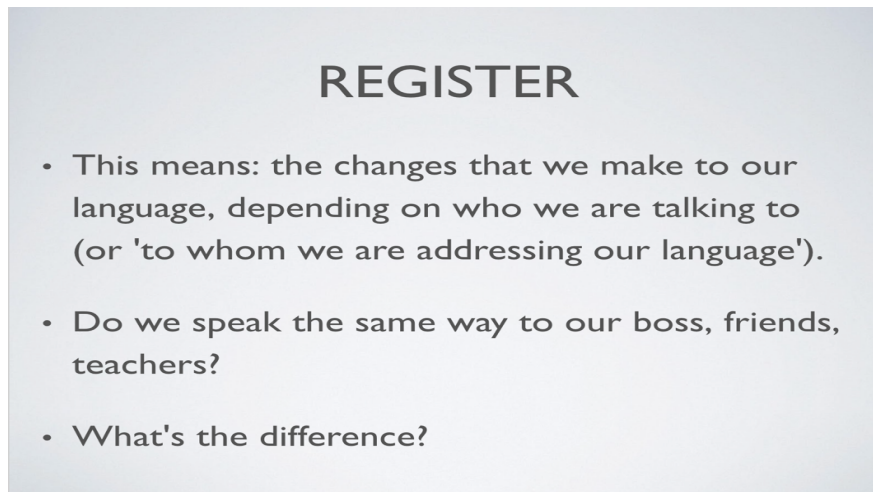


The class are asked to consider whether there are any errors contained within the message in Figure 1. In most cases, students immediately realize that the tone is inappropriately formal. At this point, learners are given a brief explanation of register to structure and contextualize the observation. The class are shown the simplified definition with related questions, as shown in Figure 2. Students document their questions, and these are reviewed together as a class. This sequence is intended to raise students' awareness of the unconscious or unthinking choices made when communicating in varied situations. The foregrounding of these selections should help students in the following phases of learning when they attempt to apply these kinds of choices more consciously.



Figure 2

*A slide that defines register and asks students to think about the context of communications*



***Decode - abbreviations (on social media)***

The students are placed into small groups of three or four. Each group is given a shared *Google* document containing a list of abbreviations commonly used in netspeak and social media, shown in Figure 3. Learners are given around 10 minutes to decipher the meanings of the abbreviations. Students are not permitted to research the answers, which means they should attempt to decode the unfamiliar abbreviations. This requirement is crucial, as students must cultivate the ability to understand new social media language as it is encountered.

The activity is reviewed, with each group asked to explain three or four answers to the class, thereby giving all the students speaking and listening opportunities. As this is conducted, each group can keep a tally of correct answers, which can earn class points; this is a system where points are accumulated for good work. These points can contribute to students' class participation grades, and feed into their overall semester grades.

Figure 3  
*A worksheet containing the netspeak abbreviations used for the activity*

	Abbreviation	Meaning
1.	GR8	
2.	B4	
3.	ur	
4.	2DAY	
5.	FB	
6.	LOL	
7.	OMG	
8.	PLS or PLZ	
9.	CU	
10.	BTW	
11.	Geez	
12.	Noob	
13.	tbh	
14.	FOMO	
15.	YOLO	

***Explain - rules for abbreviations (on social media)***

Students are initially asked how they attempted to infer the meanings of the unknown abbreviations in the previous activity. The answers tend to attribute their solutions to intuition, guesswork or vague associations. So, when students are informed that these kinds of abbreviations and respellings have patterns that can be grouped into 'rules', they are often surprised. However, the ease and interest with which young learners digest these rules seem at odds with this lack of awareness. One speculative hypothesis is that students have accumulated an implicit or intuitive understanding of these underlying patterns. The assumption would need to be tested empirically, but it has been an interesting observation, nonetheless. To conclude this step, the rules of abbreviating are introduced to students, with the following slide, shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4  
*A slide showing the conventions used to abbreviate words in English*

- **Ways to Abbreviate or Rewrite**
  1. First letter from each word - LOL, YOLO
  2. Phonetic spelling (spell as it sounds) – wimmin, fone
    - a. Substitute a number for sound (syllable) - 4u, GR8
    - b. Substitute a letter for sound (syllable) – cu, b4
    - c. Eye dialect (simpler but unusual) - phat, cuz, luv, bigga, woz, wuz
  3. Consonant Writing (remove vowels) – pls, Bldg, Rd
  4. Clipping - demo, phone, k (ok)
  5. Online styles - flickr / wittr, iPhone, aLtErNaTiNg cApS

Figure 4 is a list adapted from Jones and Hafner (2012, p67) and Shortis (2007, p25). As a result of the simplifications and refinements, most of the items are straightforward for the students to understand. *Eye dialect*, however, is more complex, as it is less intuitive and not particularly clearly defined in the literature. These kinds of abbreviations could be described as ‘appealing to the eye’, ‘striking’ or ‘noticeable’. Some patterns that seem evident are as follows: the use of *z* for *s* or *a* instead of *er* and a general tendency for more phonetic-style shortening of words. In addition, the category of *internet styles* could also be confusing. This grouping amalgamates several observations described in the literature. The common thread appears to be the unconventional use of punctuation and form (colors, font and symbols, for example). In essence, the categories of *eye dialect* and *internet styles* are somewhat fuzzy and nebulous. Consequently, students are given a variety of examples to help them build their understanding implicitly through exposure rather than directing them with strict definitions and categorizations. Returning to the general picture, the students now have the concept of register and the rules of rewriting/abbreviating. Hence, they are ready to move to the next step and start creating and decoding abbreviations by themselves.

#### ***Create – new abbreviations (for social media)***

Students are placed into small groups and asked to create five original abbreviations using the recently learned rules. The students use a single shared *Google* document, which the whole class can edit simultaneously, as shown in Figure 5. When each group has completed their five abbreviations, students from other groups try to decipher the meanings and accrue points for each correct answer. Two methods have been trialed for this activity: a reaction quiz using a buzzer or hand raise and a paper quiz where groups solve each other’s abbreviations in a document within a set time. A brief evaluation of

each is given in the following sections.

Figure 5

*The worksheet used for the student abbreviation and quiz activity*

# Student Abbreviations

- Please create 5 original abbreviations with your group
- Then, we will have a quiz
- Captains, please lead your quiz
- One of the group members, please write the answer in your table after each question has been answered

Group 1

	Abb	Answers
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Group 2

	Abb	Answers
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Group 3

	Abb	Answers
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Group 4

	Abb	Answers
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Points

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4

#### *Option 1 - The reaction quiz*

Each section of the quiz is led by the team who created the abbreviations. This method gives students speaking and listening practice and builds leadership, management, and organization skills. This option is competitive and engaging, but it could be protracted if not managed attentively, as there are numerous answers to review. One mitigating option is to cut the number of examples to three or four per group, giving a shorter, more dynamic quiz. However, the opposing point of this approach is the reduction in the amount of practice the students receive.

#### *Option 2 - The paper quiz*

Each group is assigned another groups' abbreviations to solve; for example, group 1 solves the abbreviations created by group 2 while group 2 attempts those of group 3. This option allows students time to consider the answers at a more deliberative pace than the reaction quiz, giving students a chance to deploy the abbreviation rules carefully. However, the downside is that the direct exposure to examples is reduced compared to the other method. In addition, the review section of this approach could be uninspiring if it were simply a matter of reading through the answers. To enliven the review, the unanswered abbreviations can be given to the class as a reaction quiz for bonus points. The competition increases student engagement and keeps learners alert and focused. Thus, overall, option 2, with the addition of this short reaction quiz, has proved the most effective method, with the best balance of enjoyment and educational value for the students.


#### *A homework option*

A homework activity can be included where students harvest netspeak from their favorite celebrities' social media accounts to add to a set in the *Quizlet* vocabulary application. Students are first asked to decode the meaning of their terms by themselves and then verify their efforts using *Urban Dictionary* (n.d.). The *Quizlet* application also has several games, which can be used as warm-up activities to add motivation and enjoyment to students' learning in future classes. Finally, the *Quizlet* netspeak set can be used for a class vocabulary quiz. The advantage of this homework activity is that it exposes students to actual social media language 'in the wild' and gives them many more examples, which are not necessarily limited to abbreviations or respellings.

#### ***Transform - a message for social media***

After the practical experience of creating, decoding, and collecting internet style abbreviations and respellings, students consolidate this knowledge by rewriting the inappropriately formal tweet shown in step 1 of the process. The activity is conducted in small groups of three or four, with learners encouraged to write the message as they might for the actual *Twitter* application. The aim is to create a tweet with a mixture of abbreviated text, hashtags, and images to convey an impactful message that could receive *likes* or *retweets* on a social media application. Shown in Figure 6 is an example of the guidance given to students. After completing the activity, students can be given a *Google* form to vote for their favorite tweet, and the members of each group could be given class points according to their groups' ranking in the vote. The competition provides an additional layer of motivation, and when this vote has been employed, students comment on their satisfaction at receiving points from these class ballots.

Figure 6  
*The inappropriately formal tweet rewritten more appropriately for Twitter*



**@denver**

Hello.

I had an absolutely wonderful weekend. I enjoyed a lovely picnic in the park, with my wife. She made scones for dessert and they were absolutely delicious. Furthermore, the weather was splendid. Hope you enjoyed your weekend, too.

Regards,


Denver

- Re-write my message
- 280 characters max
- Twitter style
- Use slang, hashtags, pictures
- DO NOT WRITE FORMAL (FULL) SENTENCES
- Check the example below

**@denver**

2day, picnic with my luv ❤️❤️

#bestdayever#fff#4l#likeforfollow#YOLO



***Practice – writing messages for social media***

Students are asked to post a message on a shared *Google* document that is framed as *student Twitter*. They are permitted to post about any topic, as would be the case on the actual *Twitter* application. Teacher examples are placed at the top of the page, and there are spaces for student messages and comments, as shown in the example of Figure 7. Initially, students must post one message and comment on at least five classmates' posts, and the teacher can also comment on students' messages. The posts are reviewed in the next class for noteworthy language, and then students are encouraged to post freely on the document during a limited period set by the teacher. The updates could be maintained throughout the semester or the entire year to practice netspeak and build relationships in

the class. Finally, students are encouraged to follow the *YouTube*, *Twitter*, or *Instagram* accounts of English speakers they admire. Alternatively, learners can find an account to follow based on a hobby or interest. The students now have a deeper understanding of the language they will encounter in those accounts and some tools for decoding it; therefore, they can more confidently engage with social media applications in the English language.

Figure 7  
*The formatted Google document used for students to write their tweets*



 @denver	OK ppl - write ur text below! 140 characters or less! 🥳 U can use pix or <a href="#">links</a> or any stuff u want!  write comments for some posts you are interested in
 @denver	#FlasbackFriday <a href="#">muzik</a> from da past. #theweekend #tbt Comments:
 @denver	Cute pic for tha day.  Do u luv this little guy? #piggie #cute #adorable Comments:
@xxxxxxxx	
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### Conclusion

This process can be a highly motivational journey for many students, as they discover an alternative learning method, removed from textbooks and the usual classroom discussions. The process does not concentrate on any particular topic and so allows students to follow their own interests. Hence, learners are empowered to independently manage this element of their English studies and become more autonomous learners. In addition, this exploration of social media gives young learners access to the kind of

authentic language and cultural knowledge that many crave.

The activities help students to become relatively competent with this kind of language surprisingly quickly. This aptitude may be due to their general enthusiasm for social media or some existing familiarity with English netspeak. The exact reason is unclear; however, what has become apparent is that many students could be guided to attempt more challenging tasks. The levelling-up could be achieved with the utilization of additional examples taken from real social media accounts. In particular, the '*internet styles*' and '*eye dialect*' sections would benefit from additional authentic examples. more activities and more precise definitions to define these kinds of netspeak.

To further increase the authenticity in the learning, a safe and secure incorporation of real social media applications remains the ongoing aspiration for the unit. This vision would have class members interacting with students from diverse countries and cultures on platforms such as *Twitter*. Some students have attempted this independently, using applications such *HelloTalk*, a platform to connect language partners worldwide. These connections have not been discouraged, as many students have found this valuable and enjoyable. However, a vigilant teacher would justly be wary of inviting unvetted language partners into the class activities. A better approach would be to forge connections with partner universities overseas and create online language partner programs that use real social media platforms as the basis for communication. In this way, learners could iteratively employ their netspeak learning, motivated by their desire to communicate and connect authentically across cultures.

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## Team Teaching in Japanese Elementary Schools: Did anything change in 2020?

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### Abstract

This paper focuses on the changes made to English education in elementary schools in Osaka, Japan during 2020 due to changes made by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology - Japan, and whether those changes had a positive effect on the quality of team teaching in the elementary school classroom. In addition, the effectiveness of team teaching, its importance, and further changes necessary in order for a successful team teaching environment to occur are all discussed. The conclusion states that while some teachers have improved slightly on an individual basis, more training is necessary for both Japanese homeroom teachers and English-speaking Assistant Language Teachers in order for team teaching to be conducted more properly in public schools nationwide. Despite changes in the 2020 curriculum giving 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade homeroom teachers more English teaching responsibility, the increased amount of English classes has not resulted in a significant improvement in the quality of team teaching, but has led to some Japanese teachers taking a more active role in the class.

**Keywords:** Team teaching, Elementary school, Homeroom Teacher, HRT, MEXT, ESL, Assistant Language Teacher, ALT

Assistant Language Teachers (ALT) first arrived in Japan in large numbers after the launch of the JET Programme, which first sent 813 ALTs to Japan in 1987 (JET Programme History, 2019). An ALT's main job, as described by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) is to follow the instructions of the Japanese teacher by doing things such as model reading, explaining things in English, communicating in natural English with students, and cultural exchange (MEXT, 2011). In order for an ALT to properly function in an elementary school classroom, a Japanese Homeroom Teacher (HRT) must be present. When an ALT and an HRT or Japanese Teacher of English (JTE) work together in the classroom to conduct English classes, this is called "Team Teaching." This paper examines the purpose of team teaching and the effect it has on students. Team teaching refers to the idea that the roles of the HRT and ALT are not T1 (lead teacher) and T2 (assistant teacher), but rather T1A and T1B, in which both teachers act together as a lead teacher, with both teachers carrying an equal level of responsibility and leadership in the classroom. However, there are other ways that team-teaching can be conducted successfully that are different from the standard T1 and T2 pattern as well as the T1A and T1B, if done properly. In 2017, MEXT proposed a change to the amount of Foreign Language Instruction hours taught at public elementary schools in their "New Course of Study in Foreign Language Education Plan" (文部科学省, 2017) to be implemented starting in the 2018 school year. Up until 2017, the required hours for Foreign Language Instruction for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders was 35 hours per year,

which is equivalent to one class per week. 4<sup>th</sup> graders and younger had 0 hours dedicated to Foreign Language Instruction. The plan involved raising the hours of Foreign Language Instruction from 35 hours to 50 hours in 2018 and 2019 for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders. In addition, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders would each gain 15 hours per year of Foreign Language Instruction during these two years. The increase of classroom hours in 2018 and 2019 were meant to be a transition period for the eventual 2020 plan, which further increases the amount of hours studied in elementary school. In the 2020 plan, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders will study 70 hours a week, which is equivalent to roughly 2 classes per week. 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders classroom hours will increase from 15 to 35 as well. New textbooks were also created in order to accompany the change in class hours. These textbooks provide more content than previous years and focus on teaching students how to convey information about themselves, their opinions, and asking questions to others.

Another major change with the New Course of Study in Foreign Language Education Plan is that the subject name changes from “Foreign Language Activities” to “English” as a formal assessed subject for the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders. Up until 2020, there was no formal assessment for elementary school 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade Foreign Language Instruction, and was assessed as a pass or fail subject. These changes are significant for team teaching for two major reasons. First, Assistant Language teachers are not able to teach all of the elementary school classes anymore. The homeroom teacher must be able to teach English to their students without the help of a dedicated English teacher. Second, the homeroom teachers are now responsible for assessing their students in a meaningful way. This increased focus on English education in elementary school should theoretically increase the English teaching ability of homeroom teachers across the country, regardless of their actual English level. According to Aline & Hosoda (2003), there are four main roles that an HRT typically plays in the classroom. The first role is called the bystander role, which involves the HRT standing at the back or side of the room for a passive effect. This is generally a negative thing when the HRT does not participate or make attempts to join in the class. Students often look up to the HRT as a role model, and can view the HRTs lack of participation as a sign that English is not interesting or necessary. It also makes it difficult for the ALT to talk to them and demonstrate communication in front of the students. However, when they interject at times when the ALT is in trouble, such as to assist in ordering an out-of-control class, or by helping individual students, then they can play an important role that would benefit students that may not get help they need without the homeroom teacher nearby.

The second main role an HRT can play is called the translator role, which involves translating the ALT's English into Japanese. This can be beneficial when the instructions are too difficult and the students find themselves confused and frustrated. It can be used as a way to save time as well, allowing more times for the main activities to be conducted. However, when students show an understanding of the English used by the ALT, then a translation is not necessary. In addition, when this is overused, students will not make attempts to listen and understand to the English when they know the translation is coming.

The third main role an HRT can play is of a co-learner. This is a role that can be useful for an HRT with a low level of English, as they can be the role of an ideal learner, giving students an image of how they should act. However, if the students become too dependent on the HRT for learning how to act, it can stunt their own learning process. The fourth and final main role an HRT can play is a co-teacher role. The HRT knows the students, and will call on them to answer, and stands in the front of the class with the ALT.

They will converse with the ALT and both teachers will use their teaching skills to teach students in an effective manner that combines both teachers' strong points. However, when teachers have conflicting ideas, difficulties can arise in the classroom. While the co-teacher role is often seen as the most ideal role, if done properly, the other roles may also have beneficial effects in the classroom. The important takeaway is that as long as the HRT and the ALT work together properly and understand what role works in their classroom, then team teaching can be achievable.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. Is there a noticeable difference in the quality of elementary school 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade team teaching in 2020 compared to previous years?
2. What steps can be taken to increase team teaching competency among elementary school 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade homeroom teachers and ALTs?

The first research question is in regards to one of the big issues that ALTs face when teaching elementary school English at the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade level. There are many cases in which English classes are conducted without actual team teaching taking place, despite both teachers being present in the classroom. In previous years, one issue that is often brought up by ALTs is the lack of team teaching in the elementary school classroom. One ALT interviewed by the author in preparation for this study has said that they have often taught as the sole T1 in the classroom in previous years when teaching 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade. In cases such as these, it is possible that the HRT feels as though English teaching is not their job or responsibility. With the new role that the HRT must play as an English teacher, it is possible that they will have an easier time performing a team teaching role that they are comfortable with, but it is not guaranteed to happen.

The second research question concerns what can be done to increase team teaching competency among the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade elementary school ALT and HRT relationship? Knowing what team teaching is, and how to properly conduct it is an important part of the process for improving team teaching, but how can this be improved, and what steps should be taken to ensure that both the ALT and the HRT are aware of how to properly team teach? If team teaching is indeed useful, then why are there not more training seminars and importance placed upon it? Team teaching is something that many ALTs are told that they must do, but without any guides or advice beyond opaque suggestions such as "Be flexible."

### **Current Issues with Team Teaching**

There are many obstacles in the way of proper team teaching in the classroom, but the most common issue is an ineffective utilization of the ALT or the HRT (Johannes, 2012). One of the issues is that teachers are sometimes unsure of what role they should assume in the classroom. When the JTE is used to teaching by themselves, they may not feel as though they need the ALT to be in the classroom. There are cases when the Japanese teacher will teach grammar, and then leave a game or other activity to the ALT, with each teacher doing their own separate part rather than working together. This is particularly evident when the ALT speaks Japanese, and the Japanese teacher may feel as though they are not needed when the ALT is leading the class (Mahoney, 2004). If the ALT can translate what they are saying without the help of a Japanese teacher, then the Japanese teacher may feel as though they do not need to fulfill the role of bridging the gap between

the ALT and the students.

According to a study by Tajino and Walker (1998), students expect the JTE to help them when they have difficulty understanding the content of English lessons, which is a role suitable for the JTE due to their own experience going through the Japanese education system. Tajino and Walker (1998) also found that students in the study expected the ALT to teach about communication, grammar, and pronunciation. As a result of these beliefs, students come to view their goal for English acquisition to be the ALT's English, and not the English of the JTE, which represents an impossible goal as native-like pronunciation is simply not attainable by most learners of any language. While students may enjoy the team teaching class, it should be understood by the student that their goal is to speak like the JTE, who is capable of communicating with the ALT, even if imperfectly, rather than the unachievable English of the native speaker.

Ideally, team teaching will involve the cooperation of both members, who have unique backgrounds and different fields of expertise, which can compliment each other to maximize efficiency in the classroom (Carley, 2013). This cooperation can allow the native English speaking teachers to cover language issues that the Japanese teacher might not know as well, and the Japanese teacher can take better control of the classroom, the flow, and other issues that the ALT may encounter if they were to teach alone. In order for this dynamic to succeed, consistency and planning are necessary. When goals are verbalized and discussed, it is possible for these goals to be achieved, as both parties have more of an investment in the lesson and the class (Meerman, 2003). Often, these planned out lessons have interactions and with a combination of both of their efforts, they can respond to the student's needs better than each teacher could do individually.

### **Method**

A survey (Appendix 1) was given to 25 randomly selected elementary school ALTs in Osaka during a company-wide meeting with most of the 130 ALTs present. The survey was given in order to evaluate the differences in teaching this year compared with previous years. 20 ALTs responded to the survey. Three of these participants have also been interviewed about their experiences as well. Quotes and information from these interviews will be used in this paper. By interviewing teachers about their specific situation, more detailed information and more specific scenarios were recorded than if only a survey was used. In addition, three elementary school HRTs were interviewed about their experience teaching elementary school English. Therefore, the information gathered from this study is mostly qualitative, with quantitative data used when assessing the results of the survey, or when discussing team teaching from the perspective of an HRT.

### **Limitations**

There are a few limitations to this study. The first major limitation is that each situation is different, with different HRTs, ALTs, and students. Something that may have worked for one HRT and ALT dynamic with team teaching might not work if either the HRT or ALT changes. In addition, the teachers that were given surveys were ALTs, and not HRTs. While there were a small selection of HRTs interviewed, the qualitative data consists solely of ALT responses. A classroom that could be considered improper team teaching to an ALT might be recognized as proper team teaching according to the HRT, and vice versa. All of the teachers are teaching in public schools placed within Osaka city, which

may have different rules and regulations than different areas of Japan. Training that is given or not given to teachers regarding team teaching may also vary according to schooling received before becoming a teacher. In addition, the English level of the HRTs will vary as well, which can affect their confidence and speaking ability when it comes to teaching English.

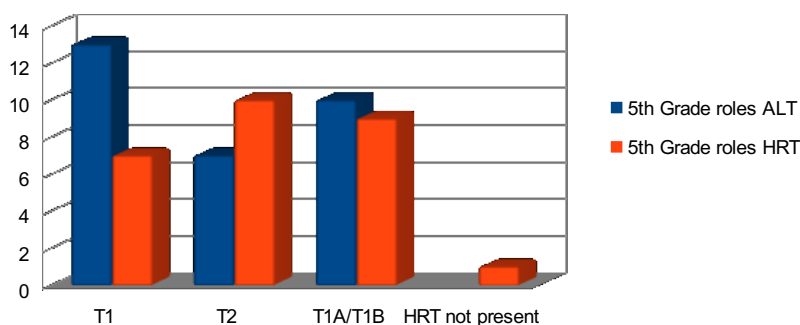
The next major limitation of the study involves the use of qualitative data, which can be helpful and provide some information on certain situations, but many of those situations are specific to that particular teacher's situation. There are no two situations that are alike, and while a teacher's commentary can provide insight on their situation, it does not necessarily reflect the norm. A different teacher using a similar method may produce very different results, therefore flaws within the results are possible.

Currently, there is no way to assess whether team teaching is being conducted properly. While students typically enjoy team-taught classes with an ALT and the presence of both a Japanese teacher and ALT is beneficial over single-teacher English classes (Galloway, 2009), there is currently no formal team teaching assessment process. There is also no reason to believe that student scores are correlated with team teacher quality. Teachers who answered that they saw a decrease in student scores and levels for the 2020 year could be falsely correlating the student scores with teacher and team teaching efficiency.

### **Analysis**

According to responses received in the survey given to Osaka City ALTs, the majority of ALTs that teach 5<sup>th</sup> grade in elementary school often find themselves teaching as T1 (13 respondents) versus only 10 teachers who answered that they teach in a T1A and T1B situation (Figure 1). The survey allows for respondents to check all answers that apply, with six respondents giving two answers and two respondents answering that they teach as T1, T2, and T1A/B depending on their school and classroom. One respondent wrote that it “Changes from class to class.” While 10 out of 30 answered that they teach in a T1A/B situation, it makes up for only one-third of the answers, with the majority of classrooms being taught with either the ALT or the HRT as T1.

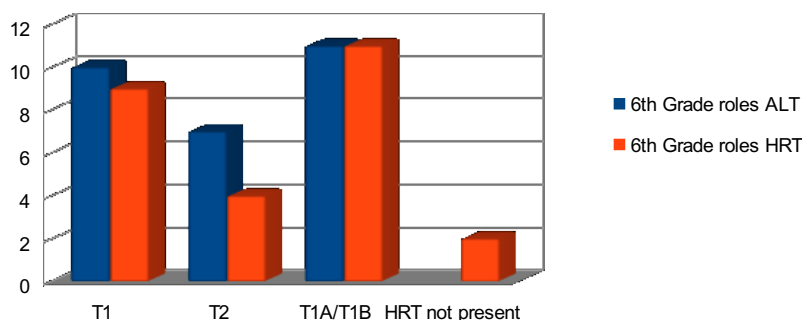
Figure 1  
*Teacher Roles at your School—5<sup>th</sup> Grade*



The results of the same question asked about the ALT and HRT teacher roles for 6<sup>th</sup> grade classroom gives slightly different results than the 5<sup>th</sup> grade results. In the 6<sup>th</sup> grade results, the teacher dynamic of T1A/T1B was the most common answer (Figure 2). Four teachers responded with two answers, and two teachers responded answering all three. While this is an improvement in the T1A/B situation compared to the 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom, it still shows that less than half of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms in Osaka are taught in a T1A/T1B situation, with the ALT taking the role of T1 more often than the HRT.

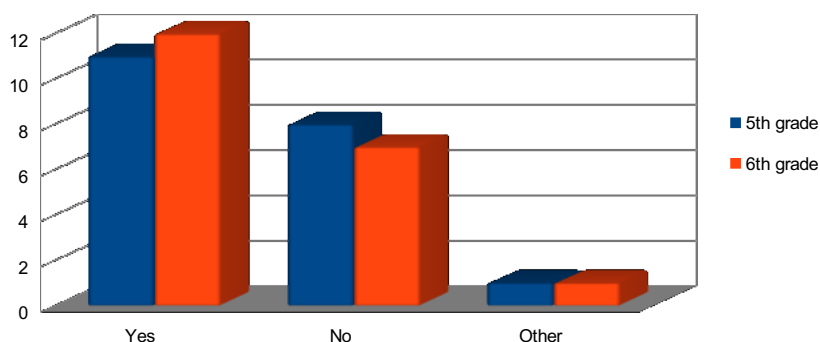
The third question asks ALTs about a noticeable difference in the quality of team teaching. Looking at only the results of the previous question as seen in Figure 1 and Figure 2 may lead the reader to believe that team teaching is not being conducted properly enough despite the changes in the curriculum from MEXT. However, when ALTs were asked whether there was a noticeable difference in the quality of team teaching when compared with previous years, 11 ALTs answered that there is a noticeable difference in the quality of team teaching with 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers as opposed to only 8 teachers who stated that there was no difference in quality (figure 3). The same question for 6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers received 12 responses confirming a noticeable difference in team teaching with only 7 writing that they did not notice any difference this year. One respondent answered “Other,” due to the fact that they did not teach 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade elementary school before this year, so they did not have a base to compare it to.

Figure 2  
*Teacher Roles at your School–6<sup>th</sup> Grade*



One respondent who said that they found a noticeable difference in team teaching when compared to last year wrote, “Teachers are becoming more confident in teaching.” Another respondent who also answered they noticed a difference wrote, “Most teachers tried hard to improve their English due to the new requirements, hence they were more active in class.” In these cases, it is possible that the new requirements given by MEXT for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade English classes had a passive effect of making it easier for the HRT and ALT to work together to team teach English. In one case, the ALT wrote “I’ve gotten better at including the HRT.” which also notes an important point that the burden of proper team teaching does not rely solely on the HRT and their participation, but on the ALT as well. If the ALT is not properly working with an HRT, then they may not notice a difference even if the HRT attempts team teaching.

Figure 3  
*Has there been a noticeable difference in the quality of team teaching compared with previous years?*

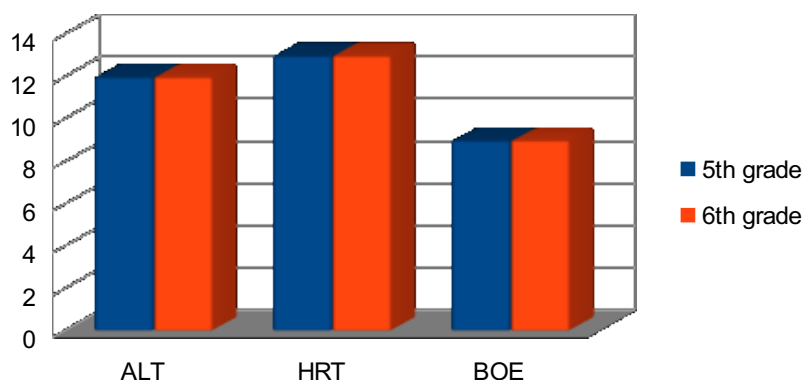


In the cases where teachers answered that there were no noticeable differences, one respondent noted that “the system and the expectations felt the same.” Another ALT wrote that “Although some teachers are trying to do more, many still rely on the [ALT].” These

responses both show a possible flaw in the system and that simply increasing the amount of classes and HRT responsibility alone is not enough to increase the teamwork and relationship between the ALT and the HRT. One respondent noted that “We work together like before, with great teamwork.” In the past, HRTs and ALTs that conducted class with good teamwork have already achieved the goal of creating a positive team teaching atmosphere for the students, and that they have not felt as though the changes have made this atmosphere better or worse. It is important to note that there is a possibility that more classes with required assessment can decrease the effect of team teaching if teacher talks and demonstration conversations are removed in place of drilling vocabulary and grammar.

Overall, the results of the survey show a positive improvement in the quality of team teaching that occurs in the elementary school 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade classroom. The changes made by MEXT giving homeroom teachers more responsibility and increasing class hours appears to have a correlation with the teacher relationship between the HRT and the ALT. It could be due to the increased class hours or due to the changes in the quality of the lesson plans. According to the survey, when asked who makes the lesson plans for their schools, 12 respondents wrote that the ALT makes the lesson plan, 13 respondents wrote that the HRT does, with 9 respondents answering that the Board of Education (BOE) makes the lesson plans (Figure 4). There is no overwhelming majority for who writes the lesson plans, and even changes among classes and teachers. According to these results, the person making the lesson plan does not necessarily have an effect on the whether the team teaching is properly conducted. If the lesson plan is written in a way that supports team teaching, then it will be easier to properly teach in a T1A/B manner.

Figure 4  
*Who Makes the Lesson Plans at your School?*



After interviewing 3 elementary school HRTs about their opinions teaching by themselves and team teaching under the new MEXT 2020 guidelines, there were various answers. All three teachers agreed that the textbook is sufficient for teaching English as a subject, but the ALT often has more expertise with games and activities. If the MEXT guidelines require the HRT to carry a more prominent role in English class, then it makes sense that the materials the teachers are given are sufficient. The digital textbook was emphasized by the HRTs as being the most important aspect in English class when an ALT is not present, particularly due to the video and listening sections, which would be



very difficult for the Japanese teacher to do effectively without some form of media. This shows that with some support, even if the homeroom teacher is not experienced in teaching English, they can still teach the class, and are not as reliant on the ALT as in previous years. As many ALT participants have noted in their survey, the HRT who are more comfortable teaching English are more engaged in teaching with the ALT, and it shows that not only the new guidelines, but the materials given to the HRT are also very important. When the HRT is no longer reliant on the ALT, this transitions into team-taught classes, where the HRT is more aware of the material as well as what is going on in the class, and can therefore help students and contribute more to the demonstration of activities.

From the side of the Japanese teachers, when it comes to explaining and demonstrating cultural differences, the ALT has experience living in other countries, therefore many students view this as ALT's job (Johannes, 2012). The Japanese teacher can use their own knowledge and talk about other countries, but ultimately cultural differences are one part of the English class where ALTs can contribute in ways that the Japanese teacher may be unable to. However, one teacher stated that in the digital textbook for the 2020 book "Here We Go!", there are many videos and a lot of information about other cultures and differences that can give students some insight into other cultures. In this sense, even without the ALT present, the digital materials have allowed the Japanese teacher to even teach cultural differences. Nunan (2003) has concluded that proper materials can help compensate for the lack of fluency and skill in English. HRTs who try to use their own lack of English knowledge as an excuse for not participating in English class should no longer have to worry as long as materials and lesson plans provide a sufficient amount of material that can be used to teach.

### **Suggestions for Improving Team Teaching**

While the results show an improvement in team teaching, it is far from being a perfect system. There are classrooms where either the ALT, HRT, or both have difficulty in conducting an ideal team teaching environment. One proposal given by a respondent in regards to ways to improve team teaching is by encouraging the HRT to take the role of an ideal student, which is the third main role an HRT can play. The ALT said that when their homeroom teacher took the role of an ideal student, it gave the students more motivation to learn. They stated that many HRTs do not know that this is an acceptable scenario, so they often try not to participate in fear of interrupting the ALT. Nao (2011) says that even advanced learners have a difficult time understanding native English, which has a variety of pronunciations, accents, and dialects. It is therefore an unrealistic goal for Japanese students to become as fluent as a native speaker, but rather by using the HRT as a more realistic goal for students, students will be less likely to give up due to the issue of an unattainable goal. In addition, other ALTs have stated that when the Japanese teacher is present and team teaching with the ALT, then the classes are easier to teach. One respondent stated, "[The Homeroom Teachers] know their students and can really help steer the class in the right direction." For these reasons, when the ALT is not placed as the sole T1 in a classroom, then the classes tend to go better overall than when the HRT is a solo T1, which can contribute to the importance and relevance of team teaching.

Another suggestion for improving team teaching given by an ALT is by organizing meetings between the two teachers that will be conducting a class together. When the ALT and JTE/HRT are both fully aware of the lesson plan, the activities, and the roles that they

should take in the classroom, it is easier to teach together and take advantage of the roles that each teacher will play. The ALT respondent said, “If the HRT asked the ALT for feedback and ideas before the class rather than ideas for improvement after the class finished, it would be easier to implement those ideas and teach together.” This is one issue that at a face value, seems simple to implement, but in practice, time and languages-ability are issues. In a study by Ohtani (2010), Japanese teachers reported that the ALT is not always able to fully communicate in Japanese, and the Japanese teacher does not feel as though they are able to fully communicate in English. Planning and discussing lessons takes a lot of time as well, especially if there are ideas being discussed and lesson plans being edited. Particularly at elementary school, the HRTs are not experts in English, and may lack the ability to communicate properly with an ALT. While some ALTs can speak Japanese, there are also many who have no Japanese language ability. This is especially true for JET Programme ALTs who are not required to have a degree related to Japan, or Japanese language skills (Eligibility, 2020). In such cases, the ALT often becomes T1, despite less than 15% holding a degree in an education-related field (Browne, 2008). In other cases, the Japanese teacher may worry that the ALT does not understand the Japanese educational system, and therefore the teachers may have a difficult time working together if they cannot understand each others’ viewpoint. Despite this, if there is proper communication and time allotted, consistent meetings are a good way for ALTs and HRTs to work together to discuss a lesson before the class and understand their expectations of each other.

One other issue with team teaching is the amount of training received for team teaching for both ALTs and HRTs. Training for many ALTs in Japan consists of practicing working with another teacher, and practicing methods for doing proper demonstrations. However, for JET Programme ALTs, due to the results of the job acceptance coming only months before they come to Japan, there is very little time to properly prepare these workers for working in a Japanese school with a Japanese teacher. There are multiple training sessions each year, which are for the improvement of teaching skills, but an ALT respondent described those sessions as “too little, too late”. When the Japanese homeroom teachers were questioned about their team teaching training, most responded that they have never had any training regarding team teaching. This difference could be one reason why many Japanese teachers often do not understand what team teaching really is, or what the goal is.

With English becoming an official subject for homeroom teachers in elementary school, Japanese teacher training could be a potential solution that helps teachers properly understand their role in the classroom. Without training regarding team teaching, there will continue to be issues with team teaching, as the Japanese teachers cannot be expected to know something that they were not trained to do. According to a study by Machida (2016), HRTs require support and training in order for them to gain the skills necessary to work with an ALT without problems. With proper guidance, practice, and materials, an HRT should not feel as though the English that is being taught is something beyond their own capabilities. Therefore, one of the main difficulties that HRTs often cite when discussing working with an ALT can be negated, and more focus can be placed on conducting classes in a setting that benefits the students in an optimal fashion. A longer period of training for ALTs in order to assure that they understand the Japanese education system and that they understand what team teaching is, and how to properly conduct it should become a requirement for ALTs across the country.

## Conclusion

While there have been cases of improvement in the team teaching dynamic between public school ALTs and HRTs, there does not seem to be any noticeable difference due to the increase in the number of English classes at elementary school. Even in cases where HRTs are teaching by themselves and are more familiar with the material, many ALTs still find their classes being taught in a T1 and T2 fashion rather than a T1A and T1B fashion. Therefore, the issue with proper elementary school team teaching is not solely due to teaching experience or English ability. One proposed solution is consistent meetings, but this solution faces some difficulties due to language barriers and time constraints. The most optimal solution for the issue is to provide more training for both ALTs and HRTs in the field of team teaching, and giving the teachers many opportunities throughout the year to practice issues they may face. A lack of training among ALTs and HRTs is a major obstacle in the way of proper team teaching being implemented in elementary schools across the country. Until some steps are taken specifically for the purpose of increasing the team teaching ability of ALTs and HRTs, the present issues with team teaching are unlikely to change or improve.

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learners can sound like native speakers (Lenneberg, 1967) due to their L1, age, exposure, and innate phonetic ability (Kenworthy, 1987) it is not realistic to expect L2 learners, including non-NESTs, to speak with perfect American or British accents (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). Levis (2005a) suggested that it is more realistic to apply the “intelligibility principle” instead of the “nativeness principle” to non-NESTs. If the goal is shifted to intelligibility from imitation of native English speakers, non-NESTs have advantages teaching pronunciation due to their English learning experience and because of sharing the same L1 with their learners (Snow et al., 2006). Walker (2001) concludes that non-NESTs might be ideal instructors for monolingual groups because they can use the learners’ L1 to help them achieve their goals.

### ***Explicit Instruction***

Due to lack of exposure to English, EFL learners tend to rely on their teachers to learn English mainly through explicit instruction in classrooms. Even in the area of pronunciation teaching, both Couper’s (2003) and Katayama’s (2007) surveys showed that L2 learners have positive attitudes toward explicit instruction.

Although the majority of learners can reproduce and copy sounds after listening to their teachers without explanation (Stevens, 1974), some learners forget the sounds after the session has ended (Locke, 1970). Learning phonology explicitly helps learners notice the features of the sounds in the target language (Derwing & Munro, 2005) and gives them a means of reviewing the the sounds in the long-run (George, 1972). Explicit instruction could prevent L1 interference (Spada & Lightbown, 2010) and raise learners’ awareness about their own pronunciation (Spada, 1997) by showing them the difference between their own pronunciation and that of native speakers’ or advanced learners’ (Derwing & Munro, 2005). Research also shows that explicit instruction has positive effects on learners’ aural perception abilities (Strange & Dittman, 1984). Couper’s (2006) study showed that short-term explicit pronunciation instruction could lead to a decrease in the total amount of pronunciation errors and improvement of the comprehensibility (Saito, 2011). These studies indicate that explicit instruction is effective in pronunciation teaching.

### ***The Role of Suprasegmental Features in Intelligibility***

Suprasegmental errors cause more hindrance in communication than segmental errors by interfering more with listeners’ understanding (Anderson-Hsieh et al., 1992). Therefore, researchers like McNerney and Mendelsohn (1992, p. 186) argue that “suprasegmentals have the greatest impact on the comprehensibility of learners’ English”. Broadly speaking, suprasegmental features have more influence on discourse than segmental features (Pennington & Richards, 1986). Some researchers indicate that focusing on suprasegmentals or prosody more than segmentals can improve intelligibility.

In the 1980s suprasegmental approaches dealing with stress, tone, intonation, and length played a main role in teaching pronunciation (Riney et al., 2000). Many recent researchers focus on learners’ acquisition of English intonation, rhythm, connected speech, and voice quality settings (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). Sentence stress (Hahn, 2004), lexical stress (Field, 2005), and strong and weak syllables (Zielinski, 2008) play a crucial role in intelligibility (Saito & Saito, 2016).

A study by Nakamura (2010) showed that duration of unstressed syllables and weak vowels strongly affected evaluation scores of intelligibility as rated by native English

speakers. If non-native speakers use stress and rhythm patterns that are too different from those of native speakers, they might be misunderstood. For example, if they use improper intonation contours then they might be regarded as rude (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). In contrast, if L2 learners use suprasegmentals correctly, their segmental errors could be ignored, which might make their speech sound comprehensible (Gilbert, 2012). Therefore, Morley (1991) claims that suprasegmental features should be treated more seriously than segmental features in pronunciation teaching.

### ***Reading Aloud***

Reading aloud is a commonly used activity in L2 classrooms and is particularly popular in Asia (Gabrielatos, 2002; Gibson, 2008; Huang, 2010; Kailani, 1998; Kato, 2009). Takeuchi et al.'s (2012) research showed that reading aloud is favored by Asian EFL learners.

Some studies suggest that reading aloud is effective in the development of pronunciation, because it releases the cognitive burden by allowing learners to concentrate on pronunciation (Park, 2011). According to Gibson (2008), reading aloud has four advantages in teaching pronunciation. Firstly, reading aloud could improve spoken and reading fluency. Secondly, reading aloud can function as a way of monitoring pronunciation. Thirdly, reading aloud can reduce the learner's anxiety, because they do not have to create original speech and can focus on reading the text. Finally, reading aloud helps learners raise their awareness of intonation and sentence stress.

Adrián's (2014) research demonstrated that reading aloud activities help students to become aware of their pronunciation problems. Anderson-Hsieh and Venkatagiri's (1994) study found that intermediate speakers produced long and frequent pauses at places where they were not expected, but they improved their intonation after reading aloud. These studies indicate that reading aloud is not only favored by EFL learners but also effective in pronunciation teaching.

### **Research Questions**

Research questions for this case study were:

1. Is explicit instruction for suprasegmentals effective in improving pronunciation?
2. Is reading aloud an effective activity for improving pronunciation?
3. What is a learner's attitude toward explicit teaching and the reading aloud activity?

### **Method**

#### ***The Participant***

The participant was a female Chinese adult about thirty years old using the pseudonym Lily Wang. She did not have experience in living or traveling in English speaking countries. She had learned English in classroom settings in China for more than ten years since she was 12. She passed an English proficiency test Grade 4 in China, which is equivalent to IELTS Band 6 score. She was a part-time Chinese teacher visiting the instructor's (the author) high school once a week. She was highly motivated.

#### ***Instruments***

The material used for the diagnostic test (see Appendix A) was from the book *American Accent Training* written by Cook (1991). The text used for the pre- and post- test was from a first-year high school textbook (see Appendix B), which had 101 words and 56



word types. The text contained a token ratio of 0.64 and a lexical density of 0.43 based on Tom Cobb's vocab profiler. The passage (see Appendix C) chosen for reading aloud has 127.81 different words, with a 0.64 type-token ratio and 0.44 lexical density.

### ***Meeting One***

A diagnostic test (see Appendix A) was conducted. The participant had her reading recorded and rated by the instructor and a native American graduate student. Influenced by her native Chinese language, the participant read every word very clearly and accurately but without intonation or word-linking, which made her speech difficult to understand for the native rater. She also put too much stress on word-final consonants such as *t*, *d*, and *k*, which made her speech choppy and sound mechanical.

In Mandarin Chinese, except for *n* and *ng*, there is no final consonant sound, which causes Mandarin Chinese speakers speak with neither word connections nor consonant endings (Cook, 1991). In order to acquire English tones, Mandarin Chinese speakers must adapt to an intonation system with more variations (Park, 2011). Therefore, the decision to teach intonation and liaison was made in order to help the participant sound nearer to a native speaker as she wished by overcoming her negative L1 transfer.

### ***Meeting Two***

After explaining the result of the diagnostic test to the participant, she agreed to focus on intonation and liaisons. She read a short paragraph as a pre-test (see Appendix B).

### ***Meeting Three and Treatment 1*** (see Appendix C)

In order to make the participant feel comfortable about learning English intonation, the instructor told her that different intonation could produce different meaning in English even though it is not as a tonal language like Chinese. She practiced reading *Sound/Meaning Shifts* and *Two-Word Stress* (See Appendix C). Her reading was recorded at the beginning, in the middle of, and at the end of the reading activity, and the recording was analyzed by both herself and the instructor afterwards. After reading and correcting errors fifteen times, both agreed that her last recording became easier to understand than the previous recordings, which the participant reported made her feel confident.

### ***Meeting Four and Treatment 2*** (see Appendix D)

After focusing on intonation and word stress on the word-level in Treatment 1, Treatment 2 focused on intonation on the sentence level. The participant was told that putting stress on different words in the same sentence (e.g., *I did not say he stole the money; I **did not** say he stole the money; I did not say he **stole** the money*) could produce different meanings. The participant was asked to read the above sentence with three different intonations on different words in her native language so that she could realize the importance of the intonation in languages. After reading in her L1, she read the sentence with different intonations in English. Thereafter, she practiced reading a text (see Appendix D) fifteen times through reading aloud activities. Her reading was recorded and then analyzed by both the participant, herself, and the instructor.

### ***Meeting Five and Treatment 3*** (see Appendix E)

Treatment 3 focused on connected speech and reduced forms, such as *hol don* (*hold on*), *tur nover* (*turn over*), and *teller miser* (*tell her I miss her*). After explicit instruction about

word connection, the participant was given the liaisons in written form so that she could read them easily. As in the Treatment 1 and 2, the participant read the reading passage (See Appendix C reading passage) by looking at liaisons in written form such as, *They tell me the dai measier to understand. (They tell me that I'm easier to understand).*

One problem in Treatment 3 was that the participant could not focus on both intonation and word linking. When she paid attention to intonation, she forgot about word linking. On the other hand, when she focused on word linking, she forgot about intonation. A solution for the problem was practicing two words rather than a sentence until the participant got used to both intonation and word linking.

### ***Meeting Six***

The participant read the same paragraph as a post-test (see Appendix B) and completed questionnaire (see Appendix F).

## **Results, Discussions, and Pedagogical Implications**

### ***Results***

Quantitative data was collected from recordings while qualitative data was collected from a questionnaire. Both the instructor and the native American English speaker rater agreed that recordings at the end of the treatment were easier to understand than before. Therefore, the answer to the research question one is positive: Teaching suprasegmentals is effective in improving speech comprehensibility.

The text (see Appendix E) used for reading aloud has 23 sentence stresses, 46 reduced forms, and 55 liaisons. At the end of Treatment 3, the participant could read 23 sentence stresses, 16 reduced forms, and 10 liaisons. She made an improvement of 100% on sentence stress, 35% on reduced forms, and 18% on liaison.

The text (see Appendix B) used for pre- and post-test has 20 sentence stresses, 12 word linking occurrences, and eight reduced forms according to the CD attached to the high school textbook. In pre-test recordings, there was neither intonation nor word linking. In post-test recordings, the participant made 12 sentence stresses, three word links, and three reduced forms. She made a 60% improvement on sentence stress, a 37.5% improvement on reduced forms, and a 25% improvement on liaisons. Therefore, the answer to research question two is also positive: Reading aloud is responsible for the improvement of the speech intelligibility.

Table 1  
*Results from reading passage with practice and post-test without practice*

	word stress	reduced form	liaisons
Results from readings practiced during Meeting 5	100%	50%	18%
Results from the post-test without practicing during Meeting 6	60%	37.5%	25%

As Table 1 indicates, the participant could read word stress, reduced forms, and liaisons in the post-test text which was not practiced during the case study.

The questionnaire answers also indicated that the participant was interested in learning English pronunciation. She agreed that explicit explanations of pronunciation was effective. She partly agreed that reading aloud was effective for learning and teaching pronunciation. She had no prior knowledge of intonation, rhythm, re-syllabification and reduced forms because teachers in her previous learning contexts focused on teaching English grammar rather than pronunciation. In other words, she had never learned suprasegmentals before during her ten-year formal English education in China. She was also satisfied with the results of the treatments even though she did not sound like a native speaker of American English, as she had wished to before the treatments.

### ***Discussion***

The results from the recordings were consistent with previous research, showing the effectiveness of explicit pronunciation and reading aloud on the development of pronunciation intelligibility. The participant's reading recordings at the end of the treatment were more comprehensible than before just by adding intonation and word linking. These results implied that suprasegmentals play an important role in comprehension. The results of the post-test and questionnaire showed positive effects of teaching suprasegmentals, which is consistent with Morley's (1991) view.

In terms of the results of the treatments and the participant's satisfaction, we can see that pronunciation instruction in EFL contexts needs more attention. Like many other English learners in an EFL environment, the participant in this case study did not receive much previous pronunciation training, but rather reading comprehension and grammar lessons. This might have been partly caused by nonnative English teachers' limited knowledge or lack of confidence (Celce-Murica et al., 1996).

It is important to provide training for EFL teachers and to adopt the "intelligibility principle" in pronunciation teaching (Levis, 2005a). We have to bear in mind that the ultimate goal of pronunciation teaching is to facilitate effective communication and not to imitate perfect American or British accents (Zhang, 2009).

### ***Pedagogical Implications***

Teachers in EFL environments serve as role models for their learners in teaching pronunciation (Zhang, 2009). Therefore, English teachers are expected to (a) have a high command of the English sound system, (b) analyze negative L1 transfer, and (c) be well

trained before teaching (Celce-Murica et al., 2010). Pronunciation plays an important role in the process of communication (Zhang, 2009). Although there are many unchangeable factors affecting acquisition of native-like accents (Kenworthy, 1987), there are potentials to teach intelligible pronunciation in the EFL environment in terms of effective communication. Eighty percent of all English teachers globally are non-NESTs (Cangrjah, 1999). Therefore, we cannot expect that English pronunciation will be taught only by NESTs (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). If pronunciation needs to be taught, it should be taught by both qualified NESTs and non-NESTs (Levis et al., 2016).

### Conclusion

Two conclusions were drawn from this case study. First, explicit instruction and reading aloud are effective methods of pronunciation teaching. Second, teaching suprasegmentals is effective for improving speech intelligibility during limited periods. The participant in this case study showed great interest and confidence in learning pronunciation after receiving the treatments. She was suggested to repeat after listening to CDs and to record her own pronunciation for comparison if she wanted to continue studying pronunciation in the future.

The major limitation of this case study was that there was only one participant with three treatments during a very short time, so the first conclusion cannot be generalized. A delayed post-test might have told whether explicit teaching along with reading aloud is effective in the long run. Unfortunately, the case study was finished at the end of the school year and the participant stopped coming to the high school where the instructor worked. However, the participant at least had raised awareness about intonation, liaison, and sentence stress through this case study, which laid a foundation for her further learning.

Due to lack of exposure to authentic input in the EFL environment, EFL learners rely on their teachers to learn pronunciation (Zhang, 2009), but learners' unrealistic goals and teachers' insufficient training in pronunciation (Derwing & Munro, 2005) can cause non-NESTs to lose confidence in teaching (Baker, 2011; Burns, 2006). Therefore, it is important for non-NESTs to help their learners set appropriate goals for pronunciation (Zhang, 2009), and for teachers to use appropriate activities.

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## Appendix A

### *Diagnostic Test*

A	B	C	D	E	F
Pit	bit	staple	stable	cap	cab
Fear	veer	refers	reverse	half	have
Sue	zoo	faces	phases	race	raise
Sheer	din	cashew	casual	rush	rouge
Tin	gin	metal	medal	hat	had
Chin	then	catcher	cadger	rich	ridge
Cut	race	bicker	bigger	tack	tag

1. Go up
2. Stairs.
3. I am going to other room.
4. My name is Ann.
5. It is the end of the bad years.
6. Give it to his owner.

From *American Accent Training* (Cook, 1991)

## Appendix B

### *Pre-Test and Post-Test*

Look at the pictures above. The left one is the picture of the sea around a small island in Southern Italy. Is it in the mid of air? No it is on the sea. The water there is so clear that makes you think it is in the mid of air. The right one is the picture of a hotel in northern Finland. There are full of stars in the sky and it is beautiful. You can watch all of them from your bed in the hotel room. Many people want to see. Don't you want to visit these places with wonderful views?

From *Vista English Communication I*

## Appendix C

### *Treatment 1*

#### I. Sound/Meaning Shifts

my <b>tie</b>	<b>mai-tai</b>	<b>Might I ?</b>
my <b>keys</b>	<b>Mikey's</b>	<b>My keys?</b>
<b>inn</b> key	in <b>key</b>	<b>inky</b>
my <b>tea</b>	<b>mighty</b>	<b>My D</b>
I have <b>two</b> .	<b>I have, too.</b>	<b>I have to.</b>

#### II. Two-Word Stress

Descriptive Phrase	Set Phrase
a light <b>bulb</b>	a <b>lightbulb</b>
a cold <b>fish</b>	a <b>goldfish</b>
a gray <b>ground</b>	a <b>greyhound</b>
a white <b>house</b>	The <b>White</b> House
a nice <b>watch</b>	a <b>wristwatch</b>
a clean <b>cup</b>	a <b>coffee</b> cup
a sharp <b>knife</b>	a <b>steak</b> knife

#### III. Reading Passage

Hello, my name is (\_\_\_). I'm taking American **Accent** Training. There's a **lot** to learn, but I **hope** to make it as **enjoyable** as possible. I should pick **up** on the American **intonation** pattern pretty **easily**, although the **only** way to get it is to **practice** all of the time. I use the **up** and down, or **peaks** and valleys **intonation** more than I **used** to. I've been paying attention to **pitch**, too. It's like **walking** down a **staircase**. I've been **talking** to a lot of **Americans** lately, and they tell me that I'm **easier** to understand. Anyway, I could go on and on, but the **important** thing is to **listen** well and sound **good**. Well, what do you **think? Do I?**

From *American Accent Training* (Cook, 1991)



## Appendix D

### *Treatment 2*

#### *Pitch and meaning change*

I didn't say he stole the money.	Someone else said it.
I <b>didn't</b> say he stole the money.	That's not true at all.
I didn't <b>say</b> he stole the money.	I only suggested the possibility.
I didn't say <b>he</b> stole the money.	I think someone else took it.
I didn't say he <b>stole the</b> money.	Maybe he just borrowed it.
I didn't say he stole <b>the</b> money.	But rather some other money.
I didn't say he stole the <b>money</b> .	He may have taken some jewelry.

### Reading Passage

Hello, my name is (\_\_\_). I'm taking American **Accent** Training. There's a **lot** to learn, but I **hope** to make it as **enjoyable** as possible. I should pick **up** on the American **intonation** pattern pretty **easily**, although the **only** way to get it is to **practice** all of the time. I use the **up** and down, or **peaks** and valleys **intonation** more than I **used** to. I've been paying attention to **pitch**, too. It's like **walking** down a **staircase**. I've been **talking** to a lot of **Americans** lately, and they tell me that I'm **easier** to understand. Anyway, I could go on and on, but the **important** thing is to **listen** well and sound **good**. Well, what do you **think? Do** I?

From *American Accent Training* (Cook, 1991)

## Appendix E

### Treatment 3

#### Reading Passage

Hello, my name is (\_\_\_\_). I'm taking American **Accent** Training. There's a **lot** to learn, but I **hope** to make it as **enjoyable** as possible. I should pick **up** on the American **intonation** pattern pretty **easily**, although the **only** way to get it is to **practice** all of the time. I use the **up** and down, or **peaks** and valleys **intonation** more than I **used** to. I've been paying attention to **pitch**, too. It's like **walking** down a **staircase**. I've been **talking** to a lot of **Americans** lately, and they tell me that I'm **easier** to understand. Anyway, I could go on and on, but the **important** thing is to **listen** well and sound **good**. Well, what do you **think**? **Do** I?

#### Reading Reduced Sounds

Hello, my name's z (\_\_\_\_). I'm taking 'mer'k'n Acc'nt Train'ng. Therez' lott' learn, b't I hope t'make 't'z 'njoy'bl'z poss'bl. Ish'dck 'p on the 'mer'k'n 'nt nash' n patter pretty eas'ly, although the only way t' get 't 'z t' pract's all 'v th' time. I use the 'p'n down, or peaks 'n valleys, 'nt' nash'n more the'n I used to. Ive b'n pay'ng 'ttensh 'n t' p'ch, too. 'Ts like walk'ng down' staircase. Ive b'n talk'ng to' lot 'v' mer'k'ns lately, 'n they tell me th't Im easier to 'nderstand. Anyway, I k'd go on 'n on, b't the 'mport'nt th'ng 'z t' Is n wel'n sound g'd. W'll, wh' d'y' th'nk? Do I?

#### Practicing liaisons

Hello, my nay miz (\_\_\_\_). I'm takingə merica næccen(t)raining. There zə lättə learn, bə däi hope t'ma ki desen joyablez passible. I shüd pi kəpän the<sup>(y)</sup>əmerica nintənash'n pæddern prid<sup>(y)</sup>ezily, älthough thee<sup>(y)</sup> only waydə geddidiz t' præk<sup>(y)</sup>ti sälləv th' time. I<sup>(y)</sup> use thee<sup>(y)</sup>up' n down, or peak s'n valley zintənashən more thə näi used to. Ivbn paying tenshən t'pitch, too. Itsläl kwälking dow nə staircase. Ivbn talking to<sup>(w)</sup>ə läddəvə merican zla<sup>(l)</sup>ely, 'n they tell me the däimeezier to<sup>(w)</sup> understand. Anyway, I could go<sup>(w)</sup>ä nə nän, bu<sup>(t)</sup>thee<sup>(y)</sup>important thingiz t' lisənwelən soun<sup>(d)</sup> good. Well, whəddyü think? Do<sup>(w)</sup> I?

From *American Accent Training* (Cook, 1991)

**Appendix F**  
**Questionnaire**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Partly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6

1. I am interested in learning English pronunciation.  
1 2 3 4 5 6
2. I believe I can improve my pronunciation with proper training and instruction.  
1 2 3 4 5 6
3. I have never received pronunciation instruction systematically.  
1 2 3 4 5 6

**Before the Treatment**

4. I had no knowledge about intonation, rhythm, and linking.  
1 2 3 4 5 6
5. I had no knowledge about re-syllabification and reduced form.  
1 2 3 4 5 6
6. No one has fixed my pronunciation problem.  
1 2 3 4 5 6
7. I did not know how to improve my pronunciation.  
1 2 3 4 5 6

**After the Treatment**

8. I thought pronunciation instruction could not be taught in a big classroom.  
1 2 3 4 5 6
9. I felt that pronunciation instruction can improve my listening abilities.  
1 2 3 4 5 6
10. I thought explicit explanation for pronunciation is useful.  
1 2 3 4 5 6
11. I thought reading aloud is an effective approach for learning and teaching pronunciation.  
1 2 3 4 5 6

**Any comments about learning and teaching pronunciation:**

# EFL Students' Retrospective Motivational Narratives: Does the Instructor's Online Feedback Style Matter?

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## **Abstract**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, while educators worldwide have been struggling to enhance student motivation in a virtual environment, quite a few students have been disinclined to turn their video cameras on during class. This is a critical problem for instructors who want to monitor students' cognitive and affective states during class. One possible way instructors can help improve students' cognitive skills while promoting their positive affective states or motivation might be to provide effective online feedback customized for individual students. The present study examines the effects of an instructor's online feedback style on promoting students' motivation. First, I present and discuss the current problem and present the literature review. Second, I explain the study comparing group-based feedback and privacy-oriented feedback styles. Participants were 48 EFL university students who enrolled in the required first-year ( $n=25$ ) and second-year ( $n=23$ ) courses. Participants submitted pre- and post-semester motivational narratives at the end of the semester as well as their final reflections on what they learned in the course during the semester. The material was adopted from part of a retrospective motivational narrative questionnaire (Boku, 2005; 2008; see Appendix A). The statistical results indicated that only the group-based feedback group had a significant within-group difference in the pre- and post-semester motivational scores. However, there was no significant motivational mean difference in the post-motivational score between the group-based and privacy-oriented feedback groups. Regarding the qualitative analysis, participants in both groups did not use the word "feedback" as a high-frequency keyword in their post-semester motivational narratives, which was not the case for their final reflections.

**Keywords:** EFL, retrospective, motivation, narratives, online, feedback

## **Introduction**

One of the most critical issues during the COVID-19 pandemic is how instructors can make online classes more communicative and motivating for students while securing their right to privacy. However, instructors are having a hard time keeping their classes communicative and motivating because increasing numbers of students prefer more privacy with their video off during online classes, which might lead to reduced student motivation. This is a critical problem for instructors who seek to keep classes at the same communicative level as pre-pandemic classes. Researchers, therefore, are wondering if instructors' online feedback styles affect student motivation, and if so, in what ways? To date, little is known about the relationship between EFL instructors' online feedback styles in online classes and students' motivation in them.

Therefore, the purposes of the present study are (1) to explore whether online

instructor feedback during classes affects EFL student motivation and (2) to compare the effects, if any, of group-based (GB) feedback and privacy-oriented (PO) feedback during online classes. GB feedback refers to a teaching style in which an instructor gives feedback to an individual student in the presence of other group members during a group breakout session. PO feedback refers to a teaching style in which an instructor gives feedback to an individual student privately in an individual breakout session. First, I summarize the literature review. Second, I demonstrate the method of comparing the effects of the two feedback styles by using a retrospective motivational narrative questionnaire (Boku, 2005; 2008). The questionnaire is based on the Naikan approach (Yoshimoto, 1965), a traditional Japanese introspective therapeutic approach. Third, I show the results of statistical and narrative analyses. Fourth, I discuss the results of this study. Finally, I conclude by giving implications for future research and discussing limitations of the study.

### **Literature Review**

Commonly used self-reporting questionnaires such as the Attitude Motivation Test Battery (Gardner, 1985) and Language Learning Orientation Scales (Noels et al., 2000) have been adopted in motivation studies. These scales explore student orientations from a cross-cultural communication perspective. Starting from a psychological standpoint, Deci and Ryan (2000) proposed self-determination theory (SDT), categorizing motivation as amotivation, extrinsic motivation, or intrinsic motivation. Researchers in various fields, including psychology, education, sports, and nursing, widely acknowledge SDT.

However, some researchers have pointed out the difficulty of adopting self-reporting questionnaires in EFL education because motivation is variable over time. Dornyei (2001), among others, raised a few problems regarding the self-reporting questionnaire:

1. Constructing a scale can be difficult because of the unstable nature of learners' motivations over time (Dornyei, 2001, p.16);
2. Simple questions can be interpreted by different learners in very different ways (Dornyei, 2001, pp. 201-202).

From a statistical analysis perspective, Macintyre et al. (2009) noted the variable aspects of the self as, "...a highly variable concept, not only cross-culturally but also intra-individually, as research with bicultural individuals shows" (p. 55). Dornyei (2005), Macintyre et al. (2009), and Ushioda (2009) stressed the variable nature of the students' concept of self (e.g., ideal L2 self, out-to-L2 self). Thus, the quantitative research paradigm has an inherent limitation in studying individual students' diachronic changes because it aims either to test validity of a universal theory by a cross-sectional survey or to apply a universal theory to explain a phenomenon.

Riley (2009) examined the change in Japanese EFL students' beliefs over time using a questionnaire based on quantitative research. The study demonstrated learners' motivational change depending on the time and circumstances by showing the results of "the shifts in student belief about language learning during the nine-month period of English study" (p. 102). Papi and Abdollahzadeh (2012) examined whether the ideal L2 self was correlated with a student's behavior and found it did not necessarily have such a relationship. They argued that factors affecting learning outcomes were not limited to internal factors, such as motivation or the concept of self.

More recently, Cao (2014), Vongsila and Reinders (2016), and Joe et al. (2017) addressed motivation from the perspective of willingness to communicate, and Walker

and Papi (2017) examined the relationship between participants' writing motivation and feedback-seeking orientation. Even more recently, Fong et al. (2021) examined participants from different backgrounds (i.e., European American, Asian American, African American, and others) in an ESL context in terms of their perceptions of instructor feedback. The study showed that feedback high in specificity was perceived as constructive, but that friendliness did not have an effect. Thus, Japanese EFL instructors might ask whether the findings of Fong et al. (2021) apply to an online Japanese EFL context.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, motivation issues have been discussed in online class contexts. Mahadin and Hallak (2021) examined situations in which students' cameras were turned on or off during virtual live lessons. They suggested that students not be required to turn their cameras on during the transitional period because they are not ready or are reluctant to do so. Kim (2021) suggested that students' security and privacy concerns during online classes reduced their motivation in a Korean EFL educational context. The question is whether class would be successful if conducted in secure and private circumstances without students' cameras turned on.

Thus far, extensive research on motivation has grown in cross-cultural communication, intra-individual change, and the online classroom context. However, to my knowledge, the relationship between EFL students' intra-individual motivational change and the instructor's online feedback styles has received little attention. Therefore, the present study will examine how EFL instructors' online feedback styles affect local students' motivational change over time.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

Participants included university EFL students in the Kansai area enrolled in the required first-year and second-year English classes. Those participants who did not submit retrospective motivational questionnaires with official approval due to sickness were excluded from this study prior to the analysis, which did not cause any threat that less motivated students might not have participated, or make the participants not reflective of the actual population. Questionnaire non-submission did not affect students' course grade. As a result, participants included 48 students; the GB feedback group included 25 (12 male and 13 female) students while the PO feedback group included 23 (10 male and 13 female) students. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 20 years. Their English level ranged between low- and high-intermediate.

### ***Materials***

*Retrospective motivational narratives sheet* (Boku, 2005; see Appendix A)

Ishin Yoshimoto's (1965) Naikan approach, which focuses on self-reflection to achieve self-awareness or self-cultivation, is called Naikan therapy in psychiatric treatment. The original Naikan therapy focuses on three thematic categories: (1) what others did to help the individual in the past, (2) what the individual did to express gratitude to those who helped them, and (3) how the individual might have caused troubles or difficulties for others. In the Naikan interaction, an interviewer listens to an interviewee talk about what the latter has learned by reflecting on the past. The interview is usually conducted over a week in a private space contained within a large public space. During this time, the interviewee should concentrate on a focused analysis of a particular time in the past. For

example, the individual might reflect on what they were like from age eight to the present. After the interviewee has finished this basic reflection, the interviewer listens to that reflection in terms of the three Naikan thematic categories. By reflecting on what they were like in the past, interviewees recall their fathers, mothers, teachers, and friends. By describing what they recall, they not only remember what they were like in the past, but also gain insights into what they are like in the present. Inspired by the Naikan approach (Yoshimoto, 1965), a traditional Japanese self-introspective therapy, Boku (2005) created the retrospective motivational scale in which participants described what they recalled for a particular period. It uses not only narratives from each period of the respondents' schooling, from the first year of junior high school to the current year of university education, but also a five-point Likert scoring system from 0 through 5 based on their motivational strength (see Appendix A).

#### *Final reflection on course learning*

The participants reflected and wrote narratives on what they learned during the semester. All participants had to submit the narratives to the instructor at the end of the semester via a learning management system (LMS).

#### *Software*

SPSS Base system Version 27 was used to compute the statistical analysis, and NVivo version 1.5.2 was used for the narrative analysis.

#### ***Procedure***

##### *Overall: GB and PO feedback groups*

The relationship between the instructor's online feedback styles and students' motivation was compared with the GB and PO feedback groups. The researcher controlled the total time of online feedback given to each participant. During the semester, participants in the GB and PO feedback groups received 14 minutes of individual online feedback regarding their presentation outlines and drafts, including revisions. The feedback was consistently based on a "learning goal" (Elliot and Dweck, 1988), in which the instructor pointed out problems to be resolved on a participant's submitted outline or draft. The researcher gave positive feedback to participants on their hard work and then gave them goal-oriented suggestions for possible use in their future presentations.

At the end of the semester (Week 15), all participants were to submit (1) the final reflection on the course and (2) a retrospective motivational questionnaire (see Appendix A) via a learning management system as part of the course requirement. Because the motivational questionnaire includes private narratives, the researcher explained to students that the questionnaire submission was based on their free choice. As a result, those who submitted the questionnaire got one extra point, which was not part of the course grade. Therefore, the submission or non-submission of the questionnaire did not affect their course grade. Those who did not submit the questionnaire due to absence resulting from sickness were excluded from this study prior to analysis. Non-submission of the questionnaire had no negative influence on their course grade because an extra point given to those who submitted the questionnaire was not included as a course grade anyway. The detailed procedure for each feedback group is explained below.

### *GB feedback group*

Participants in the GB feedback group learned about differences in basic rhetorical structures between Japanese and English (e.g., thesis statements, paragraph structures, topic sentences, supporting sentences, and concluding sentences) and grammar (e.g., conjunctions, punctuation marks) from a textbook. Participants received the GB feedback in class for their skill development. The GB feedback was aimed at facilitating reciprocal learning through within-group scaffolding based on the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). ZPD refers to “the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). The individual participant in the group received the researcher’s feedback. Feedback for an individual student was open to other members in the same breakout session in Zoom, so the entire GB feedback group did not necessarily receive more individual feedback than the PO feedback group. The final class goal was to give a presentation at the end of the course based on a theme provided by the researcher around the midterm of the semester.

#### 1. Pre-task phase

Before each lesson from Weeks 9 through 12, participants had to submit an outline, revised outline, draft, and revised draft based on the given presentation theme. Submission of these assignments was conducted via a learning management system.

#### 2. During-task phase

During Weeks 9 through 12, four participants were assigned to work together in a breakout session on Zoom. The researcher visited each breakout session to give the GB feedback on each participant’s outline, revised outline, draft, and revised draft. The researcher gave each participant online feedback for a total of 12 minutes (i.e., 3 minutes x 4 times).

At the end of the semester (Week 15), the researcher gave each participant feedback in a 2-minute online evaluation in the group breakout session. Thus, each participant received 14 minutes of feedback in total during the semester. Members in the same group had a chance to ask the researcher any questions.

#### 3. Post-task phase

After receiving the researcher’s feedback on participants’ assignments in the lessons (Weeks 9 through 12), participants submitted (1) a summary of the researcher’s feedback and (2) a reflection on what and how they learned from the researcher’s online feedback. The participants focused on their own learning goals and cognitively reflected on what they could or could not achieve in class.

### *PO feedback group*

The participants in the PO feedback group were assigned to give 3-minute presentations three times on Zoom (one group presentation and two individual presentations) during the first semester. The learning goals of this course were to achieve the successful expression of each participant’s logical thoughts in spoken English. The PO feedback was aimed at creating a secure and self-regulative environment for the participants (1) to pursue their own goals from a cognitive perspective and (2) to incorporate or integrate their acquired knowledge with the researcher’s private assistance.



### 1. Pre-task phase

Before each class, participants were to submit an outline, first draft, and final draft (revised draft) via a learning management system.

### 2. During-task phase

During each lesson, participants used a textbook with instructions on writing an outline and a draft and on revising a draft to prepare for a presentation on themes assigned by the researcher. The participants also reviewed what they had learned in the previous year, such as grammatical and rhetorical differences between writing in English and Japanese. Each participant was assigned to an individual breakout session, and the researcher gave each one private online feedback on their outline (2 minutes x 2 times), first draft (2 minutes x 2 times), and final draft (2 minutes x 2 times) submitted before the lesson. After presentations, the researcher gave private online evaluations of each presentation (1 minute x 2 times), and participants could ask any questions they had. Thus, each participant received a total of 14 minutes online feedback during the semester.

### 3. Post-task phase

After receiving feedback on the assignment (e.g., outline, first draft, and final draft) in the lessons, all participants submitted (1) a summary of the researcher's online private feedback and (2) a reflection on what and how they learned from the feedback. The participants focused on their own learning goals and cognitively reflected on what they could or could not achieve in class.

## **Research Questions**

The research questions addressed in this study are:

1. Are there any within-group motivational mean differences in the GB and the PO feedback groups?
2. Are there any within-group motivational relationships in the GB and the PO feedback groups?
3. Is there any post-semester motivational mean difference between the GB and the PO feedback groups?

## **Hypotheses**

The hypotheses tested in this study are:

1. There are within-group motivational mean differences in the GB and the PO feedback groups.
2. There are within-group motivational relationships in the GB and the PO feedback group.
3. There is a post-semester motivational mean difference between the GB and the PO feedback groups.

## **Results**

### **Quantitative analysis**

Research question 1—*Are there any within-group motivational mean differences in the GB and the PO feedback groups?*

Participants' pre- and post-semester motivational mean scores and standard deviations are shown in the descriptive statistics (see Table 1).

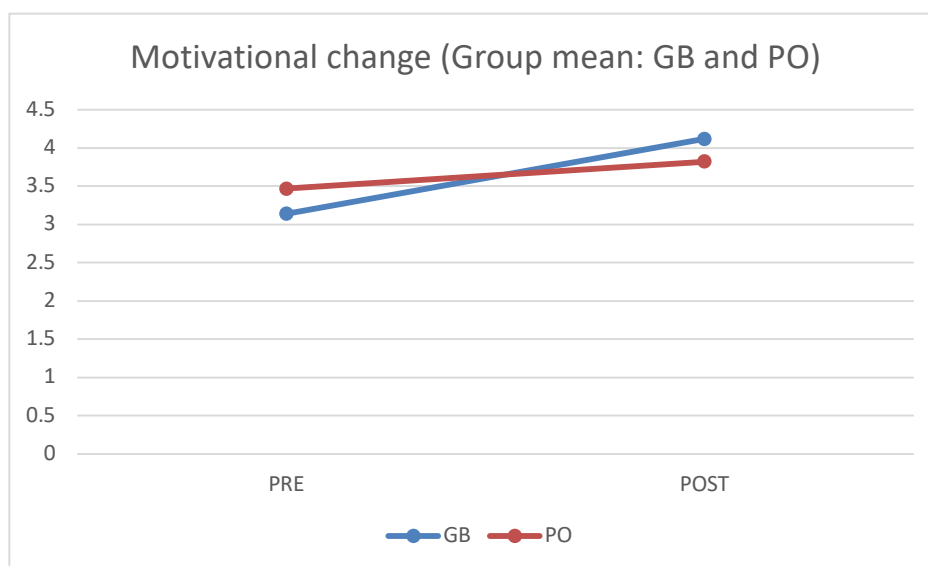
Table 1  
*Descriptive statistics: GB and PO feedback groups*

	GB (n=25)				PO (n=23)			
	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Pre	3.24	1.36	1	5	3.47	1.03	1	5
Post	4.12	0.72	3	5	3.82	0.65	2	5

As for the GB feedback group, the motivational scale showed a reliability of ( $\alpha$ ) .696. As a result of the one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the null hypothesis was retained. Therefore, to examine the difference in the pre- and post-semester motivational mean score of the GB feedback group, the paired sample t-test was administered. The result indicated a significant difference between the scores ( $t = 4.176, df = 24, p < .001$ ).

Regarding the PO feedback group, the motivational scale showed a reliability of ( $\alpha$ ).701. The one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that the null hypothesis was rejected ( $p < .01$ ). Therefore, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was administered to examine the differences between pre- and post-semester motivational mean scores of the PO feedback group. Pre- and post-semester motivational scores showed no significant difference in the PO feedback group ( $Z = 1.930, p = .054$ ). Graph 1 shows the pre- and post-semester motivational mean scores for both groups.

Graph 1  
*Pre- and post-semester motivational mean comparison: GB and PO feedback groups*



Research question 2—*Are there any within-group motivational relationships in the GB and the PO feedback groups?*

The Pearson correlation of the GB feedback group was .644 ( $p < .001$ ) and that of PO feedback group was .600 ( $p < .001$ ). These results showed within-group motivational relationships in both the GB and PO feedback groups, possibly indicating that both feedback styles have positive relationships with motivation; however, considering that only the GB and not the PO feedback group showed a significant difference between pre-

and post-semester motivational scores, it might be possible that only the GB feedback group received a positive motivation effect.

Research question 3—*Is there any post-semester motivational mean difference between the GB and the PO feedback groups?*

The t-test result showed that the null hypothesis for normal distribution was retained. No significant differences were shown when comparing the post-semester motivational mean scores between the GB and the PO feedback groups. Although the GB feedback group showed a gain in pre- and post-semester motivational score with correlation, it is not clearly determined that the GB feedback style is significantly better than the PO feedback style because the two groups showed no significant post-semester motivational mean difference. In sum, statistical results alone cannot conclusively determine whether the two feedback styles significantly differ. The following section discusses the qualitative analysis results.

### ***Qualitative analysis***

#### ***1. Pre- and the post-motivational narratives: GB and PO feedback groups***

The researcher extracted students' motivational narratives of this academic year from pre- and post-semester motivational narratives in Japanese and translated them into English. See the students' original Japanese keywords in English for GB (Table 2) and PO (Table 3) feedback groups. The frequently used keywords in Tables 2 and 3 include only those that appeared more than five times in the pre- and post-semester motivational narratives. Word clouds represent the original Japanese words used in the pre- and post-semester motivational narratives. Frequently used keywords are shown in a larger font and the less frequently used in a smaller font. Word clouds 1 and 2 represent original Japanese words used in the GB feedback group's pre- and post-semester motivational keywords and Word clouds 3 and 4 represent those in the PO feedback group.

#### ***2. Pre- and the post-semester motivational narratives: GB feedback group***

As shown in Table 2, frequently used words “university” and “entrance exams” in the pre-motivational narratives were substituted for the words “fun” and “class” in the post-motivational narratives, while “English” and “think” appear in both narratives.

Table 2

*Keywords used most frequently in the pre- and post-semester motivational narratives: GB feedback group*

<b>Keywords used most frequently: The GB feedback group</b>	<b>PRE (number of times used)</b>	<b>POST (number of times used)</b>
1	English (19)	English (10)
2	University (13)	class (9)
3	entrance exam (6)	fun (8)
4	think (6)	think (5)

Word cloud 1 includes words like “university,” “English,” “entrance exams,” “think,”

“not good at,” “study,” “conscious,” “compare,” “lowered,” and “uneasy.” Students in the GB group seem rather uneasy about learning English due to their past experiences and the possible university study image.

#### Word cloud 1

*Words used in the pre-semester motivational narratives: GB feedback group*



Word cloud 2, on the other hand, includes words like “English,” “class,” “fun,” “think,” “speak,” “study,” “chance,” “increase,” “can,” “teacher,” and “use.” The differences in the words used in students’ narratives between Word clouds 1 and 2, or between pre- and post-motivational narratives, may signify that those in the GB feedback group might have built their positive image or self-confidence in English through learning in the class.

#### Word cloud 2

*Words used in the post-semester motivational narratives: GB feedback group*



### 3. Pre- and the post-semester motivational narratives: PO feedback group

As shown in Table 3, the word “English” appears in the pre- and more frequently in the post-motivational narratives. Although only a few frequently used keywords are shown in the pre-motivational narratives, the post-semester motivational narratives include a greater variety of frequently used keywords, such as “class,” “fun,” and “presentation.” Notably, the keyword “fun” appears only in the post-semester narratives in the PO feedback group.

Table 3

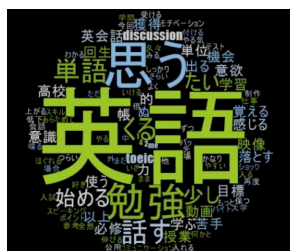
*Keywords used most frequently in the pre- and post-semester motivational narratives: PO feedback group*

Keywords used most frequently: The PO feedback group	PRE (number of times used)	POST (number of times used)
1	English (16)	English (37)
2	think (8)	study (18)
3	study (6)	class (16)
4		fun (10)
5		think (8)
6		presentation (7)
7		feel (7)
8		increase (5)
9		chance (5)
10		speak (5)

Word cloud 3 includes words such as “English,” “think,” “study,” “TOEIC,” “English conversation,” “discussion,” “credit,” “not good at,” “image,” and “fail.” The words shown in the PO feedback group might indicate that students tended to be under pressure with studying English at the beginning of the semester.

Word cloud 3

*Words used in the pre-semester motivational narratives: PO feedback group*



Word cloud 4, on the other hand, includes “English,” “study,” “class,” “fun,” “think,” “presentation,” “feel,” “increase,” “chance,” “speak,” “understanding,” “interest,” “overseas,” “pronunciation,” “grammar,” and “goal.” The word differences in the pre- and post-semester motivational narratives may signify those students in the PO feedback group might have raised their awareness for building their specified goals with fun through learning in class.

#### Word cloud 4

*Words used in the post-semester motivational narratives: PO feedback group*



#### 2. Final reflection: GB and the PO feedback groups

Although the word “feedback” did not appear in either the GB or the PO post-semester motivational narratives, it did appear in the participants’ final reflections (see Table 4 in Appendix B). The final reflections are students’ reflections on what they learned during the semester, not the pre- and the post- semester motivational narratives. The keywords used most frequently in the final reflections (i.e., noun, verb, adjectives) were translated and categorized as (1) the keywords used most frequently in both the GB and PO feedback groups or (2) group-specific keywords used only in the GB or PO feedback group (see Table 4). Table 4 shows the 18 most frequently used keywords in the narratives in both groups, including the word “feedback.” The difference between the GB and PO feedback groups is that the former includes the word “teacher” whereas the latter does not in the top five frequently words. In addition, the word “feedback” was shown to occur slightly more frequently in the GB feedback group than the PO feedback group.

Word clouds 5 and 6 (see Appendix B) list the original Japanese words used in the final reflections in the GB and PO feedback groups, respectively. The frequently used group-specific keywords in the GB feedback group included “fun,” “nervous,” “senior high school,” “assignment,” “accustomed to,” “Japanese,” “positive attitude,” and “reason.” In contrast, the PO feedback group included four frequently used keywords: “method,” “expression,” “outline,” and “individual.” The GB and PO feedback groups differed in that the former showed emotion-oriented words while the latter did not in their final reflection.

#### Discussion

I hypothesized that both the GB and PO groups would have a within-group relationship and a motivational mean difference. Although both groups showed a significant within-group relationship, the GB feedback group alone had a significant within-group difference. Graph 1 indicates that the GB feedback group had a lower pre-semester motivational score than the PO feedback group, but that it had a higher post-semester motivational score than the PO feedback group. These results suggest that the GB feedback group enhanced participants’ motivation more effectively than the PO feedback group. However, the research results also indicated that there was no significant difference between the groups in the post-semester motivational mean score. In sum, statistical analysis alone cannot conclusively determine whether the GB feedback enhanced participants’ motivation better than the PO feedback.

On the other hand, the post-semester motivational analysis showed that the keyword “fun” was used frequently, but “feedback” was not shown in either group. For the

motivational narratives, students had to reflect on their past motivational state at a particular age between junior high and the present, overlooking past learning experiences. This helped them delve into their own cognitive and affective (motivational) states from a long-term (macro-level) perspective. As a result, students found that classes were “fun”.

In the final reflections, however, the keyword “feedback” occurred more than five times in both groups. Students were asked to observe their immediate (most recent) learning context in their final reflection. Therefore, they naturally paid attention to their cognitive and affective (motivational) states on specific experiences in class from a short-term (micro-level) perspective. As a result, they might have used the keyword “feedback” frequently in their reflections.

The fact that participants’ post-semester motivational narratives include “fun” but not “feedback” might indicate that instructor’s feedback (style) was not relevant from a long-term (macro-level) perspective. From a short-term (micro-level) perspective, however, an instructor’s feedback might have been somewhat relevant, along with other factors that might have influenced the students’ immediate learning.

The group-specific keywords used most frequently in the final reflection represent unique factors that might have affected participants’ short-term motivation in each group. The study found that participants in the GB feedback group tended to include emotion-oriented words, whereas those in the PO feedback group tended to use knowledge-oriented words. Thus, the disposition or nature of participant motivation in the GB and PO feedback groups differed from each other from a short-term perspective. To summarize, whether or not this difference is attributable to the feedback style remains unknown from the present quantitative and qualitative studies because of the possible intervening variables that might have affected the disposition of participant motivation.

### **Limitations of the study**

One limitation in the study is that the motivational scale used showed middle-level reliability, which is not high enough with a small population. This might have caused a problem in generalizability. In addition, the study did not include a questionnaire at the beginning of the semester due to the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic schedule change, which caused a critical difficulty in the comparison of pre- and post-motivational scores/narratives. In light of the original retrospective motivational narrative analysis (Boku, 2005; 2008) designed to compare participants’ reflection on their motivational change from the beginning to the end of the semester, the pre- and post-semester motivational narrative analyses alone at the end of the semester were not enough to examine their long-term (macro-level) cognitive and affective (motivational) changes.

### **Conclusion**

The present study investigated whether an instructor’s online feedback style influenced EFL students’ motivation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The quantitative analysis results showed that the GB feedback group had higher post-motivational scores than pre-motivational scores. On the other hand, the qualitative analysis results indicated that the instructor’s feedback style might enhance their short-term (micro-level) motivation in their immediate learning context, but not their long-term (macro-level) motivation. A qualitative study also indicated that the GB and PO feedback groups showed different types of keywords (i.e., emotion-oriented and knowledge-based) regarding short-term motivation, which might not be attributable to the instructor’s feedback style alone due

to other possible factors. Thus, from the present study results, it cannot be conclusively determined whether an instructor's online feedback style enhances students' motivation. Students' affective states, including motivation, are individually divergent and variable over time. Therefore, future studies should examine the relationship between an instructor's online feedback style and students' motivation, focusing on their motivational narratives from a long-term (macro-level) and a short-term (micro-level) perspective with a larger population based on a mixed-methods study.

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## Appendix A

### *Retrospective Motivational Narrative Questionnaire Sheet* (Boku, 2005; 2008)

1. Five-point rating score. Please rate your motivation during each period (e.g., J: junior high school, H: senior high school, U: university) as 0: no learning experience, 1: very demotivated, 2: demotivated, 3: neither motivated nor demotivated, 4: motivated, 5: very motivated.
2. Retrospective narratives. Describe the reason for the rating (0-5) you selected. Write vertically in Japanese.

5								
4								
3								
2								
1								
0								
JH1	JH2	JH3	SH1	SH2	SH3	Uni1 April	Uni 1 July (PO group) Uni 2 April)	(PO group Uni 2 July)

#### NOTES:

1. The original approach to analyzing retrospective motivational narratives is to examine participants' questionnaires submitted at the beginning and end of the semester to identify any individual's motivational change over time. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, classes were conducted online with schedule modifications made at the beginning of the semester. Therefore, the questionnaire was submitted at the end of the semester alone via a learning management system, instead of being submitted on the original retrospective motivational narrative questionnaire sheet.
2. The researcher investigated and collected motivational data by adopting the original retrospective motivational narrative questionnaire, which includes scores and narratives given for each year of junior high school to the present year of university, as of April and July. However, in this paper, the score and narratives regarding junior and senior high school age were not used for the comparison of the instructor's feedback styles because they are beyond the scope of this paper.

## Appendix B

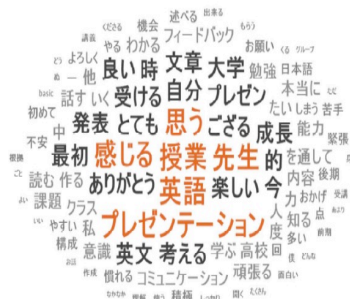
Table 4

*Keywords used most frequently in the final reflection: GB and PO feedback groups*

Keywords used most frequently: Final reflection	Order	GB group (number of times used)	PO group (number of times used)
<b>Keywords used by both groups</b>	1	class (79)	presentation (82)
	2	English (60)	English (71)
	3	presentation (55)	class (47)
	4	teacher (32)	learn/study (26)
	5	Thank you (25)	Thank you (24)
	6	learn/study (18)	think (16)
	7	improvement (16)	improvement (16)
	8	think (12)	consciousness/awareness (12)
	9	good (11)	not good at (11)
	10	content (8)	teacher (10)
	11	ability (8)	ability (10)
	12	speak (8)	speak (9)
	13	<b>feedback (7)</b>	understand (7)
	14	consciousness/awareness (7)	good (6)
	15	understand (7)	<b>feedback (5)</b>
	16	do my best (7)	content (5)
	17	not good at (6)	do my best (5)
	18	structure (6)	structure (5)
<b>Group-specific keywords</b>	1	fun (24)	method (13)
	2	nervous (11)	expression (8)
	3	senior high (8)	outline (7)
	4	assignment (7)	individual (5)
	5	accustomed to (6)	
	6	Japanese (6)	
	7	positive attitude (6)	
	8	reason (5)	

### Word cloud 5

Words used in the final reflection: GB feedback group



### Word cloud 6

Words used in the final reflection: PO feedback group



## A Reflection on Diversity in Picture Books for the ELL Classroom

Hitomi Otani

### Abstract

English is a tool for global communication. Emphasizing the importance of teaching English to English Language Learners (ELLs) through global perspectives, this paper introduces the idea of incorporating diverse picture books into ELL classrooms to connect ELLs to diverse perspectives on the world through their language learning. Diverse picture books allow students to obtain knowledge of different ways of life and people from different backgrounds, appreciate our differences and similarities, and develop global, social, and academic learning. However, social and cultural issues concerning diverse views can cause unfair discrimination against race, religion, and gender. In order to bring up difficult subjects with English learners, who are yet to explore the world beyond their experience, this paper highlights the sensitivity required in selecting diverse picture books before they are introduced into an ELL classroom. While addressing the method of utilizing picture books to improve English language skills, this paper aims to raise teachers' awareness of selecting books to expand the benefits of using diverse picture books in ELL classrooms.

**Keywords:** ESL/EFL Literacy, Text & Visual Literacy, diversity, language & global competency, multicultural picture books

Language is a communication tool to develop our interpersonal relationships. English is a tool for global communication to connect us with people across the world. Dividing my time between the USA and Japan with opportunities to teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL), I have always felt the importance of reminding English language learners (ELLs) of the fundamental role of the English language and the primary reason for their English learning. Language competency is an essential factor in expanding one's possibilities in a global society. However, looking back thirty years ago when I was struggling with a language barrier and cultural difference as an exchange student, I cannot deny that my determination to interact effectively with others and willingness to understand and respect our diverse societies had a significant influence in leading me to a new opportunity. Learning English through global perspectives allows ELLs to explore the world beyond, expand their knowledge of diverse views, and develop critical thinking skills for better judgment and right decision-making. Making ELLs aware that English is an essential tool to connect them with the world is a powerful incentive to motivate them. Whether my students are EFLs in language schools and corporations in Japan or ESLs in afterschool programs in the USA, I have come to understand that encouraging students to broaden their global perspectives and effectiveness through language learning is as vital as teaching language skills and systems (Kansy, 2006). Providing a teaching curriculum and learning

environment that promote students' global, social, and academic awareness is a crucial element to help them prepare to function as members of the global society through their English learnings (Kansay, 2006). Again, English is a tool for global communication, and English learning is closely connected to global competency. English language competence and global competence complement one other.

Promoting a better understanding of our diverse society fosters global competence in ELLs. As Kansay (2006) addressed, English is “the core of celebrating diversity” (p. 3). We have social, political, gender, religious, cultural, and racial diversity across the world. Obtaining accurate knowledge of different ways of life broadens our diverse perspectives on the world. Meeting people from different backgrounds allows us to value our differences and similarities (Reisberg, 2008). However, social and cultural issues are sensitive topics to talk about openly. They can trigger unfair discrimination against race, religion, gender, and politics. There is a risk of creating tension in the classroom. So, how do we handle touchy topics? Picture books have many advantages for introducing sensitive topics in ELL classrooms and teaching English through global perspectives. The book length is short with a rich vocabulary for ELL literacy. There is a wide range of selections with social and cultural themes that suit both children and adults. The illustrations provide not only the necessary information for students to understand the plot visually but also function as the beneficial vehicles to enhance students' critical and analytical thinking through visual literacy (Reisberg, 2008). While textual literacy with picture books will expose students to the strategies for thinking about the texts, raising the questions, and expanding their comprehension, visual literacy will help develop their skills for interpreting the images, thinking critically, and understanding the depth of the story.

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) (2020) is the method that effectively induces the benefits of visual literacy in ELL classrooms. It utilizes three questions to enhance visual interpretation: 1) What is going on in the picture? 2) What makes you say that? 3) What else can we find? This method not only improves students' visual reading skills but also encourages them to justify their opinions using evidence. Having students answer questions verbally and articulate their explanations in a written format expands their speaking and writing fluency (Yeom, 2018). It helps develop logical reasoning in their verbal and written responses. Similarly, the Whole Book Approach is the method of guiding students' attention through the details of visual storytelling and enhancing their visual literacy skills (Lambert, 2015). This method instructs students to observe the images closely and gather the clues to read the story deeper. The process of deeper reading will allow students to reflect on the stories and organize their thoughts. Consequently, it directs them to relate to the characters, connect with them through empathy, and prepare for self-reflection on the topics in the stories. In this way, picture books can initiate ELLs to learn social-cultural issues through language learning when given an opportunity to meet the people they have never met and explore the cultures they have never experienced. In other words, the entertaining elements of picture books will help facilitate sharing thoughts on difficult topics with rhythmic texts and aesthetic visual elements.

In order to maximize these benefits of picture books, teachers must be conscious that the books introduced to the ELLs who are not familiar with the world beyond their society tend to represent the culture from a particular ethnicity. In other words, teachers must carefully review, evaluate, and select a book to provide accurate knowledge on the topics. In other words, the selected books must be culturally and historically authentic in both

texts and illustrations (Reisberg, 2008). As I brainstormed my criteria for selecting the books for my students, two incidents in the children's literature industries caught my attention. In 2016, Scholastic recalled *A Birthday Cake for George Washington* (Ganeshram & Newton, 2016) because of the public criticism of the depictions of a President's enslaved chef, Hercules. *School Library Journal* criticized the book, saying it "conveys a feeling of joyfulness that contrasts with the reality of slave life" (Parrott, 2016, para. 1). *Kirkus Reviews* stated the book presented "an incomplete, even dishonest treatment of slavery" (Smith, 2016, para. 3). As the withdrawal reason, Scholastic issued the statement that the title failed to convey the accurate images of the historical reality "despite the positive intentions and beliefs of the author, editor, and illustrator" (Scholastic Media Room, 2016, para. 2), which demonstrates that positive intentions with a lack of awareness and knowledge could unconsciously harm others.

In 2017, a similar incident occurred in the Dr. Seuss Museum in Springfield. The mural from the page of *And to Think I Saw It on Mulberry Street* (Dr. Seuss, 1937) was removed as a consequence of the public complaints about the racial stereotype image of a Chinese character (Wilkens, 2017). Nel (2014) observed how the picture books Dr. Seuss read as a child influenced "his unconscious, as an ordinary part of his visual imagination" (p.72), and his stereotypes of depictions continued to emerge in his works without his being aware of it. In 2021, six titles written and illustrated by Dr. Seuss - *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* (1937), *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950), *McElligot's Poo* (1947), *On Beyond Zebra!* (1955), *Scrambled Eggs Super!* (1953), and *The Cat's Quizzer* (1976) - were eventually removed from publication because of a visual racial misrepresentation. During the process of publishing *A Birthday Cake for George Washington* and setting up Dr. Seuss' mural, everyone involved must have been well intentioned. However, it is implausible that no one ever realized that their intention to celebrate the legacies of Hercules and Dr. Seuss might devalue and hurt a specific ethnicity until the works were out in public and criticized.

I pictured myself showing Dr. Seuss's mural unconsciously to a class that included one Chinese student without being aware of how the student might feel among others, standing in front of the wall. What if I introduced *A Birthday Cake for George Washington* to the class with one African American student with my good intention of showing how incredible Hercules was? Then, I imagined myself as being a member of the ethnicity represented in the book I selected and asked this question to myself: Do I feel proud to be in the class while this book about my race and culture is being read, or do I feel misunderstood or belittled? In addition to word counts and writing styles matching students' literacy level, my first criteria for selecting books has become whether or not the books represent each character and culture in pride and dignity with no "distorted, negative, or laughable" images (Bishop, 1990, p. 4). According to Yoo-Lee et al. (2014, as cited in Short & Fax, 2003), there is no doubt that "only an insider to the culture portrayed in the book can sense if it is authentic" (p. 326). If the story's theme contains cultures that we are not familiar with, how do we verify a book's authenticity? Should we choose only the books by the authors and illustrators who are from the cultures on the topics or those who have a background in its culture and were exposed to it for a specified number of years? I would not eliminate a good story by the authors and illustrators who are outside of the cultures; however, when we choose the books by those who have no cultural background in its specific country, seeking feedback on the topics

from cultural insiders helps us learn about what is in the texts and implied by the texts (Yoo-Lee et al., 2014).

Acquiring insight about the books gives us an opportunity to learn, debate, weigh, and make a final decision in selection. For example, Cynthia Rylant, a native of West Virginia, is well known for her Appalachian cultural-themed books. Authentic positive Appalachian values discussed by Valentine's research (2008) such as "religion," "self-reliance," "love," "pride," "neighborliness," "familism," and "a sense of place" (p. 54) are all identified in Rylant's stories. Roggenkamp (2008) stated that the author provided Appalachian stereotypes in her works only to have the readers see beyond the negative stereotypes to which the region is often subject and explore the positive side of Appalachian value and culture. However, Roggenkamp (2008) found that the illustrations of the author's memoir, *When I Was Young in the Mountains* (1982), fell short of Rylant's effort by providing the images of the century-old pre-modern Appalachian stereotypes. Being an outsider of its culture, I found nothing but a beautifully illustrated peaceful life in Appalachia. After researching about Appalachian culture further, I decided to include this book in my selection. Rylant's love and devotion to the region are well-known from her past works. In addition to the feedback that I received from a cultural insider and a lack of sufficient evidence to support visual inaccuracy and overgeneralization, beautifully illustrated gentle scenes reinforce Rylant's lyrical language and intensify the mood and tone of the narrative. However, Roggenkamp's insights were essential in weighing the content of the book before introducing it to the class. Roggenkamp's observation brought me awareness and kept me from unconsciously raising the risk of negative stereotypes in the classroom.

Wee (2017) pointed out that "a single story forms stereotypes and stereotypes are problematic not because they are not true, but because they are incomplete" (p.3). To illustrate, *A Different Pond* (Phi & Bui, 2017) is a quiet, beautiful book that depicts the bond and love in a hard-working Vietnamese immigrant family in the United States. The protagonist's father is a war refugee, and their struggles and meager life are subtle but evident in both texts and illustrations. I felt introducing the only lasting image of Vietnamese people as poor war refugees in the United States seemed insufficient to represent Vietnamese. As Wee (2017) stated, most of the Southeast Asian-themed picture books published in the U.S. have a common plot, such as the characters' experience of war, refugees, escape from their own countries, and struggle as immigrants (Wee, 2017). It is not that this history is not true, but that consistently showing only the story of their traumatic history is insufficient for understanding their culture and tradition. We cannot portray an ethnicity's whole culture through a couple of picture books. However, using the paired books to show the variety of life from the same culture helps ease generalizations and allows ELLs to explore a character's different cultural background without inputting a fixed image of stereotype.

For instance, *Knock Knock: My Dad's Dream for Me* (Beaty & Collier, 2013) is a compelling story about a boy who overcame his father's sudden disappearance and grew into manhood to be independent. However, by introducing only this book as a representation of an African American author and illustrator, I felt I ran the risk of reinforcing the stereotype of an incarcerated black father. In order to show a different life of African American characters, I decided to pair up *Knock Knock: My Dad's Dream for Me* with *Uptown* (Collier, 2000), which conveys the passion and energy of Harlem culture. Both *Knock Knock: My Dad's Dream for Me* and *Uptown* introduce each character's life



to the readers with beautiful and powerful language and illustrations. Each book stands out with the different characters in the different settings. However, when selecting a book for an ELL classroom for the purpose of raising awareness of diversity, using the paired books facilitates ELL's discussion on the sensitive topics and connects them with the character in the story without feeding unconscious bias.

### Conclusion

Language and visual literacy in picture books are significant resources to help develop students' language skills and critical thinking abilities and teach English through global perspectives. Simultaneously, how teachers incorporate books into the curriculum and what books they select make a significant impact on ELLs' diverse views. Many ELLs are still in the process of acquiring knowledge about the world outside their culture. If the cultures are outside our own, stay humble to learn these differences and embrace this diversity. By doing so, we have less risk of unintentionally devaluing other ethnicities, cultures, and backgrounds and unconsciously passing along racially misrepresented images to the students. It seems illogical to encourage students to study one global language that allows us to connect with our diverse world without teaching the value of our diverse world. The power of storytelling will elevate students' emotional growth, and the stories in diverse picture books will raise awareness of global diversity. As Bishop (1990) pointed out, books are windows, sliding glass doors, and mirrors. Through picture books, the students are taking a journey to see the views of the world through the windows, walk through the sliding glass doors to the world unknown, and see the reflections of themselves in the mirrors (Bishop, 1990). We have invited our students to travel with us, meet people unlike us, and listen to their voices. It is our job to help them prepare for their journey.

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# Developing Professional Learning Community for Cooperative Learning

Hitomi Otani

## Abstract

The benefits of Cooperative Learning have been proved to be effective for students' academic and social development. Through positive group interaction, students can develop social skills and strategies for constructive communication and effective teamwork. Individual accountability induces active participation, motivation, and higher academic performance. However, these advantages of working in groups occur only when Cooperative Learning is effectively conducted in a way that highlights the benefits of group interaction. A lack of students' collaborative skills, organization skills, and unequal contribution often causes disruption, delay, and group operational failure and negatively affects the advantages of Cooperative Learning. Most importantly, teachers' lack of knowledge, understanding, and skills of Cooperative Learning is often listed as a crucial factor for its implementation failure. This paper aims to help teachers familiarize themselves with the goals of Cooperative Learning, develop sufficient skills and strategies to handle the challenges, and develop a well-planned structured framework through professional development to make Cooperative Learning successful in ELL classrooms.

**Keywords:** Cooperative Learning & Collaborative Learning, Common Obstacles of Cooperative Learning, Cooperative Learning Training, Equity in Cooperative Learning, Professional Development for Cooperative Learning

## Background of the Problem

*Problem of Practice* — An English as a Foreign Language teacher in a private language school frequently implements group work to promote students' active participation. However, unequal contributions among the group members often make group work a platform to socialize rather than learn, making it harder for the teacher to assess individual competency through the collaborative task. Having no choice but to rely on summative assessment, the teacher rarely finds significant improvement in the average class score. The teacher needs to find a way to make Cooperative Learning more meaningful and productive to individuals' cognitive and collaborative learning development.

The benefits of Cooperative Learning have been discussed by many researchers and proved to be effective in promoting students' academic and social development. Group members take individual responsibility for the product (the quantity and quality of individual work) and process (individual contribution for team operation) and contribute their skills and knowledge to build a positive group interaction to achieve a shared goal (Frykedal & Chiriack, 2016). Positive group interaction motivates students to develop social skills and strategies for constructive communication and effective group operation. Individual accountability increases students' motivation and active participation and enhances cognitive skills for higher academic performance (Cohen, Lotan, Scarloss, & Arellano, 1999). As a result, Cooperative Learning generates academic achievement, positive social skills, and psychologically healthy development by promoting individuals' success (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

However, these advantages of group work occur only when group interaction is effectively conducted in a way that highlights the benefits of Cooperative Learning. A lack of students' collaborative and organization skills often causes unequal contribution, disruption, delay, and

group operational failure during the process (Le, Janssen, & Wubbels, 2018). Le et al. (2018) pointed out that students' self-regulating skills of planning, monitoring, and reflecting outcomes and collaborative communication skills for productive group interaction must be taught before collaboration. Furthermore, while peer assessment is encouraged during the process, students may also lack the skills to deliver proper feedback (Frykedal & Chiriac, 2016). Teachers are urged to provide Cooperative Learning training to prepare students with appropriate communication and interactional skills and make the goals of Cooperative Learning and assessment criteria public to allow students to acknowledge both cognitive and collaborative aspects. Nevertheless, a lack of teachers' knowledge and skills has been a critical issue in Cooperative Learning practice (Gillies & Boyle, 2010; Le et al., 2018). As indicated in the Problem of Practice, without collaborative skills, students are often exposed to Cooperative Learning that does not have any structured framework. As a result, their collaboration failure prevents each student from achieving academic and collaborative gains.

### **Learning Community**

Johnson & Johnson (1999) advocated that the five basic elements—"positive interdependence, individual and group accountability, promotive interaction, appropriate use of social skills, and group processing" (pp. 70-71)—are essential components of the Cooperative Learning structure to optimize its benefit and impact students' development. The Cooperative Learning practice without a proper structure not only diminishes its advantage but also creates negative outcomes. To bring the benefits of Cooperative Learning into the best practice, teachers must be well prepared with a structured implementation that aligns with the goals of Cooperative Learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). In order to develop a well-structured framework that effectively produces students' active learning in cognitive and collaborative aspects, providing professional development to help teachers gain knowledge and skills of Cooperative Learning is a good start.

The concept of a Professional Learning Community is "increasing teachers' professional knowledge and enhancing students' learning" (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008, p. 81). A Professional Learning Community allows teachers to acquire and utilize "Knowledge of Practice" (Vescio et al., 2008, pp. 88-89) for the purpose of students' learning achievement. By succeeding in changing their teaching practice, teachers can subsequently improve students' learning (Vescio et al., 2008). Therefore, building a Professional Learning Community is an effective approach to maximize the cognitive and collaborative benefit of group work for students' gains. Through a Professional Learning Community, teachers can familiarize themselves with the goals of Cooperative Learning, obtain instructional skills and strategies, and develop a well-structured Cooperative Learning framework.

### **Focus on Learning**

In successful Cooperative Learning practice, groups can achieve effective team management on their own and generate a productive outcome for a mutual goal. Through this process, individual students can develop constructive communication skills by taking responsibility for their own roles and making contributions to the product and process (Frykedal & Chiriac, 2016; Le et al., 2018). Furthermore, according to Cohen, Lotan, Scarloss, & Arellano (1999), students who actively engage in Cooperative Learning gain more access to developing academic knowledge and social skills than passive participants. Well-structured Cooperative Learning with teachers' effective intervention strategies will alleviate the problems and facilitate students' learning process (Frykedal & Chiriac, 2016). Therefore, teachers' primary responsibility is to provide a well-structured Cooperative Learning framework that maximizes the benefits of collaboration and ensures that all students receive equal access to academic and collaborative learning opportunities.

### **Collaborative Culture in Professional Learning Community**

An ideal Professional Learning Community should include the five steps below. In each stage, the group members conduct research-based studies individually, evaluate the findings collectively, and synthesize the knowledge in groups.

1. Develop theoretical knowledge of Cooperative Learning and understand the benefits and goals of Cooperative Learning.
2. Examine the common Cooperative Learning issues and evaluate the strategies.
3. Develop the knowledge of Cooperative Learning assessment and determine assessment criteria.
4. Develop a well-structured Cooperative Learning framework by applying the attained knowledge.
5. Implement the practice, monitor the progress, and execute the changes.

At the first stage in the Professional Learning Community, teachers establish knowledge and understanding of the purpose and benefits of Cooperative Learning and determine the essential components of Cooperative Learning structure. Knowing what students should achieve through group operation and how the benefits of Cooperative Learning can be optimized directs teachers to create clear assessment criteria that align with the goals. Subsequently, the groups proceed to examine common Cooperative Learning obstacles to familiarize themselves with the possible challenges and prepare themselves with the strategies to handle the problems, provide proper interventions, and support students' learning process.

For instance, group communication skills are one area where students need to be taught before collaboration (Gillies & Boyle, 2010; Le et al., 2018). Through this Professional Learning Community, teachers can collect and share research-based studies on students' skill training models for Cooperative Learning, learn about the strategies, and practice their coaching skills in the group. Furthermore, as the Problem of Practice exhibits, "the power order of the group" between "high-status students and low-status students" (Cohen et al., 1999, pp. 83-84) negatively influences equity in participation and contribution. Cohen et al. (1999) suggested administering "multiple abilities treatment" (pp. 84-85) prior to collaboration by encouraging students to find and utilize different skills and abilities each member possesses. Teachers' deliberate interventions promote participation from passive participants and help students' group operations function properly. Therefore, exploring the issues and strategies is an essential process in this Professional Learning Community.

After obtaining the knowledge and skills for the challenges that teachers often face during Cooperative Learning practice, the Professional Learning Community examines assessment models, determines what elements are necessitated in the criteria, and creates clear assessment criteria that ensure students' academic and collaborative achievement. Finally, applying the gained knowledge, the group develops a Cooperative Learning structure that integrates each component of the five basic Cooperative Learning elements (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Once the framework is developed and implemented in the classroom, the Professional Learning Community monitors their teaching efficiency and students' progress in cognitive and collaborative aspects and forms follow-up action plans for a better structure through collective reflection, feedback, and discussion. Collaborative research-based learning allows teachers to collect the knowledge necessary to build a well-structured Cooperative Learning framework and expand it further through collaboration.

### **Collective Inquiry**

The attained knowledge of Cooperative Learning should be applied and practiced in the Professional Learning Community. In other words, the group should ensure that the five basic

Cooperative Learning elements exist in their own group interaction. For that reason, the group's collaborative skills should also be evaluated by utilizing the same assessment model designed by the Professional Learning Community. Operating their own groups with intention by applying the learned knowledge to practice allows the teachers to test the effectiveness of their learning outcomes and examine their collaborative efforts for the process and product.

The process can be conducted through in-person discussions, virtual meetings, and file-sharing. For example, while administering research-based studies, the group can share the resources and findings through shareable digital files, create a PowerPoint to compile the findings, and establish the collective knowledge into the ideas for framework development. In addition, research suggests that assigning students to each role for the product and process increases individual accountabilities and improves students' contribution to the groups (Cohen et al., 1999; Frykedal & Chiriatic, 2016). Therefore, the Professional Learning Community can divide the workload and assign each teacher to the areas where the resources need to be applied.

### **Action Orientation**

Once a Cooperative Learning framework is developed, the first important procedure in the classroom is providing students with the necessary knowledge and information required to participate in Cooperative Learning, such as instructional tasks, goals, systems, assessment criteria, and skill training. For example, Frykedal & Chiriatic (2016) emphasized that "knowledge (cognitive skills), product (content), and process (cooperative abilities)" (pp.152-153) should be included in the criteria and assessed "in a group and individual levels by both the outside of the group (teachers) and the inside of the group (peers)" (p. 158). The authors further asserted that the structure of the assessment—"what is assessed, how the assessment is implemented, who is assessing, and how the feedback is given" (Frykedal & Chiriatic, 2016, p. 149)—must be explicitly explained to students prior to collaboration. Providing a clear objective of their learning and clarifying the knowledge and skills they need to utilize and develop through group interaction significantly improves students' motivation, participation, and achievement (Gillies & Boyle, 2010).

After the instructional task is introduced and students are assigned to each role for product and process, teachers are kept informed of students' progress through file-sharing and review the effectiveness of their practice. The data tracking sheet of individuals' cognitive and collaborative development and groups' progress is updated and shared by each teacher and analyzed collectively. While maintaining ongoing electronic communication, the Professional Learning Community needs to set periodic face-to-face meetings to evaluate the strength and weaknesses of the plan and make decisions for changes if necessary. The collaborative data-oriented analysis helps teachers observe an individual's progress, detect issues, and identify students' struggles at the early stage, which allows teachers to implement intervention strategies, alleviate the problems, and analyze the impact of the changes.

### **Commitment to Continuous Improvement**

According to Frykedal & Chiriatic (2016), teachers' "feedback, feed-up (students' goals), and feed-forward (further improvement)" (p.154) on collaborative skills positively influence students' engagement in group interaction. Although students' constructive feedback skills need to be taught and monitored, the authors further stated that including self/peer assessment in collaborative skills helps reinforce a role-assigning strategy by prompting students' motivation, accountabilities, and participation (Frykedal & Chiriatic, 2016). Accordingly, teachers' proper intervention skills during the process become critical to successful Cooperative Learning.

With ongoing communication through technology and in-person, the Professional Learning Community ensures that the steps below are adequately administered and necessary

adjustments are made to improve their teaching practice and students' learning outcomes:

1. Students are provided with the necessary information and skill training for Cooperative Learning before collaboration (Frykedal & Chiriac, 2016).
2. Students are assigned to each role for the product and process (Frykedal & Chiriac, 2016).
3. The five essential elements of Cooperative Learning are functioning properly during operation (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).
4. Teachers' interventions are sufficient and adequate to promote participation from low-status students (Cohen et al., 1999).
5. Teachers' intervention with feedback, feed-up, and feed-forward is sufficient to help students determine the goals and further improvement (Frykedal & Chiriac, 2016).
6. Students are utilizing the skills they attained from skill training during group operation.

### **Results Orientation**

In order for teachers to continue to learn and improve their teaching practice, evaluating their own work is equally as important as monitoring students' progress. For instance, if any inequity in a group operation is identified in the collected data, the Professional Learning Community examines if their interventions are adequate to induce participation and what alternative methods can be employed for improvement. If students' summative test results do not exhibit any progress, the Professional Learning Community needs to prepare alternative strategies to strengthen students' academic gains. While ensuring that students utilize the attained strategies from skill training, teachers can examine the training methods and consider alternative models if necessary.

The result of students' summative and formative assessment helps teachers review the strengths and weaknesses of their practice and reinforce their Cooperative Learning structure, coaching skills, and strategies. While improving their teaching efficiency, the Professional Learning Community can examine if each teacher was "accountable for the product and process and contributed the skills and knowledge to build positive group interaction and achieve group's mutual success" (Frykedal & Chiriac, 2016, pp.155-157). The successful collaboration in the Professional Learning Community will be an outcome of students' summative and formative assessments.

### **Backwards Planning**

Backwards planning is "the most direct method for improving student outcomes" (Mishkind, 2014, p. 3). It allows teachers to design curriculum and lesson plans in line with specific students' learning needs. First, teachers identify the areas where students need to improve and define research questions. Secondly, through research-based analysis and evaluation, they design the assessment and establish the goals to help students meet the standards. Finally, they build the appropriate lesson plans that directly impact students' needs and improve their learning outcomes (Jensen, Bailey, Kummer, & Weber, 2017). In the Problem of Practice, the issues are identified as unequal accountability, dysfunctional group operation, and vague assessment criteria. By utilizing Backwards planning, teachers can examine the focused problems, conduct research-based analysis, set feasible goals for students, and create a clear assessment that complies with students' goals and effective interventions that facilitate students' learning process.

### **Phase 1**

According to Le, Janssen, & Wubbels' (2018) research interview, 18 out of 19 teachers reported that their students did not have effective collaborative skills during the Cooperative Learning process, and 18 out of 23 students and 13 out of 18 teachers noticed inequity in contribution in

group operation. Inequity in participation and contribution leads to dysfunctional group operation and makes it challenging for teachers to accurately assess students' abilities. In addition to the factor that the assessment criteria are not transparent to students, the students in the Problem of Practice are not assigned to the roles equally accountable for the product and process. Adding to the teacher's insufficient intervention skills, this structural disorder in the Problem of Practice significantly affects passive or underachieved "low-status participants" (Cohen et al., 1999, p. 84) with less access to learning opportunities and learning gains. Presenting Cooperative Learning implementation without any structured framework and not clarifying its purpose to students will result in gaps in students' learning (Gillies & Boyle, 2010; Le et al., 2018). In order to meet the expectations of the standards, students must be instructed in the goals they need to achieve and the skills they need to utilize and develop through collaboration.

### **Phase 2**

Johnson & Johnson (2008) defined teachers' roles in Cooperative Learning in four stages:

1. "Making pre-instructional decisions" (p.26).
2. "Explaining the instructional task and cooperative structure to students" (p. 29).
3. "Monitoring students' learning and intervening to provide assistance" (p.29).
4. "Assessing students' cognitive and collaborative achievement" (p. 29).

At the preparation stage, teachers develop a Cooperative Learning structure and assessment criteria that align with the purpose of Cooperative Learning and build the skills and strategies that facilitate students' learning process. Next, at the instructional stage, teachers clarify social skill objectives in group operation, assessment criteria, rules, and expectations to students to promote accountability, engagement, and participation in group interaction (Cohen et al., 1999; Johnson & Johnson, 2008). Once the goal and policies are clearly explained to students, Cooperative Learning skill training is conducted to prepare them with collaborative skills to utilize and develop through group operation. Finally, students are assigned to each role for the product and process. Once the collaboration starts, teachers begin monitoring and utilizing intervention strategies, ensuring each group functions properly and assisting students' learning process. Upon completion, "individuals' and groups' knowledge, product, and process are assessed" (Frykedal & Chiriak, 2016, pp. 152-153).

As indicated in the four stages of teachers' roles, providing the instructions prior to collaboration is a critical step to help students succeed in Cooperative Learning. The information and skills that students require to participate in team management significantly impact the rest of the students' learning process. Furthermore, without knowing what students should achieve through Cooperative Learning and how teachers can optimize the benefits of Cooperative Learning, teachers cannot create clear assessment criteria in line with the purpose of Cooperative Learning. Le et al. (2018) reported in their research that only five out of 19 teachers who had Cooperative Learning experiences were able to define the goals of Cooperative Learning, and 14 out of 19 teachers did not integrate the goals of Cooperative Learning into the course objectives. They further asserted that cognitive aspects of Cooperative Learning are more prioritized over collaborative aspects among teachers, which negatively affects students' perceptions of the collaborative process during the operation (Le et al., 2018). Therefore, the critical benchmark for students' progress is teachers' knowledge, skills, and strategies to understand the benefits of Cooperative Learning, elevate students' learning, and execute proper interventions to assist students' group operation.

### **Phase 3**

Through the Professional Learning Community, the teachers develop and implement a well-structured Cooperative Learning framework, navigate students' learning process effectively



with proper intervention strategies, and administer the accurate assessment in line with the purpose of students' learning. As a result, the effect of the Professional Learning Community must be indicated in students' academic and collaborative achievements. In other words, the results of students' summative and formative assessments will be the evidence-based outcomes of the Professional Learning Community.

A unique characteristic of this learning community is that teachers also work together to achieve a mutual goal by gaining first-hand Cooperative Learning experience, evaluating their group operation, and improving their practice through collaboration. The group needs effective leadership, decision-making, trust-building, communication, and problem-solving skills to determine the most effective way to operate as a team and bring the best outcomes to the product. This process allows teachers to practice effective Cooperative Learning while working as a team for students' development.

Additionally, some organizations and non-profits provide a school-wide intervention program that supports teachers' professional development. For instance, Center for the Collaborative Classroom (2020), the non-profit educational organization, offers professional learning for teachers such as virtual learning events and learning portals where teachers can access online and obtain external perspectives. PBLWorks (2020) also provides workshops, online resources, and rubrics that help teachers design assessment criteria.

#### ***Phase 4***

In order to enhance group interaction, various strategies have been developed and successfully implemented. For instance, using “the Getting to Know You form” (Oakley, Felder, Brent, & Elhadj, 2004, p.12) is a great way to break the ice before collaboration (see Appendix A). Having students sign “the Team Policies Statement” (Oakley et al., 2004, p.14) makes them aware of the rules and system of Cooperative Learning (see Appendix B). Moreover, assigning each student to the roles of “facilitator, recorder, material manager, and checker” (Cohen et al., 1999, pp.81-82) helps establish the team rules and individual accountability. Conducting “multiple abilities treatment” (Cohen et al., 1999, p. 84) and discussing how to handle “Hitchhikers and Couch Potatoes” (Oakley et al., 2004, p.15) at the instructional stage raise awareness of equity in collaboration and help reduce unequal contribution. Furthermore, administering a periodical survey enables students who struggle with group interaction to reach out for support from teachers (Oakley et al., 2004). Setting the deadline for revision and critique is also effective for exercising time management (Oakley et al., 2004).

Among various strategies for effective Cooperative Learning, one crucial intervention that needs to be examined is Cooperative Learning skill training for students (Le et al., 2018). For instance, Guided Reciprocal Peer Questioning takes students through a step-by-step process of creating thought-provoking questions to induce elaborative explanation, responding with effective elaboration to reinforce knowledge, and providing constructive feedback to help improve peers (King, 2008; King et al., 1998) (see Appendix C). This language usage training & peer tutoring training helps students build the skills and strategies to generate constructive, supportive communication that stimulates group interaction.

King et al. (1998) conducted research on 7th graders to examine the effect of the sequenced inquiry & explanation model of peer tutoring—ASK your partner to THINK—and demonstrated that students who received sequenced inquiry & explanation training (SIE) did better at the written test, verbal interaction, and new knowledge construction than those who participated in inquiry & explanation training (IE) and explanation training (E). In this training, with the guidance of prompts, students practice creating knowledge review questions, thinking questions, probing questions, hint questions, and feedback & encouragement to induce elaborate explanations from the partner. The result confirmed that the training promoted students' communication skills and high-order thinking and students were able to build new

knowledge by creating probing and hint questions and exchanging interaction of questioning and explaining. Demonstrating analytical inquiry, constructive feedback, and encouragement are essential skills students need to facilitate the group and assess peers. Providing language usage training and peer tutoring training will facilitate students' learning process during collaboration and enhance their participation in group interaction.

### ***Phase 5***

Monitoring equity in each group, the teachers begin deliberate interventions to promote participation by setting the stage for those who are less engaged and giving them positive but subtle evaluation in front of the group members (Cohen et al., 1999). Program for Complex Instruction (2020) was established by Elizabeth G. Cohen, Rachel Lotan, and Beth A. Scarloss, who developed Complex Instruction Theory and advocate equity in Cooperative Learning. Operated by the Stanford University School of Education, it provides the program Multiple Abilities Curricula and offers instructional strategies, teacher training, and valuable research-based resources to promote equal access to learning for all students. When problems are identified during the process, these resources will also help the Professional Learning Community find a strategy and solution.

In addition, as Frykedal & Chiriac (2018) addressed, peer/self-assessment induces individual accountabilities, motivation, and participation while providing teachers with external observations that might have been neglected. In order to keep track of those who require deliberate interventions, peer assessment can be administered in the beginning, mid, and final stages of the implementation (Oakley et al., 2004). In this way, teachers' feedback, feed-up, and feed-forward on each student's collaborative skills will be more effectively support feedback from peers and improve their collaborative skills throughout the process (Frykedal & Chiriac, 2016). Additionally, teachers need to remind students to utilize the strategies gained from language usage training and peer tutoring training and guide them to generate constructive, supportive communication during the operation (King et al., 1998; King, 2008).

### ***Phase 6***

The Professional Learning Community collects qualitative and quantitative data through observations, term-tests, peer/self-assessment, and the developed rubric. Quantitative data are often more objective than qualitative data in keeping track of progress. They are also more manageable to sort and organize digitally. Thus, a single-point rubric can be used for an evaluation and peer/self-assessment. Feedback comments in the rubrics and qualitative data can be coded to share digitally and analyzed within the Professional Learning Community. A self/peer assessment rubric is easily downloaded online; however, teachers must ensure that accountability and contribution for the product and process are included in the rubric and that it aligns with the goals clarified to students at the instructional stage (Frykedal & Chiriac, 2016). Periodic peer/self-assessment and teachers' feedback, feed-up, and feed-forward allow teachers to compare students' progress on collaborative aspects and facilitate analysis among the Professional Learning Community.

The collected data will be recorded and uploaded through the data tracking sheets by each teacher and reviewed by all teachers in the Professional Learning Community. In-person meetings will be held monthly to analyze the results, share the concerns, solve the issues, and make changes if necessary. While regular feedback can be exchanged through web-based communication among the teachers in the Professional Learning Community, face-to-face meetings should be conducted to discuss the areas that need some adjustment. Once the teachers agree upon solutions, new strategies and changes are implemented in the practice. Observing each other's practice and exchanging objective feedback, each teacher determines

the next step to take in the classroom.

### **Phase 7**

In order to receive external perspectives and objective evaluations on their practices, the school staff and educators who are not involved in the program can observe the practice and analyze the evidence-based results shared among the Professional Learning Community. Administering post surveys or focus groups to students will also contribute great resources for the Professional Learning Community to reflect on the outcome of the program and recognize the changes required for further development. The past evidence-based data are valuable sources for maintaining the expected outcomes, seeking solutions when needed, and comparing the results with previous years. They are also confirming evidence to prove the program's strengths, weaknesses, and implications to others. Even after the Problem of Practice is solved and growth is achieved, there will be other teachers and students who need to be trained and taught. Eventually, the teachers in the Professional Learning Community can become trainers to pass on the knowledge, skills, and experiences to new teachers and continue to improve the program.

When evaluating the program, the Professional Learning Community should keep in mind that the program's success is determined by students' success in both academic and collaborative aspects. Therefore, through the data from term-tests in summative assessment, teachers need to ensure that students' teamwork efforts comply with their academic knowledge gains. In other words, students must exhibit improvement in their test scores and gain academic knowledge by "reaping the benefits from interacting with others" (Gillies & Boyle, 2010, p.933). If the data indicate students' cognitive underachievement, new strategies and alternative summative assessment methods must be considered. If a desirable overall outcome is not achieved and analysis from the past data does not help with solutions, hiring a professional trainer from organizations and communities to provide school-wide professional development on Cooperative Learning is also an alternative resolution. In the end, teachers' development leads to successful Cooperative Learning practice in the classroom.

### **Conclusion**

Ferguson's (2011) study illustrated that professional development changed teachers' perspectives toward Cooperative Learning practice and significantly influenced students' learning gains. The author's research observed that the early career teachers "developed an understanding of teachers' roles in Cooperative Learning," "realized the importance of interdependence in practice," and began to "relate Cooperative Learning as a strategy to increase both student learning outcomes and social development" (p.123). While the effectiveness of Cooperative Learning has been extensively researched, teachers' understanding of Cooperative Learning is not adequately supported, and professional development on Cooperative Learning is not sufficiently provided for teachers. Professional development guides teachers to develop an understanding of their roles in Cooperative Learning, implement effective practice, and direct students to acquire the maximum benefits of Cooperative Learning. In order to support students' academic and collaborative achievement through group operation, providing professional development is a crucial component of Cooperative Learning practice.

### **Recommendations**

A well-structured framework and strategic implementation are the keys to making Cooperative Learning effective. Teachers' understanding of the goals and purpose of Cooperative Learning and the strategies with intention significantly improve students' learning process and gains. There are many Cooperative Learning communities for teachers to enhance their knowledge, skills, and practice. For instance, attending the conferences held by organizations such as the

International Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education (IASCE) (2020) is an alternative way to gain access to informational resources, support, and professional development communities. However, it is strongly recommended that schools provide support for teachers to expand their knowledge and improve their teaching efficiency. If professional development is conducted as a school-wide approach, teachers will have easier access to those learning opportunities. Providing teachers with better education, resources, and support will directly lead to students' learning gains.

### **Future Research**

It is challenging for teachers to ensure that students' collaborative skills have a direct effect on students' academic performance. If academic achievement is not significant in the collected data, a Professional Learning Community needs different intervention strategies to improve students' academic gains or skill training for a specific subject to reinforce their academic knowledge. For instance, Reciprocal Teaching of Reading (RTR) and Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) are the methods to increase literacy development through collaboration, and these activities can be easily integrated into the classroom and directly influence students' academic improvement (Kamdideh, 2019). Most of the professional development is targeted to the success of general Cooperative Learning implementation. However, in order to generate students' significant improvement in the cognitive aspect through group interaction, teachers will need to examine activities and skill training focused on a specific subject area they teach. Professional development on Cooperative Learning designed to improve specific subjects will allow teachers to discover direct approaches to meet the students' academic needs and further reinforce their teaching efficiency.

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## Appendix A

### GETTING TO KNOW YOU

(If you feel uncomfortable answering any of these questions, you may leave that area blank. However, please complete as much as possible.)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

What you would like to be called: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Academic Major: \_\_\_\_\_

Year of Study (e.g. sophomore, junior, senior, returning for 2nd degree) \_\_\_\_\_

If returning for 2nd degree, what was first degree in? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a job aside from being a student? If so, where do you work and what do you do?

\_\_\_\_\_

Why do you want to be a \_\_\_\_\_ (insert profession)? or, Why did you decide to major in, or, Why are you taking this course?

\_\_\_\_\_

What is something about you that is probably not true of other students in the class (for example, an unusual experience, hobby, skill, or interest)

\_\_\_\_\_

Favorite movie: \_\_\_\_\_

Favorite music or book: \_\_\_\_\_

Favorite hobby or sports activity: \_\_\_\_\_

What is the most beautiful sight you have ever seen? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### TEAM POLICIES

Your team will have a number of responsibilities as it completes problem and project assignments.

- Designate a coordinator, recorder, and checker for each assignment. Add a monitor for 4-person teams. Rotate these roles for every assignment.
- Agree on a common meeting time and what each member should have done before the meeting (readings, taking the first cut at some or all of the assigned work, etc.)
- Do the required individual preparation.
- Coordinator checks with other team members before the meeting to remind them of when and where they will meet and what they are supposed to do.
- Meet and work. **Coordinator** keeps everyone on task and makes sure everyone is involved, **recorder** prepares the final solution to be turned in, **monitor** checks to make sure everyone understands both the solution and the strategy used to get it, and **checker** double-checks it before it is handed in. Agree on next meeting time and roles for next assignment. For teams of three, the same person should cover the monitor and checker roles.
- Checker turns in the assignment, with the names on it of every team member who participated actively in completing it. If the checker anticipates a problem getting to class on time on the due date of the assignment, it is his/her responsibility to make sure someone turns it in.
- Review returned assignments. Make sure everyone understands why points were lost and how to correct errors.
- Consult with your instructor if a conflict arises that can't be worked through by the team.
- Dealing with non-cooperative team members. If a team member refuses to cooperate on an assignment, his/ her name should not be included on the completed work. If the problem persists, the team should meet with the instructor so that the problem can be resolved, if possible. If the problem still continues, the cooperating team members may notify the uncooperative member in writing that he/she is in danger of being fired, sending a copy of the memo to the instructor. If there is no subsequent improvement, they should notify the individual in writing (copy to the instructor) that he/she is no longer with the team. The fired student should meet with his/her instructor to discuss options. Similarly, students who are consistently doing all the work for their team may issue a warning memo that they will quit unless they start getting cooperation, and a second memo quitting the team if the cooperation is not forthcoming. Students who get fired or quit must either find another team willing to add them as a member or get zeroes for the remaining assignments. As you will find out, group work isn't always easy—team members sometimes cannot prepare for or attend group sessions because of other responsibilities, and conflicts often result from differing skill levels and work ethics. When teams work and communicate well, however, the benefits more than compensate for the difficulties. One way to improve the chances that a team will work well is to agree beforehand on what everyone on the team expects from everyone else. Reaching this understanding is the goal of the assignment on the Team Expectations Agreement handout.

### TEAM EXPECTATIONS AGREEMENT

On a single sheet of paper, put your names and list the rules and expectations you agree as a team to adopt. You can deal with any or all aspects of the responsibilities outlined above—preparation for and attendance at group meetings, making sure everyone understands all the solutions, communicating frankly but with respect when conflicts arise, etc. Each team member should sign the sheet, indicating acceptance of these expectations and intention to fulfill them. Turn one copy into the professor, and keep a remaining copy or copies for yourselves.

These expectations are for your use and benefit—they won't be graded or commented on unless you specifically ask for comments. Note, however, that if you make the list fairly thorough without being unrealistic you'll be giving yourselves the best chance. For example, "We will each solve every problem in every assignment completely before we get together" or "We will get 100 on every assignment" or "We will never miss a meeting" are probably unrealistic, but "We will try to set up the problems individually before meeting" and "We will make sure that anyone who misses a meeting for good cause gets caught up on the work" are realistic.

*\*Adapted from R. M. Felder & R. Brent, Effective Teaching, North Carolina State University, 2000.*



**Appendix C**

<p><b>Comprehension Review Questions</b></p>	<p>What does ... mean?                  What caused ...?                  Describe ... in your own words. Summarize ... in your own words</p> <p>e.g., How does increase in carbon dioxide affect the earth's atmosphere?                  What does "greenhouse effect" mean?</p>
<p><b>Thought-Provoking Questions</b></p>	<p>Explain why...                  Explain how...                  What is the significance of ...?                  What is the difference between A and B?                  How are ... and ... similar?                  What do you think would happen if ..?                  Compare ... and ... with regard to ...                  What do you think causes ...? Why?                  How might ... affect ... ?                  What are the strengths and weaknesses of?                  Which ... do you think is best and why?                  Do you agree or disagree with this statement?                  What evidence is there to support your answer?</p> <p>e.g., How are the terms "greenhouse effect" and "global warming" similar and different?                  What do you think would happen to the people in our community if the temperature of the atmosphere increased a great deal?</p>

*\* Sample comprehension and thought-provoking question starters for use in Guided Reciprocal Peer Questioning*

**The TEL WHY Procedure in Guided Reciprocal Peer Questioning**

<b>T</b>	Tell what you know to your group.
<b>E</b>	Explain the why and the how about something. Don't just tell what it is or describe it or summarize it
<b>L</b>	Link. Connect what you are telling about something your partner already knows about so they will be sure to understand. Connect two things or ideas or link together a procedure and an idea.
<b>W</b>	Tell Why.
<b>H</b>	Tell How.
<b>Y</b>	Use Your own words.

*\*TEL WHY Explanation Guide adapted from King(2008)*