

Foreword

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In December, 2020, the JALT Yokohama (YoJALT) chapter hosted their annual winter My Share event, which invited chapter and other local JALT members to share practical and innovative classroom activities and ideas. As always, the participants in this My Share did not disappoint. What follows is a collection of seven papers fleshing out the details of many, but not all, presenters' talks that day. We hope you enjoy this issue as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

Jason Byrne introduces a way to reduce the technology burden on students engaged in emergency remote learning which can be applied to online learning post-pandemic. Ma. Wilma Capati shares an idea for using the “stay woke” social media phenomenon to teach pronoun usage that is inclusive and nonbinary. Margalit Faden describes an intercultural communication activity which can help students preparing to study abroad simulate the conflicts they may encounter with roommates. Yusuke Okuyama and Lucinda Okuyama share the research findings of a project investigating students' foreign language anxiety and present suggestions for how it can be addressed pedagogically in curricula. Jason Pipe highlights the need to include suprasegmental pronunciation training in EFL classrooms, particularly regarding the teaching of stress. Jonathan Shepard explains the findings of a study on highly motivated language learners and provides guidance for teachers looking to support and encourage their students. Finally, this issue closes with Brooks Slaybaugh sharing thoughts on the cross-cultural issues that may impact discussion activities and how to adapt certain models to fit the Japanese context and students.

As editors of this special issue, we would like to take a moment to thank all the authors, who not only submitted papers, but reviewed and edited those of their colleagues in the publication process. The YoJALT officers also helped with editing and pulling this issue together. We simply could not have achieved this success without all of you. May readers find something promising and of use within the pages of this special issue of *Accents Asia*. Thanks for taking the time to read.

For those readers interested in participating in future JALT Yokohama events, please visit <http://yojalt.org>.

Sincerely,

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Co-Editors, *Yokohama JALT My Share 2020 Special Issue*

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Lowering Student Technological Load: Blended On-Demand CALL with Instructional Video

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ABSTRACT

This article describes action research focused on a practical, simple solution for enforced remote learning. The outlined solution utilises a blended learning approach, instructional video, data compression and a learning management system. An emphasis was placed on a learner-centred approach with low technological load, good instructional support and minimal data usage.

INTRODUCTION

How can a teacher provide learning, using available technologies, to students who are unprepared for computer assisted language learning (CALL) and who largely find themselves in enforced self-study isolation? This applied action research question, has been born out of necessity, created by the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on education. One potential answer, as shall be discussed, is a blended learning book-based teaching strategy employing scaffolded video instructions further supported by learner management systems for the delivery and submission of work. However, compressed instructional video is the key element and the focus of this paper.

METHODS

Participants, Setting & IT Environment

The research was focused on 37 second year English Literature majors at a mid-ranked university in the greater Tokyo area of Japan. The course was compulsory, so students needed to find a way to complete the work. It was confirmed, through Google Forms, that all 37 students had a smartphone with camera and microphone. 94.6% of students had access to a personal computer and a further 78.4% also had access to a tablet computer. In addition, the quality of access to a wi-fi network is a critical factor in deploying online study. 51.4% of the students stated that they had good wi-fi and typically watched Youtube and/or Netflix streamed videos on a regular basis. It seemed likely that such students were in a good online environment. A further 45.9% believed that their wi-fi was reasonable and hoped it would be good enough for online study, but there was a sense of shifting into the unknown. One student did not have access to home wi-fi or a personal computer, and would need to rely on free wi-fi networks such as the on campus wi-fi.

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Clearly, there was evidence that the majority of students were equipped to undertake online studies, but there was no certainty of success, and at least one student would be in great difficulty. Equally, the students found themselves in this position, through no fault of their own, and they were required to pass the class in order to graduate.

Blended Learning Solution

An on-demand blended learning solution was created to meet the needs of the students. This can be broken down into four parts; textbook, scaffolded video, time approach, and learner management system. While each part is listed below to provide context, the emphasis is on the video solution.

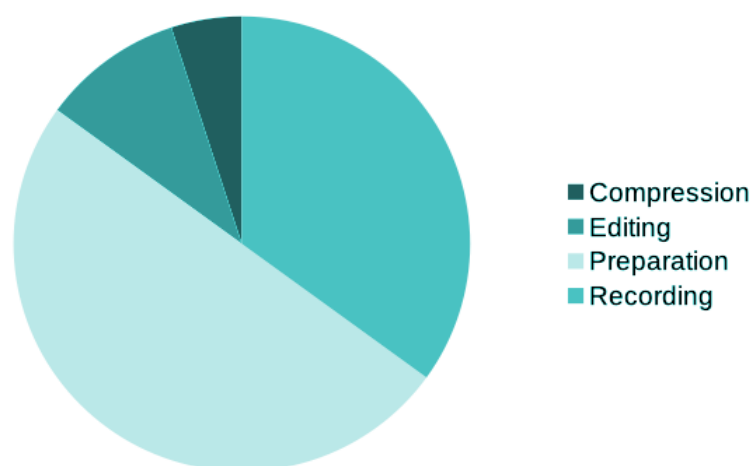
Textbook

The students were requested to acquire a textbook, meaning at the very least the students would be able to complete the core work of the course. The textbook would be complemented by instructional videos. The videos would be relatively short and compressed in order to minimise data usage.

The Video Solution

The solution is based on the idea of scaffolded video (Byrne, 2010) which builds on Vygotsky's (1978; 1986) concept of the zone of proximal development. Video has previously proven highly effective, engaging, and relatively simple to implement (Gruba, 2006; Kelsen, 2009). However, it does require some video creation skills that will be outlined here. In order to create good quality videos, the materials maker will need to follow four steps: prepare, record, edit and compress. The time required for each step is outlined in Figure 1. You should expect to spend most of your time preparing, a reasonable amount of time recording, and very little time editing and compressing.

FIGURE 1



Video Preparation Time.

Preparation.

Ultimately time spent on preparation will determine the quality of the video. Preparation will involve the instructional material, setting up the audio environment and if required the background and lighting of the speaker's environment. The simplest method of creating instructional video materials, is to record a live powerpoint. There are many free software options that allow for desktop capture and the recording of whatever is on the desktop of a computer. For example, Quicktime and OBS Studio. In fact, OBS Studio allows for the recording of a PowerPoint on the desktop while simultaneously recording audio and webcam footage of the speaker. If a teacher wishes to proceed with this approach, careful consideration must be taken with webcam background imagery and audio clarity. The background can be enhanced by using a simple black cloth backdrop or a plain white wall. Lighting can be difficult. For example, a light above the speaker's head can create a halo effect. Natural light, even from a north facing window, can be utilised by placing the computer and webcam between the window and speaker. In contrast, for a simpler solution, Quicktime will only show the PowerPoint while simultaneously recording the audio, consequently it is easier to set up, as there is no need to concern ourselves with lighting or backdrops. The audio preparation is vital. If the quality of the initial audio is poor, then it is very difficult to truly improve it. It makes sense to start with good quality recordings. If you have an Apple device, then it is very likely you will be ready to record high quality audio. However, if you are using a Windows-based machine, then you may find results vary greatly. If your onboard mic is not providing good quality audio, then you may need to invest in a Lavalier microphone (\$30 USD) that can be clipped onto your clothing. It is quite common for laptop mics to pick up the noise from the internal fan and other sources. This rapidly deteriorates the quality of the finished audio product. A Lavalier mic will allow you to move away from the computer noise source and thereby minimise the noise. Indeed, all noise sources must be stopped. For example, air conditioning, refrigerators, and street noise.

Recording.

Once prepared, the recording should go smoothly. It should be a simple matter of pressing record, knowing what you intend to say, and understanding where the video file will be output.

Editing.

There are various video editors. For example, iMovie is shipped with Apple devices. You will need to use editor software to tidy up your video. Most likely you will need to cut the beginning and the end off of your raw video. You may also need to cut out any mistakes you have made in the middle of shooting. If you make a mistake while shooting, leave a clear cut point, for example shouting "Mistake" or "Cut here" and pause for a few seconds before repeating and proceeding onwards. It will be much easier and cleaner to edit such a mistake out.

Compression.

Often teachers underestimate the value of compression, probably because they cannot see the impact it has on the students. However, if the student has poor access to wi-fi then this is a vital step. Videos can typically be compressed to ten percent of the original size. Handbrake is a very good compression software tool that works on both Windows and Apple devices.

Please see Table 1 for details of useful software which will help create high quality data efficient videos. The quality of the complete video can be decided during the initial preparation or later during the compression phase. If you start with a large high quality video, it is always possible to downsize. It is almost impossible to upsize. As a rule of thumb, the following two sizes will probably provide the best results. If your students are using laptop computers and have reasonable wi-fi then 1280×720 pixels might be a good choice. As of 2021, this typically will fill a student

laptop screen. However, if the student is operating in a poor wi-fi environment, then 480×360 pixels will significantly decrease the data usage requirements. In this case, it will use a quarter of a typical laptop's screen and may look blurred in fullscreen mode. This is the trade off: quality versus data saving. It would be advisable to always start by making the larger file and then also making a smaller secondary version as required.

TABLE 1
Useful Software.

Application	Usage	Information
Handbrake	Compression	www.handbrake.fr
iMovie	Editing	www.apple.com/imovie
OBS Studio	Recording	www.obsproject.com
Quicktime	Recording	Pre-loaded on Macs
Microsoft Office	Materials Development	www.office.com
Libre Office	Materials Development	www.libreoffice.org

Time Approach

An on-demand time approach was selected in this class, as this tends to mean less technical problems, less time induced stress, and more learning opportunity. The students were given one week in which to complete the assigned work at their own pace. There were two concrete reasons for this decision. Firstly, the very practical issue of relying on real-time video. If lessons were live streamed it would be very likely that one or two students each week would have problems with accessing the live feed. Sometimes the teacher may also face unexpected technical problems impacting all students and creating time pressure for the increasingly stressed teacher. Secondly, there is evidence that different individuals approach on-demand study in very different ways. It was quite likely that many Japanese students would prefer to work through the night. Byrne (2019) demonstrated that English self-study occurred 24/7, this was especially true in East Asia and the Middle East. If students in lockdown chose a nocturnal lifestyle, then on-demand would provide more scope for meeting their individual needs.

Learner Management Systems

A school delivery and submission system is very helpful for online study. In Japan, the Manaba system is widely used, and recently more schools are offering Google Classroom. The researcher chose to use a system provided by the school, in this case Google Classroom. It was chosen for use, due to previous experience and confidence that it is very intuitive for students (Byrne & Furuyabu, 2019). However, the important point is to use a system provided by the school, thereby lowering the student technological load. If several teachers were to introduce the system of their choice, then the students would spend many hours learning each system. This is inefficient for the learner and effectively a teacher-centred approach, not necessarily meeting the students' needs.

FINDINGS

There were three key takeaways confirmed by this qualitative research.

Technological Load

It is important that approaches to this problem are mindful of the student situation. Firstly, students have many classes with many different teachers. If each teacher required the students to use new and different technologies, then the technological load on the students would become too high. For this reason, it was decided to keep things as simple as possible. A blended learning approach of book and video instruction provided little additional technological load to the student circumstance. The chosen content delivery submission system was a school provided system which at least minimised and controlled student technological load. Overall, the approach generated very few requests for technical help and work was submitted as asked. This suggests that the approach did not overload the students, and it was within their technical capabilities.

Video Compression

The compression of the video was probably the most important aspect of the solution. A focus on using as little data as possible, was vital. For example, typical mobile data plans in 2020 Japan were between three and seven gigabytes per month. An uncompressed 10-minute video can easily consume 100 MBs of data. Consequently at this rate, a student would be unable to access and complete all classwork on a mobile plan, as the students would require several gigabytes per week, just for school work. While the major mobile service providers did provide improved plans to the under 25s, mobile could not have been relied upon to fully service the need of uncompressed video. If students did not have access to home wi-fi, then they would have been forced to attend campus or other social gathering areas. Consequently, video compression and teacher data rationing were imperative for student wellbeing and success in a lockdown environment. Once again, the lack of requests for technical help, suggests that compression may have helped avert unnecessary problems.

Scaffolding

Pre-recorded video in contrast to real-time Zoom lectures can be replayed at the viewer's discretion providing repeatable scaffolded learning support. Replayability was identified by students as a key strength of the blended learning with video instruction approach. The scaffolding decreased the student stress load, supporting student ability to learn, and complete communicative tasks.

CONCLUSION

The recent lockdown has presented enormous challenges for both students and teachers. The mantra "Simple is best" is a suggested starting point beneficial to all parties. As has been suggested, teachers must be mindful of learner needs, while struggling with their own technological demons. A learner-centred solution focused on low technological load, that does not use too many new technologies, good instructional support with video instructions, and minimal data usage achieved via compression, is likely to lead to positive outcomes.

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They and Them: Creating Awareness towards Using Pronouns Through the Stay Woke Phenomenon on Social Media

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become widespread around the globe. This has become an opportunity for gender and racial minorities to raise their concerns for equality and identity. This paper will focus on how the “stay woke” phenomenon on social media has affected the use of language not only on social media but also in official sites and real-life situations. The examples given in this paper are the use of singular they, neopronouns, and gender-neutral terminologies such as “Mx.”. Recognizing the changes in the language due to the social issues being raised online, this paper explains how the “stay woke” phenomenon on social media can be used to learn to use the language in context. First, the definition of the term “woke”, singular “they”, and nonbinary “Mx.”, will be introduced. The next section will provide a short discussion on gender issues especially in the Japanese context and online/offline global context. Succeeding sections will provide resources and activities using gender-neutral language that will be beneficial to both educators and students. The conclusion will focus on the importance of creating awareness that will be applicable inside and outside the classroom.

INTRODUCTION

When it comes to self-introduction, the simplest information that is expected is name, age, hometown, and other interesting facts about oneself. However, the trends on social media have influenced how the English language is used. For instance, the “stay woke” phenomenon on social media which pertains to the expectation to be socially and politically aware of issues in the world today has given opportunities for racial and gender minorities to raise their concerns for equality (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). When it comes to the validation of all gender identities, the way pronouns are used outside the gender binary has been prevalent on various social media platforms. The pronoun, “they” was considered as the word of the year by Merriam-Webster Dictionary in 2019. “They”, in this case, is used as a singular pronoun that refers to people outside the gender binary (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The word “Mx.” was also recognized by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.) to address nonbinary people instead of “Mr.” or “Ms.”. These are examples of the effects of destigmatizing gender on social media. As a result, pronouns have been normalized to be included on social media as part of the introduction, or even being added on profiles of internet users (Harmon, 2019). Considering the “stay woke” phenomenon on social media, the next sections will focus on how to create awareness with the change in the use of the English language particularly on gender identities.

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GENDER NEUTRALITY IN JAPAN AND GLOBAL CONTEXT

Given how gender and sexuality are perceived in this country, how these concepts are being taught should be taken into consideration, especially that the English language is starting to adapt to the needs of the LGBT community through the use of pronouns. While considering these current social media trends on pronouns, the way these issues are scaffolded in the classroom should be sensitive to the students' knowledge towards gender and sexuality. Teaching gender-neutral words and pronouns could be perceived as superficial if teachers are not familiar with the issues of gender and sexuality in a specific country. Being able to inform oneself on these issues in society will be a vital support in proving the importance of gender-sensitive words in the classroom.

Compared to other Asian countries, Japan is showing slower progression in gender awareness. One survey presented in *The Japan Times* (2019) showed that 1 in 10 Japanese people identify themselves as part of the LGBT community. 2.5% of the LGBT community have identified themselves as nonbinary, or those who do not identify as either masculine or feminine, and 1.2% still questions their gender identity. Furthermore, 12% of workplaces have further acquired knowledge of the LGBT community which is a 4% raise compared to 2016. Despite these facts, 65% have not come out due to the fear of possible stereotypes and negative effects in their work and personal lives. Given these valuable pieces of information in the Japanese context, educators should be able to carefully teach gender and sexuality through the language used in class.

One issue is the possibility of sex bias due to the use of binary pronouns, he or she. Prior to the recognition of "they" as a gender-neutral pronoun, the pronoun "he" was often used as a gender-neutral pronoun which has been frequent in job descriptions when applying for jobs and other situations (Shulz, 1975; Moulton et. al, 1978). Titles such as *businessman* or *fireman* may imply that jobs, similar to how pronouns were used before, are gendered.

Another possible issue that could be encountered in the classroom is the misuse of pronouns. Robertson (2018) discussed the issue of deadnaming and misgendering that often occur on social media. Deadnaming pertains to the act of referring to a transgender person by their non-affirmed name or the name that they used prior coming out as a transgender. For example, the recent coming out of Elliot Page, who then was known as the actress Ellen Page, was received with mixed reactions (Steinmetz, 2021). However, social media users mostly accepted this coming out announcement positively. Articles that called Elliot by their previous name were criticized by SNS users.

Misuse of pronouns and deadnaming, however, could also be a possibility of a person's prior knowledge and first language interfering with the conversation in English. In particular, ESL/EFL learners may misuse pronouns due to how language or situation has been presented, and to their culture and background on how genders are perceived (Fleshner, 1993). Another possibility to consider is how a learner's language may be gender-neutral. For example, the Filipino language is considered gender-neutral due to the pronoun *siya* which may refer to any person regardless of gender (Ching, 2020). Hence, asking "What are your pronouns?", which has been normalized on social media, can also be a question that can be used in ordinary or daily conversations in English. In the next sections, the current trends on introduction along with pronouns on social media will be discussed through the lens of an educator and how this will help students recognize the appropriate gender-neutral pronouns or titles to be used.

GENDER NEUTRAL TITLES AND PRONOUNS IN EFL LEARNING

Most traditional textbooks do not mention the singular they and them. Moreover, the gender-neutral term, “Mx.” has also been recognized recently. Some educators have started to add to address forms “Ms.”, and “Mr.”, with “Mx.” being the third option when teaching proper addresses to people (Kessler, 2019). As websites continue to adapt to the change of the English language as well as recognize all identities, the list of learning resources will be very important not only for EFL students but also for educators.

Resources for Educators

“My Pronouns” Website

MyPronouns.org (Appendix A) was developed by Shige Sakurai in 2017. Referred to as they/them, Shige Sakurai was the first transgender person to officially receive a nonbinary driver's license in the US. They are also the founder of International Pronouns Day. This website was created to inform readers on how to use personal pronouns more inclusively. Through the information given, they hope to empower other people who identify outside the gender binary.

“Gender Spectrum” Website

Another website that provides information on the use of personal pronouns is GenderSpectrum.org (Appendix A) which can be accessed by anyone including educators, students, family, mental health professionals, and spiritual leaders. This enables readers to learn not only how to use personal pronouns educationally but also how to address a person while considering their mental health, status, and beliefs. There are people who experience gender dysphoria or distress on their assigned sex versus gender identities, doubts, mental illnesses, and personal issues due to the current gender binary society: this website addresses these concerns while informing the proper address in respect to different identities.

Resources for Students

Two interactive websites can help students not only to become aware of personal pronouns but also to improve their grammatical abilities. These are PracticeWithPronouns.com and Minus18 (Appendix B). The way pronouns and *neopronouns* are used in a grammatically coherent manner will be learned through the interactive games and activities on these websites. Neopronouns have emerged due to the influence of social media and pop culture (Feraday, 2014). These, such as “zir” or “hir”, are used by nonbinary people along with the singular “they” when introducing themselves. Along with the social awareness that is brought by the activities, these activities ensure that students will learn how the pronouns are used whether as subjective, objective, reflexive, or possessive as shown in the table below:

TABLE 1.
Example Pronouns and sentences shown in Practice with Pronouns and Minus18

SUBJECTIVE	OBJECTIVE	POSSESSIVE	REFLEXIVE	EXAMPLE
SHE	HER	HERS	HERSELF	She is speaking. I listen to her.

				The backpack is hers.
HE	HIM	HIS	HIMSELF	He is speaking. I listen to him. The backpack is his.
THEY	THEM	THEIRS	THEMSELF THEMSELVES	They are speaking. I listened to them. The backpack is theirs.
ZE	HIR/ZIR	HIRS/ZIRS	HIRSELF ZIRSELF	Ze is speaking. I listened to zir. The backpack is zirs.

Activities in the Classroom

Vocabulary for Gender Neutrality.

Along with gender-neutral pronouns, gender-neutral titles and terms could be taught to students. This will help the students to avoid having assumptions about people's gender identities. Also, this will encourage gender equality and may avoid possible stereotypes and discrimination relating to certain jobs or titles. Some examples are shown in Table 2:

TABLE 2.
Gendered titles and Gender-neutral titles

Gendered title	Gender-neutral title
businessman/businesswoman	businessperson
chairman/chairwoman	chairperson
steward/stewardess	flight attendant
fireman/firewoman	firefighter
salesman/saleswoman	salesperson
father/mother	parent
husband/wife boyfriend/girlfriend	partner lover
son/daughter	child

Role-play Activities

Woodward (2020) specifies that the diversity of experiences of individuals is more apparent nowadays compared to how language historically described them. Identities are more specifically shown than before. Due to the changing times and easier access to information, "What are your pronouns?" has become a part of self-introduction.

This question clarifies the pronoun that is preferred by the people in the conversation. For example, role-play can be done in the classroom by simply giving the students roles they can do (Figure 1). However, gender-neutral occupations and preferred pronouns can also be put to add the question "What are your pronouns"?

FIGURE 1.

Character cards that can be used in the roleplay:

Situation: You are at a party. Make friends and introduce yourself! Make sure to ask questions about them, too!	
Name: Aiko Pronouns: She/Her Age: 24 Occupation: businessperson Hometown: Tokyo	Name: Erika Pronouns: They/Them Age: 21 Occupation: university student Hometown: Osaka
Name: Natsuki Pronouns: He/They Age: 30 Occupation: police officer Hometown: Hiroshima	Name: Yuto Pronouns: She/They Age: 26 Occupation: journalist Hometown: Hokkaido

Situational email writing

The use of gender-neutral pronouns and titles could be practiced through situational email writing. One example is shown in the figure below (Figure 2). In the Japanese context, some Japanese names may be considered gender-neutral, especially when written in English alphabets. Otaka (2016) states that even though Japanese names evolved to have gender classifiers through the last syllables of first names, it is still a challenge to classify female names not only in their phonology but also in the kanji characters used. Good examples given by Otaka (2016) are *Hikaru* and *Kaoru*. Although these names have always traditionally been used to identify male names, these names are also used by females in modern Japan.

With that being said, the use of the gender-neutral title, "Mx.", will be applied in a realistic situation. This enables not only improvement in grammar, but also critical thinking. The teacher may provide hints of the person's preferred pronouns or gender identity. In the figure below, there is no hint provided so the student may use the gender-neutral title instead.

FIGURE 2.
Situational e-mail writing with the gender-neutral title "Mx."

CONCLUSION

Social media has become a powerful tool for sharing and getting information. With the “stay woke” phenomenon on social media, the importance of gender identities has been emphasized through changes in the use of the English language. Personal pronouns matter because awareness of which pronouns to use avoids assumptions, misgendering, and possible deadnaming. These current issues on the internet may become a topic for discussion between students and educators. The importance centers on how students will communicate competently; this will also help students create politically correct sentences when talking to English speakers who are in the LGBT community. However, language awareness and the persons’ decision to come out are mutually exclusive. Being informed of the current trends in addressing social issues online and offline will enable students to use the language without stereotypes while ensuring that all identities are respected. Through the resources and example activities given in this paper, students and educators will be able to become aware of how the language is adapting to the needs of those who call for equality in society.

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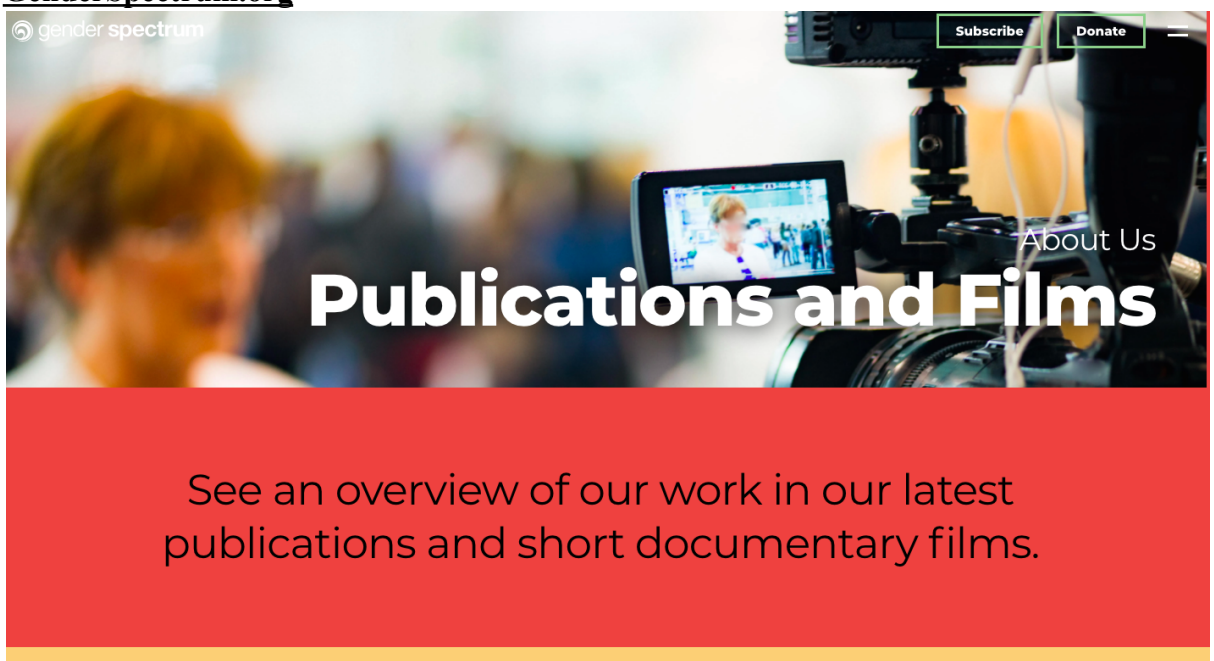
APPENDIX A - Websites for Educators

- **MyPronouns.org**



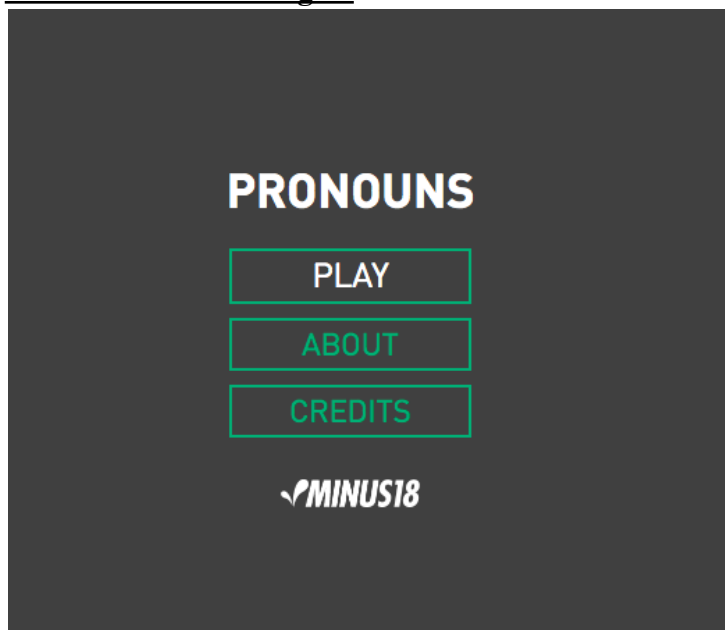
WHAT ARE PERSONAL PRONOUNS AND WHY DO THEY MATTER?
HOW DO I USE PERSONAL PRONOUNS?
WHAT IF SOMEONE MAKES A MISTAKE AND MISPRONOUNS SOMEONE ELSE?
HOW DO I SHARE MY PERSONAL PRONOUNS?
HOW DO I ASK SOMEONE THEIR PERSONAL PRONOUNS?
HOW DO I USE GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE?
WHAT ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND LINKS CAN HELP ME?

- **GenderSpectrum.org**



APPENDIX B - Websites for Students

- Pronouns.minus18.org.au



- Practicewithpronouns.com

Instructions

1. Click one of the sets of commonly used pronouns OR fill in your own.
2. Press 'Start Practicing' to practice using the pronouns you chose.

Pronoun Selection

Commonly Used

ze/zir

ze/hir

ey/em

ve/ver

ne/nem

xe/xem

they/them

she/her

he/him

Selected Pronouns

subject pronoun

e.g. "they"

object pronoun

e.g. "them"

possessive adjective

e.g. "their"

possessive pronoun

e.g. "theirs"

reflexive pronoun

e.g. "themselves"

☒ " __ is" ☐ " __ are"

Start Practicing

Clear

Intercultural Communication Simulation for Undergraduate Students: Deepening Understandings of Culture in a Globalizing World

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ABSTRACT

This article introduces an intercultural communication simulation activity for undergraduate students. This activity encourages students to identify and explore conflict that arises in situations that involve intercultural communication while promoting the development of skills to cope with such conflict. As a result, this activity enables students to reflect upon how culture is manifested among individuals. Thus, students begin to grasp that, in a globalizing world, culture is no longer solely defined by countries' borders.

INTRODUCTION

A number of studies have focused on how personality traits impact multicultural effectiveness. The Multicultural Personality Questionnaire features dimensions that measure five personality traits: flexibility, social initiative, emotional stability, open-mindedness, and cultural empathy (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2001). A number of studies have shown that higher scores on these dimensions are predictive of multicultural effectiveness (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2001; Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee, 2002; Van der Zee & Brinkmann, 2004; Yakunina et al., 2012). In addition, studies have explored how personality traits impact anti-prejudice behaviors and attitudes. Carter et al. (2021) found that the personality trait of perspective taking (i.e., the ability to adopt other people's perspectives) was predictive of anti-sexist and anti-racist behaviors. Levin et al. (2016) also found that perspective taking was a significant predictor of generalized prejudice. The purpose of this article is to describe a simulation that has been designed to develop multicultural effectiveness, openness to diversity, and anti-prejudice behaviors and attitudes among undergraduate students in a simulated situation familiar to them.

SIMULATION

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One of the first immersive intercultural communication experiences an undergraduate student might experience is that of living with one or more strangers while studying overseas. This simulation focuses on intercultural communication conflict within the scenario of dorm roommates because it is relatable to undergraduate students. The simulation consists of four steps and can be expanded upon or simplified depending upon time constraints and class size and level.

Step 1: General Preparation

The first step is to prepare the students for the simulation. The scenario (Appendix A), a roommate agreement (which can be found online for many universities), and the roleplay schedule are provided to students 3-4 weeks before the simulation. During these weeks, students are asked to review these materials to become familiar with the scenario and the time constraints. In addition, students are assigned two roles: Role Y and Role Z. In Role Y, students play themselves. In Role Z, students play roles that they have been asked to research and prepare.

Step 2: Role Z Research and Preparation

For Role Z, students are assigned particular characteristics that are in direct conflict with characteristics assigned to other roles. For example, some students might be assigned the trait of “early risers,” while other students might be assigned the trait of “night owls.” In courses particularly focused upon intercultural communication theory and research, an additional level of research is integrated into the coursework. To promote empathy and multiple perspectives and to develop research skills, students are asked to formulate characteristics of Role Z based upon research into a particular country that they have been assigned. For example, a student might be asked to find, analyze, and integrate information from Geert Hofstede’s six dimensions, Erin Meyer’s eight scales, and Richard Lewis’s triangular model into Role Z (Hofstede, 2011; Lewis, 2006; Meyer, 2015). This information serves to help the student embody and articulate different perspectives while playing Role Z.

Step 3: Simulation Day

It is recommended that a minimum of 100-200 minutes be dedicated to the simulation and reflection. In the scenario, the instructor plays the role of the Resident Assistant (RA). Hence, it is important that the materials, roles, and schedule of the simulation be explained and clarified before the simulation begins. Depending upon the class size and the students’ language level, one negotiation round takes 15-30 minutes.

After each negotiation round, students are asked to reflect upon the negotiation and discuss a list of questions (Appendix B). Groups are then asked to share their answers to the discussion questions with the class. After each negotiation and discussion, groups and roles are rotated so that students can experience different dynamics and conflicts in each round. Usually, one or more students will be playing themselves and one or more students will be playing Role Z. At the end of the simulation day, students are asked to share their reflections upon the activity with the class.

CONCLUSION

After experiencing this simulation, students often request more activities that allow them to explore and examine social interactions with their peers. Through the preparation for, negotiations of, and reflections upon conflict in this setting, students have the opportunity to observe and examine intercultural communication conflict between individuals. As a result, this activity enables students to reflect upon how culture is manifested among individuals. Thus, students begin to grasp that, in a globalizing world, culture is no longer solely defined by countries' borders.

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APPENDIX A

Roommate Roleplay Scenario

You will be studying abroad at Gray College in Wisconsin in the United States for one year. Gray College is located in a rural area. There are no restaurants, shops, or bars near the campus. On the weekends, students who want to shop can take a bus that goes from the campus to a nearby town. Otherwise, there is no easy way to leave the campus.

The university's Residential Office has assigned you one or more roommates with whom you will share a bedroom for one year. Your Residential Assistant (RA) has asked you and your roommate(s) to discuss and answer together the items on the Roommate Agreement.

APPENDIX B

Roommate Roleplay Discussion Questions

1. For you and your roommate(s), which points were easiest to agree upon?
2. For you and your roommate(s), which points were most difficult to agree upon?
3. What kinds of intercultural communication problems did you experience?
4. What are your solutions for those particular problems? How can you overcome those intercultural communication problems?

Reducing Foreign Language Anxiety with Bespoke Education in Japanese University Context

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ABSTRACT

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is an issue of concern among EFL educators in Japan. Various researchers are investigating why Japanese EFL students experience FLA so acutely and how to resolve it. This small-scale exploratory study followed eight Japanese EFL students throughout a ‘*How to deal with Foreign Language Anxiety*’ course to determine if a bespoke FLA course and textbook could reduce the amount of FLA students experienced. The bespoke textbook included 13 chapters on FLA and was fused with real life experiences of Japanese students who learnt how to manage FLA successfully. Furthermore, the textbook comprised of practical exercises such as breathing techniques, meditation and visualisation as well as weekly reflective diary tasks and discussion questions to increase students’ personal awareness. A mixed methods approach allowed researchers to collect quantitative pre-post survey data and qualitative ‘Most Significant Change’ (MSC) story data. The findings revealed that participants experienced less FLA after completing the course, particularly in speaking tasks. As a result of these findings, it is recommended that FLA training be integrated into EFL education to buffer Japanese students against the debilitating effects of FLA.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of language anxiety is “receiving increasing research attention” in the study of language learning (Cutrone, 2009, p. 55). Researchers are especially interested in investigating the struggles and silence of Japanese EFL students when asked to engage in speaking tasks in EFL classrooms (Cutrone, 2009). Japanese students experience intense pressure and competition in their childhood and are faced with many important examinations that greatly influence their future (Nozaki, 1993). Because of this pressure, they feel anxious

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when they make mistakes (Nozaki, 1993). Additionally, Japanese students are “reluctant to talk in situations where they will stand out in front of their peers” (Cutrone, 2009, p. 60). Japanese students have been found to rarely initiate conversation (Helgesen, 1993). They evade introducing new discussion topics, and rarely challenge the teacher (Helgesen, 1993). Moreover, Japanese students seldom ask for clarification, and do not readily or without prompting give answers in class (Helgesen, 1993). In addition, the Japanese classroom, which is characterised by conventional rules, formalities, and highly guarded behaviour also contributes to student anxiety in language classrooms (Doyon, 2000).

One definition of language anxiety is “the apprehension experienced when a situation requires the use of a second language with which the individual is not fully proficient” (Cutrone, 2009, p. 56). Foreign Language Anxiety is different from general anxiety because it specifically occurs when using a foreign language; it is a situational type of anxiety, where a student becomes nervous in very specific situations (Andrade & Williams, 2009). It can occur during speaking, writing, listening or reading activities.

Researchers do not all agree on the cause of FLA. Some believe it is caused by teacher behaviour and class organisation (Andrade & Williams, 2009). Others believe it originates from students’ beliefs, learning styles, personality types, gender and personal abilities (Andrade & Williams, 2009). The language classroom is a unique social situation where the teacher has the power to evaluate students and put them in embarrassing social situations. Furthermore, students find it difficult to express themselves in a foreign language compared to their native language and have to work hard to protect their self-confidence. In this type of environment, students can feel afraid that they will look stupid and be rejected or looked down on by their teacher and peers (Wilson, 2016). FLA affects EFL students adversely as it influences the communication strategies that they employ in a language class. Anxious students will commonly write, speak, and participate less in the classroom which constrains successful language acquisition (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009; Spolsky, 1989). Consequently, “language anxiety can have a debilitating effect on L2 performance” (Cutrone, 2009, p. 56).

Anxious feelings will usually diminish once a student has mastered the language. However, students often try to escape anxious feelings by avoiding situations where they have to use English (Gregerson, 2003). As a result, they do not master the language and FLA continues. Students are often unaware that FLA is a common problem that can be overcome with the right tools and strategies (He, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

It was hypothesised that Japanese students would experience less FLA if they had quality information, tools and strategies to manage the stress they experienced in the English class. In order to test the hypothesis, an intervention (bespoke FLA course and textbook) was developed, and evaluation measures were designed and implemented. The study was conducted between October 2020 – February 2021 as part of a 15-week English language course at a national university in Tokyo.

Participant Demographics

The eight participants in this small-scale study were all first-year Japanese university students between the ages of 18-20. All of the participants had an upper intermediate level of English. The study included 6 female and 2 male participants. Participants were recruited via

an invitation on their Moodle page and were asked to contact the teacher if they were interested in participating in the study (see appendix 1 for recruitment information).

Method

This study utilised a mixed methods approach including both quantitative and qualitative measures. The methodological design included three different phases: phase one consisted of a pre-post survey, phase two introduced the intervention (bespoke FLA course and textbook), and phase three focused on collecting contextualised personal stories on the most significant change that the participants experienced throughout the course. The three phases are outlined in more detail below:

Phase One

In order to compare participants' levels of FLA before and after the course, a standardised FLA survey developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) was adapted and administered on the first and last day of the semester (see appendix 2). The measurement scale was designed by Horwitz et al. (1986) to predict FLA and included three domains: communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation (Pae & Misieng, 2012).

Phase Two

Subsequently, the intervention (bespoke FLA course and textbook) was introduced in the second lesson and participants were instructed to complete weekly readings and tasks over the course of 15 weeks. The textbook was called the *'Foreign Language Anxiety Toolbox'*; it included 13 chapters on the topic of FLA such as *'What is FLA, and how does it work?'*, *'Environmental Factors'*, *'Emotional Intelligence'*, *'Coping Strategies'*, *'Self-Compassion'*, *'Goal Setting'*, *'Perfectionism'*, and *'Unhealthy Comparisons'*. Each chapter was based on academic research on FLA and was fused with real life experiences of Japanese students who experienced FLA and learnt how to manage it. Furthermore, the textbook contained practical exercises such as breathing techniques, meditation and visualisation as well as weekly reflective diary tasks and discussion questions to increase personal awareness. After completing each chapter, participants discussed their experiences with classmates in English.

Phase Three

The Most Significant Change (MSC) method was developed by Davies and Dart (2005) as a form of participatory and monitoring evaluation. It involves participants in selecting and analysing the data and provides information about the impact of the program. The research process involves collecting MSC stories and sitting down together to have in depth discussion about the value of the reported changes. Using this method, participants completed a MSC survey on the final day of the course (see appendix 3). This required participants to write a paragraph about their biggest personal improvement over the duration of the course if they had any. This methodological approach allowed for more contextualised data regarding participants' experiences to be gathered. The class then sat together, discussed their stories and the value of the changes they experienced.

Analysis

The pre-post survey data and the MSC data were collected using Google Forms. The quantitative data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet to compare the two data sets. The MSC stories were distributed in class and discussed in groups.

Ethical Considerations

This study prioritised informed consent. Participants were informed that the study was voluntary and that they would not be graded for participating in the surveys or the weekly tasks. Participants were informed that their data would be kept anonymously and securely. The data was shared with the participants at the end of the course so that they could see their own progress.

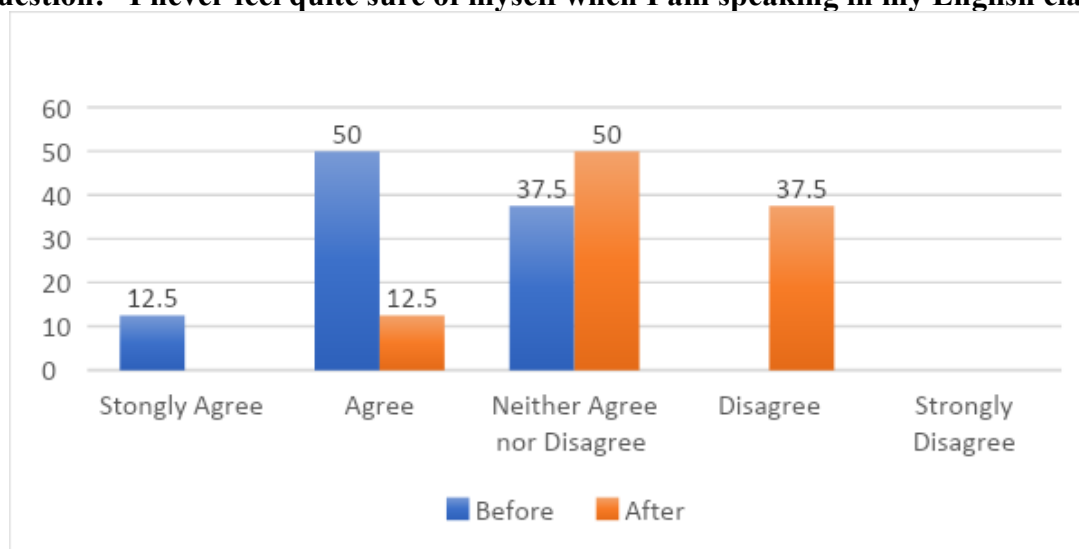
RESULTS

Results: Pre-Post Survey

The following tables show the results from the pre-post surveys and indicate the most significant changes that occurred over the duration of the *'How to deal with Foreign Language Anxiety Course'*.

TABLE 1

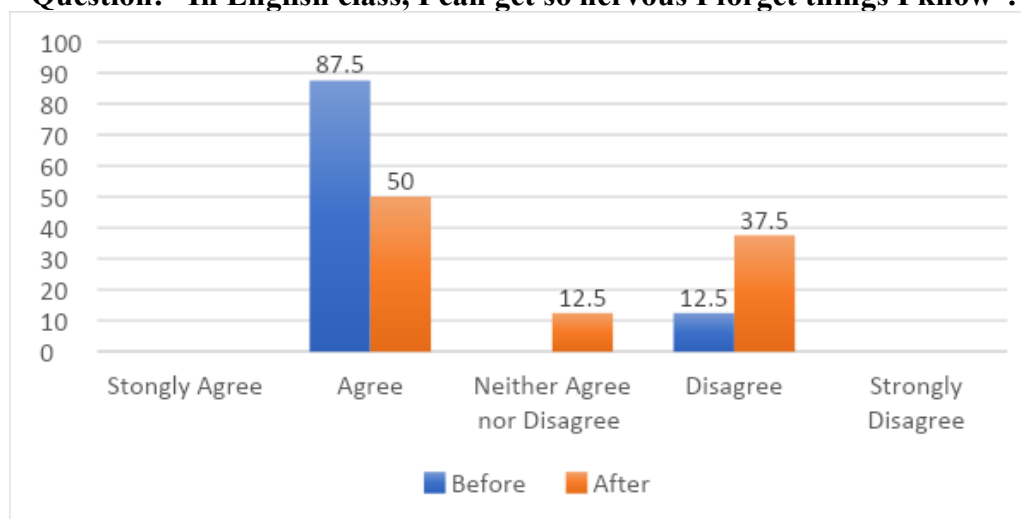
Question: "I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English class".



Before the course started 4 participants agreed that they never felt sure of themselves when speaking English. However, this changed after the FLA course as only 1 agreed that they never felt sure of themselves. Moreover, before the FLA course, no participants disagreed that they never felt sure of themselves while speaking English. This changed after

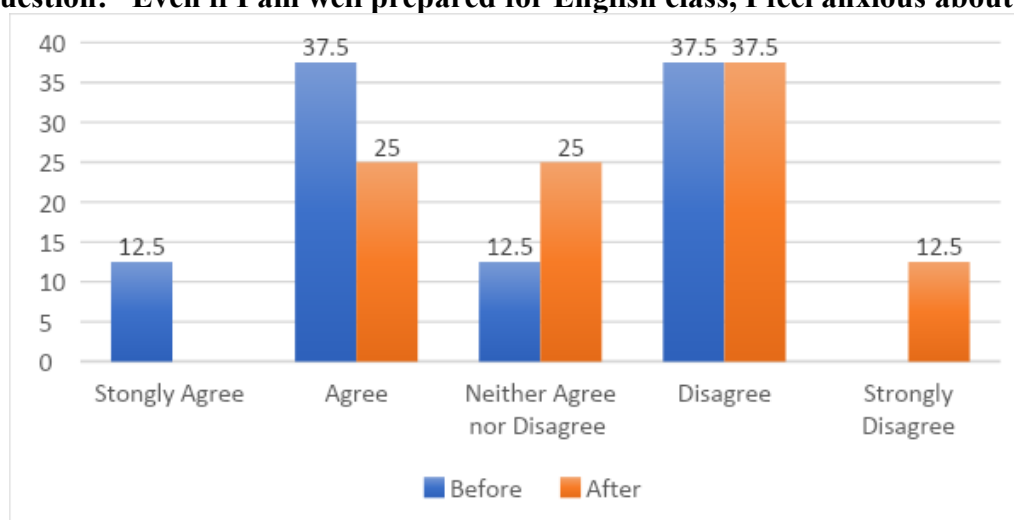
the course and 3 participants disagreed that they never felt sure of themselves when speaking English.

TABLE 2
Question: “In English class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know”.



Prior to the FLA course 7 participants agreed that they get so nervous in English class that they forget things they know. However, after the FLA course, this changed and only 4 participants felt that way. Moreover, after the FLA course 3 participants disagreed that they get nervous and forget things they know compared to 1 participant before the FLA course.

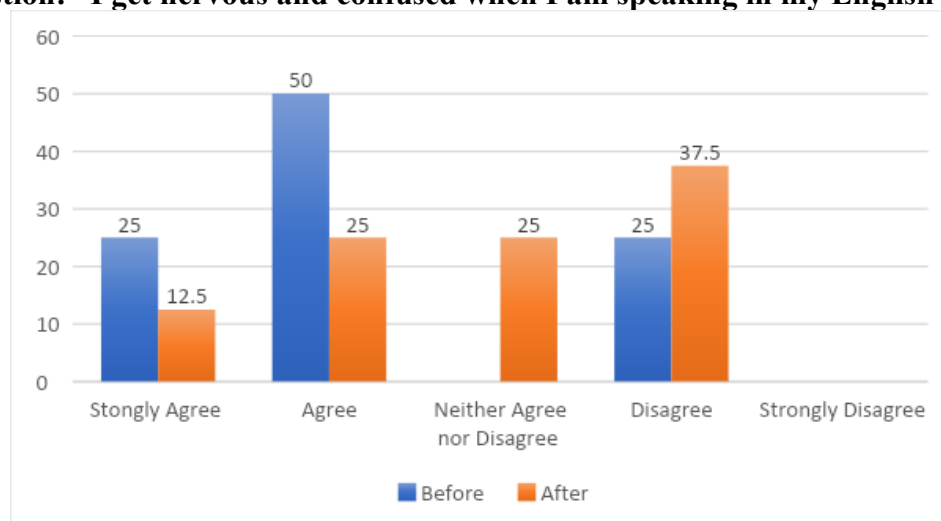
TABLE 3
Question: “Even if I am well prepared for English class, I feel anxious about it”.



Before the FLA course, 3 participants agreed that they felt anxious despite being well prepared for class. However, after the FLA course, only 2 participants felt that way. In addition, before the FLA course 1 participant strongly agreed that they felt nervous despite

adequate preparation, and after the FLA course no participants strongly agreed to this and 1 participant strongly disagreed with the statement.

TABLE 4
Question: “I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class”.



Preceding the FLA course 5 participants agreed that they get nervous and confused when they have to speak in the English class. However, after the FLA course only 1 participant felt that way. Moreover, before the FLA course 2 participants disagreed that they get nervous and confused when speaking in the English class but after the course 4 participants disagreed that they get nervous and confused when speaking in class.

Results: Most Significant Change Stories

The survey results show that 7 participants had never heard of FLA before taking the course nor did they know how to deal with FLA. Participants wrote their stories in English and minor grammatical errors were corrected by the authors to enhance readability. Seven stories were collected as one participant was absent on the data collection day. The section below outlines the most significant changes participants experienced from the course.

Story 1: *"Surprisingly, I didn't feel nervous at all when I **spoke** English in front of my classmates in this class. I realised that I don't need to feel so nervous or negative. Moreover, I knew that other students also feel scared to **speak** English sometimes. In the spring semester, I was too nervous during class presentations. However, this semester, I did not become nervous at all. The textbook was very useful, especially reading personal stories of other Japanese students who struggled with FLA."*

Story 2: *"I think my reaction toward classmates, when they share their opinions, improved. Before taking this course, there were many students who felt uncomfortable **speaking** English, I now comprehend that it was due to FLA. Before I thought it was only me who felt kind of bad to **speak** in front of people."*

However, throughout the course, I learnt that anybody could feel FLA even though it is different from person to person".

Story 3: *"I feel more confident **speaking** English than before. This is because I learned about FLA and stress levels throughout this class. I became more objective towards my nervousness and I am now better in coping with my stress. I learned that stress is not something to get rid of but to manage by making friends and relying on each other in class. In group discussions, I felt less confused because I do not forget English words due to my nervousness".*

Story 4: *"The biggest change for me was that I started to enjoy learning English more. I got to know my classmates better and I no longer think that I have to complete all the assignments perfectly, without any mistakes. I learnt that it is okay not to always have the right answer".*

Story 5: *"The biggest change for me was that my listening skills improved. My TOEIC listening score improved by 45 points compared to the last semester! I find that I catch almost all the words in listening exercises, I can't believe it. Recently I can catch almost all the words in listening. I found that breathing and relaxation techniques work for me, it is easy, and I can do it anytime I want".*

Story 6: *"I almost have no hesitation when I **speak** English now because I got a better understanding of what Foreign Language Anxiety is and how to deal with the fear I experienced. I don't get as nervous as before when I **speak** English. I found that preparation and goals setting were the most useful strategies for me. I think that these techniques have been successful because they suit my personality".*

Story 7: *"My biggest personal improvement was that I learnt how to deal with FLA. I have never thought about FLA before taking this class even though I experienced a lot of FLA when I had to **speak** in the past. However, learning some ways to decrease negative emotions helped me to concentrate on my learning without feeling too much FLA. Now that I know how to decrease FLA, I can use some of the techniques I have learned such as mindfulness and taking time to relax and have fun".*

DISCUSSION

The pre-post survey results revealed that the bespoke FLA course and textbook decreased FLA on most of the FLA survey items and had a particularly strong effect on four key areas as outlined in the Results section. Table 1 shows that some participants felt more self-assured in speaking activities after the course. Table 2 shows that some participants felt less forgetful when they were under pressure in the language class. Table 3 denotes some participants used to feel anxious despite being well prepared for class, however this changed, and participants were able to feel more at ease in class knowing that they were well prepared. Table 4 shows that some participants felt less nervous and confused when they had to speak English in class. They were able to remain calm despite confusing and potentially embarrassing classroom situations. According to the results depicted in Tables 1 and 4, it appears that the intervention was particularly successful in decreasing FLA associated with speaking as participants indicated that they felt less nervous and confused, and more self-

assured, when they had to engage in speaking tasks. Moreover, the data from the MSC survey underpins the pre-post survey results especially in regard to the reduction of FLA in speaking activities. The MSC data revealed that five out of the seven participants directly identified that speaking was one of their biggest improvements in the course. The data shows that participants not only understood what FLA is but became very self-aware and were able to select specific coping strategies from the textbook which worked for them. It must be emphasised that the textbook content was specifically tailored to Japanese EFL students and this is possibly why the results of the study were positive. Additionally, a significant amount of class time was devoted to learning about FLA, testing out individual coping strategies, and reflecting on personal responses to FLA. Most EFL classes do not allocate time to address FLA to the extent that this course did. Perhaps this is an indication that EFL classes could devote time to address EFL early on to avoid unnecessary stress which inhibits learning.

CONCLUSION

The central focus of this study was to establish if FLA could be reduced if Japanese students had more quality information, tools and strategies to deal with FLA. This hypothesis was tested and confirmed as both quantitative and qualitative measures demonstrated that the intervention (bespoke FLA course and textbook) successfully reduced FLA in four key areas, particularly in speaking activities. It must be noted that this exploratory study utilised a small sample size and that further studies need to be conducted to learn more about reducing FLA in speaking tasks. A further limitation of this study is that the sample size only included 2 male participants.

Clearly there is a need for more FLA education for both teachers and students. It is timely for EFL education in Japan to move beyond basic listening, speaking, reading and writing instructions to include FLA education to help students manage unhealthy thinking patterns and behaviours. It is no longer adequate for EFL teachers in Japan to solely rely on group work and pair work activities to manage FLA in the classroom. However, it is not useful to only confront this challenge on an individual level by holding students and teachers responsible. EFL educators need to be aware of and include FLA education for both teachers and students in order to reduce FLA and maximise students' language acquisition. Without bespoke FLA education, FLA will continue to hold some Japanese students back in their language learning endeavours.

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APPENDIX 1: RECRUITMENT INFORMATION

Dear students

Welcome to the 'How to deal with Foreign Language Anxiety' class! In this class we will learn how to deal with the stress that can be involved in learning English. In addition to the regular class, you have an opportunity to participate in a study. The study is about measuring the changes that occur during this course.

The study is voluntary, this means you do not need to participate if you don't want to. This study is not part of the course criteria so you will not be graded for it. If you want to participate you will take part in a 5-minute online survey before the course starts and another 5-minute online survey when the course finishes. There will also be an opportunity to write a short paragraph at the end of the course describing your experiences. The benefit of participating in this study is that you will receive your individual survey results at the end of the course so you can see your progress. Your survey data will be kept private, and your identity will be protected.

If you would like to participate, please email your teacher and let them know. If you do not want to participate, you don't have to do anything.

Thanks for your time!

APPENDIX 2: FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY SURVEY

This survey is completely anonymous and voluntary, you do not have to complete it if you don't want to. Your answers will not affect your course grade in any way. Your information will be kept private.

Please complete the following questions:

Ethnicity: Japanese Other: _____
 Gender: Female Male Gender Diverse
 Age: 18- 20 21-25 Other: _____

Please tick the box that applies to you:

Questions:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in the English class.					
2. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the English class.					
3. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.					
4. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.					
5. I worry about the consequences of failing my English class.					
6. In English class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.					
7. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.					
8. Even if I am well prepared for English class, I feel anxious about it.					
9. I often feel like not going to my English class.					
10. I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.					
11. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in English class.					
12. The more I study for an English test, the more confused I get.					
13. English class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.					
14. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.					
15. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class.					
16. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says.					
17. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak English.					
18. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English.					

Thanks for your time !

APPENDIX 3: MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORIES SURVEY

This survey is completely anonymous and voluntary, you do not have to complete it if you don't want to. Your answers will not affect your course grade in any way. Your information will be kept private.

Please complete the following questions:

Ethnicity: Japanese Other: _____
Gender: Female Male Gender Diverse
Age: 18- 20 21-25 Other: _____

Please tick the box that applies to you:

Questions:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I have never heard of Foreign Language Anxiety before taking this course.					
2. I didn't know how to deal with Foreign Language Anxiety before taking this course.					

Please answer the questions below in a few sentences:

1. What was your biggest personal improvement in this course? (If any)
2. Can you give an example of your answer in question 1?
3. Why do you think you improved in this specific area? (Please refer to your answer from question 1.)
4. Which tools and strategies from this course were the most useful to you, if any?

Thanks for your time!

Inclusion of Suprasegmental Pronunciation Training in the EFL Classroom

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the necessity of including pronunciation training inside EFL classrooms. The challenges to this aspect of second language acquisition will be discussed from the perspective of the student and the teacher; it will become evident the importance in focusing on practicing pronunciation at the suprasegmental level by concentrating on the prosodic feature of stress. Strategies on how to effectively include this aspect of pronunciation training will be considered followed by a closer look at the appropriate use of materials at the micro- and macro-levels. Further concerns faced by the instructors in the implementation of this pronunciation training will be discussed but it will be concluded that such training will be of great benefit to the learner's proficient in English speaking and listening.

KEYWORDS: Pronunciation, Suprasegmental, Stress, Perception awareness

INTRODUCTION

It has been widely acknowledged that students in Japan find it challenging to converse in their English classes and seem not to be meeting expectations (Maeda, 2010). There are a wide range of factors that affect student performance but one issue rarely looked at in the EFL classroom is insufficient attention drawn on suitable pronunciation training. Despite being a compulsory subject in junior high and high school, Japanese still have a hard time achieving even daily conversation levels (Tsuboya-Newell, 2017) as students do not focus on how the language is spoken but on how it will be tested (Butler & Iino, 2005; Tukahara, 2002). As a result, Japan is ranked 53rd out of 100 countries in the EF English Proficiency Index (Education First, 2019) despite having studied the subject for a minimum of six years. However, with more attention placed on students observing and producing language that reflects better intelligibility and comprehensibility, students will be better equipped to converse in this second language and hopefully improve their proficiency.

Lack of Pronunciation Training

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Pronunciation training has been largely ignored by teachers (Breitkreutz et al., 2002; Macdonald, 2002). This is partly due to concerns about students being overwhelmed with various aspects of the second language. When communicating their intentions, non-native learners need to obviously consider the message itself. They then need to draw on their lexical, grammatical, and morphophonological resources expediently to form a linguistic plan to put into actual speech their ideas. Once this is achieved, they also have to monitor their message for accuracy, clarity and appropriacy (Tavakoli et al., 2020). Further compounded by sociocultural aspects of second language acquisition such as exposure (Shively, 2008), attitude (Elliot, 1995), mother tongue (Avery & Ehrlich, 1992), students may not initially recognize the benefits of pronunciation training.

Teachers may also avoid the inclusion of pronunciation training as there would seem to be no definite aspect of pronunciation to teach, only that it is one of the most difficult skills in the learning and teaching of English language (Gilakjani, 2016; Haghighi & Rahimy, 2017). This is partly based on the unfamiliarity of segmenting the language properties by the non-native language and partly the inappropriate application of native phonotactic constraints to the segmentation procedures (Otake *et al.*, 1993; Tyler & Cutler, 2009). As a result, teachers may feel it prudent to focus their limited time in the classroom on other aspects of second language acquisition such as grammar and vocabulary.

However, pronunciation can and should be taught as it is an important part of communication (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996; Derwing & Munro, 2005; Gilakjani, 2016). In fact, poor pronunciation has been found to be the main cause of communication breakdowns or misunderstandings in English as a Lingua Franca interactions (Deterding, 2013; Jenkins, 2000; Thir, 2016). For students to be able to converse at an acceptable level with other students, it is imperative that pronunciation training becomes an integral part of the lesson to bridge these communication issues and allow students to become more successful in producing daily conversation. A recent trend in EFL conversational textbooks is the inclusion of sentence decoding exercises to raise awareness of particular aspects of pronunciation. Although a welcomed improvement, more is required and there would seem to be no specific teaching methodology which deals with this aspect of pronunciation appropriately.

Focusing on Suprasegmental Features

Empirical research has possibly provided some direction as to which aspects of pronunciation for the teacher to consider. It has become apparent that accents do not impede communication. “The presence of a strong foreign accent does not necessarily result in reduced intelligibility of comprehensibility” (Munro & Derwing 1995, p. 90). In fact, it has become evident not to focus on teaching the accurate pronunciation of syllables as the differences between Japanese and English syllable structure systems “impose many difficulties for Japanese learners” (Nakashima 2006, p. 35). It would, therefore, seem rational not to burden students with this aspect of phonology, especially if it is not necessary. Instead of focusing on the individual sound systems, it would be prudent to focus on elements of speech that will contribute to comprehensibility and intelligibility. Despite claims of the positive effects of explicit instruction of phonological rules (e.g., Champagne-Muzar et al., 1993; Pennington, 1998), a growing body of research has identified that the inclusion of suprasegmental features or prosodic sensitivity can significantly impact the degree of accentedness, intelligibility and comprehensibility of L2 speech (e.g., Derwing et al., 2012; Koike, 2014; Suwartono, 2014). As a result, it would be expedient to focus on this aspect of

pronunciation.

The implications of such findings would be for the teacher to concentrate on the production and therefore raising awareness of the suprasegmental features when providing pronunciation practice. Lexical stress is defined as those sounds which require more articulatory effort than unstressed syllables (Van Heuven, 2018). It is indicated by such properties as changes in pitch (*pitch accent*), increased intensity/loudness (*dynamic accent*) and full articulation of the vowel (*qualitative accent*) which refers to duration and vowel quality. Although, it is outside the scope of this paper, other aspects of suprasegmental pronunciation, such as nuclear stress (Jenkins, 2000), could also be included in the training once students have shown reasonable control of lexical stress. Class materials should focus students' production of these aspects by introducing and raising awareness of word stress, sentence stress and sentence rhythm. However, the effectiveness of such pronunciation focus will depend on the pedagogical needs of the students and how pronunciation is actually taught in the class.

Teaching Strategies

To become more sensitive to the prosodic aspects of English, it is necessary for students to develop greater awareness of these features. Perception awareness strategies to appreciate the types of acoustic cues used in English would seem to play a strong role in the effective adoption of such suprasegmental features into L2 learner's speaking skills. All main prosodic aspects of English need to be introduced at an appropriate level and time so that it does not have a negative impact on fluency, confidence, or development of grammar and vocabulary knowledge. It can be quite overwhelming for the learner when trying to consider other aspects of conversational English. However, perception of lexical stress plays an important role in the segmentation of speech and location of word boundaries (Tyler & Cutler, 2009). It would, therefore, seem appropriate to introduce materials that improve word stress, sentence stress and rhythm once students have become familiar with the topic in respect to their own ideas and with appropriate vocabulary and grammar.

Developing materials requires creative ways to integrate pronunciation training activities into speaking-orientated classes in a manner that clearly relates to the oral communication of the course and student needs (Levis & Grant, 2011). It has been noted that integrated pronunciation training is more effective than approaches that focus on either fluency or articulatory goals alone (Morley, 1991). If students are taught new suprasegmental features when focusing on pronunciation alone, significant gaps will occur as students struggle to apply these new pronunciation techniques to actual meaningful conversation (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). Teaching features of pronunciation should arise from the actual speaking needs and contribute to the success of the interaction (Levis & Grant, 2011). Gilakjani (2011) also states that teaching techniques, such as drilling or shadowing, must directly exercise the speech that they will actually use in real life and outside the classroom. The successful integration of prosody training will, therefore, depend on the teacher's ability to apply to unplanned as well as planned speaking (Levis, 2001).

The teacher, therefore, needs to successfully identify and develop materials on the poignant aspects of prosody to draw the students' attention. However, this can be better achieved by focusing on micro- and macro-level activities. Micro-level activities, refer to attention on word or sentence pronunciation, and should be adapted from coursebooks. They should include noticing techniques which assist in making distinctions about the types of

stress of words. Activities can include: 1. drills on words, connected speech phrases and sentences; 2. analysis practice on specific words and sentences to determine similarities or contrasts in stress; and, 3. eliciting techniques to further raise student awareness of the application of previously suprasegmental features. In addition to listening to one another's recording, students can evaluate changes in tone if they watch the sound waves of a recorded speech. Macro-level activities, on the other hand, focus on the pronunciation practice of longer dialogues, such as teacher audio recordings of student assignments with corrections. This will provide an opportunity for each student to shadow the audio version of their written assignment. Shadowing refers to the "act or a task of listening in which the learner tracks the heard speech and repeats it as exactly as possible while listening attentively to the in-coming information" (Tamai, 1997, p. 20). Shadowing these individualized recordings enables the student to understand how to follow native rhythms, especially distressing lexical items (Wang et al., 2005) and practice subconsciously various aspects of prosody without having to further determine and decode meaning at a grammatical and lexical level. Furthermore, by subvocalizing such speech input on a regular basis, a greater amount of information can be retained in a phonological loop (Nitani, 1999). There would also be an improvement in comprehension, fluency, and pronunciation (Omar & Umehara, 2010). This additional resource is expected to allow students better access to any particular aspect of prosody as they will not feel pressured to perform and can repeat particular aspects of pronunciation which would have been lost if reliant on spontaneous conversations.

Concerns and Benefits

Pronunciation certainly requires a deeper understanding of how to apply prosodic feature awareness strategies in the classroom (Yenkimaleki, 2017) by both teacher and student. The teacher may also need additional training or to experiment further to raise their own pedagogical understanding of pronunciation training so that they can become more successful and more acutely aware of the student needs in order to identify and provide more tailor-made resources to improve the learners' English pronunciation (Shahzada, 2012). But with limited resources and time in the class, it may be more expedient to look at general issues of pronunciation first. Furthermore, there remain the additional challenges of providing appropriate corrective feedback and focused pronunciation training to larger classes. The students, as well as the teacher, need to become pragmatic in the application of feedback in paired activities so that each student's confidence and fluency is not adversely affected (Levis, 2001). For example, identifying, providing and modeling perception awareness strategies for students to emulate would heighten their awareness of the types of acoustic cues used in English and how they could also adapt such suprasegmental features into their English speaking skills. The teacher may also discover that students need to spend more time analyzing their own speech from assignments set to find their own examples of specific parts of suprasegmentals. After all, greater success in using noticing techniques might also provide more appreciation and awareness during other pronunciation activities such as drills on words for syllabic contrast/vowel quality, or shadowing of speech for vowel reduction on connected speech phrases. Again though, this would depend on the skills and experience of the teacher to balance the amount of feedback so that students can heighten their awareness in pronunciation issues but not at the detriment to their fluency or confidence.

Appropriate instruction of suprasegmental features can lead to improvement in the English level of EFL students in various ways such as significant improvement in listening comprehension skills (Ahangari et al., 2015). In fact, students can benefit from perceiving prosodic information carried by pitch and intensity to assist language identification (e.g.,

Kometsu et al., 2001; Mary & Yegnanarayana, 2008). Mahjani (2003) noted that prosodic feature awareness may enhance the naturalness and intelligibility of language in speech production and can also lead to more efficient processing of input speech during the interpreting process. Moreover, Derwing et al. (1998) demonstrated that such training at the suprasegmental level resulted in better intelligibility of utterances produced by second-language learners. Furthermore, English lexical stress can be modified through classroom instruction and individual speech training (e.g., Nagamine, 2011; Tsushima, 2014) and that second language learners are able to transfer their acquired perceptual skill to spontaneous speech production as well (Derwing et al., 1998). In fact, the inclusion of such suprasegmental features into the classroom has been more effective for Japanese learners as they are able to transfer suprasegmental features from Japanese to English (Koike, 2014). Paying attention to the teaching of prosody would, therefore, be of significant benefit to the Japanese EFL learners.

CONCLUSION

Although the teacher is faced with many challenges when managing their classes to enable students to reach their potential by providing engaging lessons to stretch student learning, it has become apparent that more needs to be done to improve student proficiency. This article suggests that pronunciation training should become an integral part of the lesson and that it would be expedient to focus on the suprasegmental feature of stress to maximize progress. For this to be successfully introduced into the classroom, perceptual awareness strategies need to be put in place with activities that reflect the needs of the students and their course. The teacher should consider both micro- and macro-activities to enhance student perception and production of a particular aspect of prosody. Despite the limitation of time and the challenges to get to grips with this aspect of linguistics, with more attention placed on observing and producing language that reflects better intelligibility and comprehensibility, students will be better equipped to converse in their second language and hopefully improve their speaking proficiency.

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Considering the Motivations and Challenges of Japan's English Language Learners

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ABSTRACT

There are a range of factors that influence the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) landscape in Japan. These variables exist at the societal, cultural, educational, and individual level. In these contexts, it is understandable that motivation to learn English is not universally high. However, some university students want to study English. They are excited about English, and even enroll in extra-curricular classes. What motivates them? What inspires them to go beyond their comfort zone and embrace the challenge of learning a new language? This qualitative research inquiry includes feedback from extra-curricular university English students. Understanding learner motivations in the context of the range of variables present in Japan can help teachers to support students. This study illustrates that highly motivated students appear to be driven largely by intrinsic, personal goals. Such students see English as a tool to communicate with the global community, and see themselves as members of that larger world. They embrace challenges and are willing to go beyond their comfort zone while learning English.

INTRODUCTION

Presently, English proficiency in Japan still remains lower than to be desired. In 2018, for example, Japanese takers of the International Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) placed 44th out of 49 countries evaluated (Davis, 2019). According to Education First's English Proficiency Index, Japan ranked 53rd out of 100 countries in 2019. Of the possible categories very high, high, moderate, low, and very low, Japan scored in the low category (Education First, 2020). Japan is considered a world leader in terms of education, economics, technology, fashion and entertainment, and so much more, but perhaps not in the field of English language proficiency.

Many different factors and variables may affect the Japanese students learning English in Japan. Firstly, learner attitudes play a role. Some Japanese students may in fact see no use for English. Generally speaking, in everyday life, there is likely no need (and perhaps no opportunity) to speak English outside of the classroom. Also, student anxiety may be a factor. Anxiety in this context can be described as a feeling of discomfort, or stress, when exposed to the second language. Language anxiety may arise when speaking, reading, or listening to a

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second language (Noguchi, 2019). This is not positive, as anxiety and stress can be demotivating for language learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are a range of unique factors that impact the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educational landscape in Japan. The host of variables impact the system, the learners, and the language acquisition process. English language proficiency in Japan remains comparatively low (Lieb, 2019) and despite the The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's (MEXT's) efforts to promote and produce strong English skills and prepare students for globalization (MEXT, 2014), Japan continues to struggle some with regards to English education (Nuttall, 2019). MEXT has taken reformative measures to promote communicative English competency, and there has been a shift from grammar to communication (Mitchell, 2017). According to MacWhinnie & Mitchell (2017), the English Education Reform Plan Corresponding to Globalization calls for a deliberate transition from traditional / grammar instruction to communicative / interactive classrooms. Yet, there is still too much room for improvement. There appears to be at once a resistance and accommodation to dominant Western influence (Kubota, 1998), as Japan has a history of isolation and blue barriers (Nuttall, 2019). Historical, social, and cultural contexts are at play. There too are learner attributes that represent both opportunities and challenges. Some drivers include learner attitudes, anxiety, culture, learning styles, motivation, and willingness to communicate (Maftoon & Ziafar, 2013). Many English language learners in Japan perceive no immediate needs in society, and no tangible advantage in life from the acquisition of English (Sugino, 2010) and may view English to be a necessary hurdle for employment or university admissions, and nothing more (Noguchi, 2019). Language anxiety is common, especially if students are faced with the challenge of acquiring a new language and adapting to a new class structure simultaneously (Cutrone, 2009). Societal and cultural nuances may value indirect speech, face saving, conformity, (Saito & Ebsworth, 2004), and also learners may be inexperienced in a setting which endorses original opinion and individualization, when they are more accustomed to quiet and obediently passive classroom dynamics (Cutrone, 2009). Motivational fluency and comprehension can aid in the language teaching and learning process. Motivation is a paramount driver of learner outcomes (MacWhinnie and Mitchell, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research is descriptive and employs qualitative data collection. We strive to better understand the motivations of university students in Japan who are enrolled in extra-curricular English classes, and consider the relationship between motivations, comfort zones, and challenges, that influence English language learning in Japan. Findings and insights are non-linear, designed to capture ideas and feelings, and there is no definitive chronology to data outcomes (Kohler, 2016).

TABLE 1
Student Audience

Student Audience	Students enrolled in extra-curricular English classes at a University in Kanagawa, Japan
Demographics	16 students between the approximate ages of 18-24 Approximate distribution between male and female respondents
Method	All students were given up to ten minutes to contemplate and compose a short paragraph answering the following question: "Why do you study English?" Students were specifically instructed to think about their motivations before writing.

RESULTS

Direct Student Responses to the Question: "Why do you study English?"

"It is for travel around the world. I wanna communicate with people from another country. I wake friends there. English is the most common language. I want to have talking and listenning skills...Also, in the future I want to use English for my job: My dream is to have surf and coffee shop along the beach abroad."

"Because I like English. The harder I study English, the more I can talk with many foreigners. I'm glad to talk with them."

"Because I want to go New Zealand. I like horse. New Zealand have many horse's farm. I want to ride a horse and learn about horse."

"Communicate with several countries' people."

"My mother."

"My father is from Pakistan. So I'm alot of friend in abroad. They all can speak English. But I can't speak a lot. So I want to speak English more well and I want to make a lot of friends from overseas."

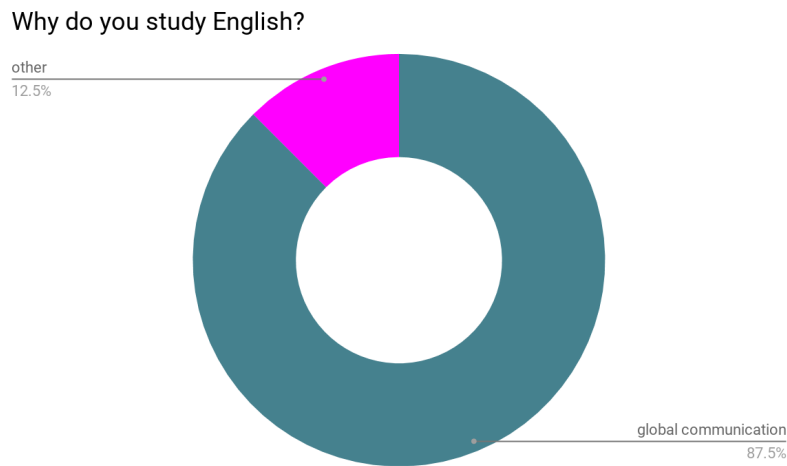
"I want to go around the world. So if I can use or understand English, I would go to anywhere."

"Because it's interesting to study English. I was awared it's good point when I was a junior-high school student. My English teacher taught very happily and he was very eager to study English. I was impressed."

Qualitative Themes captured from Student Responses

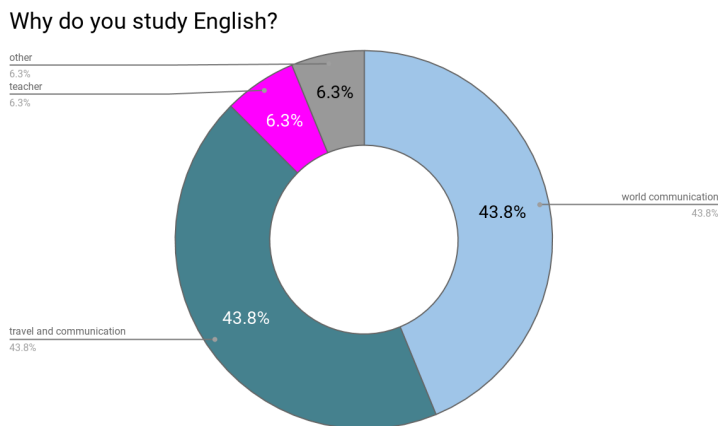
There were consistent themes across nearly all of the responses. For instance, 14 of the 16 student responses cited a desire to communicate and connect with people from around the world as a primary reason for their studying English (Fig. 1).

FIGURE1
Why do you study English? - General.



Of the 14 responses, 7 students specifically noted a desire for international travel and exploration as their primary reason. For the other 7 respondents, their primary motivation was connecting with people from around the world, who visit Japan (Fig. 2).

FIGURE 2
Why do you study English?- Specific.



One highly motivated student cited a previous, junior-high school English teacher as a source of motivation. “...*I was awared it’s good point when I was a junior-high school student. My English teacher taught very happily and he was very eager to study English. I was impressed.*”

DISCUSSION

The University students that were interviewed were mostly interested in learning English for personal reasons, and see themselves as a part of a larger, global community. Nearly all respondents cited a desire to communicate with people from around the world, and 50% of that population cited, more specifically, communication for travel and exploration. Generally, their motivation was *not* rooted in a perceived high demand for English in the workplace or in society. Rather, personal reasons were driving their studies. One student wrote, “*When I was 10 years old, I had a big sick. And the doctor helped me. I think they are cool. I want to be like then...I want to help the people around the world.*” Another student wrote, “*I want to talk other country people and I want to travel to USA, UK, and so on.*” While one student answered very simply, “*My mom,*” most of the students’ motivation was rooted in a very personal goal. Also noteworthy is that one highly motivated student cited a junior-high school teacher as a primary motivational factor. Many years later, the impact of one great teacher was driving her studies. She wanted to honor her former teacher and she was having fun in the process: “*It’s interesting to study English.*” This simple example can remind teachers that what they do matters and can have long-lasting, positive impacts.

TABLE 2
Findings

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- Highly motivated students take on challenges and appear to be driven by intrinsic, personal goals
 - Students enrolled in extra-curricular English classes see English as a tool to communicate with the global community, and see themselves as a member of that larger world
 - One great teacher can impact a student and their relationship with English for many years
 - Embracing challenge can promote students’ personal and linguistic growth
-

CONCLUSION

Motivation is a key component to learning. There are different types of motivation that drive the goals of Japanese EFL students and perhaps all learners alike: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic goals focus on the end result, which is outside of oneself. For example, a happy parent or a high test score. Extrinsic goals can be extremely motivating and lead to positive results, but

possibly shallow ones, insofar as a student might learn in a way that will yield the external result desired, but not beyond. In this scenario, it may be impossible to differentiate between the English language and the English exam.

Intrinsic goals are more internal. They are driven by genuine interest and curiosity. These objectives can lead to challenge-seeking and self-fulfillment. The learning goal and the learning process become one (Kamada, 1987). The human spirit thrives on some adversity, some adversary, some challenge.

As evidenced by the anecdote, great teachers can have a lasting impact on students and their relationship with English. Communicative fluency can take root in a friendly and positive environment (perhaps more-so than a hyper-evaluative one). By working together with students, teachers are able to cultivate an environment that moves towards communicative competence (Cutrone, 2009). Attendance and participation is vital and adapting a persona can help.

The reality remains that for some, English exams may be viewed only as a hurdle for employment and university admissions, nothing more (Noguchi, 2019). But in order for true communicative competency to flourish, there needs to be motivation. That is where implementing a global, multicultural curriculum might drive change. Focusing on a global society, a bigger community, may widen students' perspectives. When students see themselves as citizens of the world, and English as a useful tool in that new world, motivations may increase.

By seeking challenges, and conquering them, we become better versions of ourselves. And for the students who set language goals on their own, and achieve them, the reward is not one dimensional. By inviting challenge and undertaking risk, people can gain confidence in their own abilities. The comfort zone expands, individuals surpass their comfort zones and go beyond while learning and producing a new language. This is a life skill that may take shape in a language classroom, but will extend far beyond. The goal of the English immersion classroom should be to help students gain communicative competence, and equally importantly, to build confidence and skills that they can take with them on the journey of life.

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Cross-Cultural Issues in Discussion Classes

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ABSTRACT

Possibly the biggest challenge that some Japanese students face in the discussion class has to do with their first language. The conversational style of Japanese is very different from English, and teachers may find that students cannot meet their expectations. This article goes over reasons why students may have difficulties in class and a list of possible solutions. Mentioned are a model of discussions in English and analysis of why the model may not work in Japan. In addition, examples of cultural interference are noted, such as an explanation of high versus low context cultures, L1 interference, and examples of Japanese culture in its conversation style. Also, the importance of backchannels in discussions are stated, and finally there is a list of several possible solutions that teachers can try in their own teaching.

Cross-cultural Issues in Teaching Discussion Classes

The discussion class can be challenging for students since they may need to discuss difficult or controversial topics, as well as to justify their opinions and possibly express disagreement with other students. This is also not easy since students may not have had such practice even in their native language. In the discussion class, students need to read and learn a lot of topic-based vocabulary and learn to converse in a more formal and thus demanding way than in a normal conversation class. They also need to learn and memorize many phrases in order to help guide a discussion. Finally, they need to interact in an active way with other students in order to guide and facilitate discussions in a cooperative way.

Context

The classes are at a national university in Tokyo. Class sizes are around 30 and are multilevel. Although a bit idealistic, the class is useful for students who want to go on to graduate school, where they will need to read research in English and may have to do presentations at conferences abroad. Students who do not intend to go to graduate school may find the class demanding and not so useful.

A model for discussion classes in English could come from the *Cooperative Principle*, which was written by the British professor of philosophy, Paul Grice. He was a professor at the University of California and this principle is mentioned in a book he wrote, called *Study in the Way with Words*, published by Harvard University Press. It has four maxims for conversations: the maxim of quality, quantity, relevance, and manner.

1. Maxim of quality – make your contribution as informative as required

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2. Maxim of quantity

Supermaxim – do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence (so one should provide enough details and examples to support your opinion – students are weak at this)

3. Maxim of relevance – be relevant

4. Maxim of manner – avoid obscurity of expression, avoid ambiguity, be brief, and be orderly (Grice, 1989)

While this can seem reasonable and logical to a native English teacher, it is rather challenging to the student who comes from a different cultural background. The Cooperative Principles fit in well with students who come from a Western background, which is generally based on individualism. Japanese students, by contrast, come from a culture that values the group, harmony and consensus. Teachers can have a hard time preparing students to directly argue their opinions and express disagreement, partly because they may not have had proper training for this at the high school level. Maybe the biggest challenge for the Japanese speaker is the maxim of manner, as being vague is not considered wrong. Also, according to Benjamin and Nara (n.d.), Japanese would rather be polite than be considered too direct, whereas Americans may be the opposite. Another challenge for students is justifying their arguments in the maxim of quantity, and in having enough vocabulary to give enough information on the topic and to have enough reasons and examples.

Cross-cultural Differences in Communication

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges for Japanese students in speaking English well in the discussion class is when attempting to go beyond their cultural background, and to become a different speaker when speaking a second language like English. This refers to the difference between high context vs. low context culture. Edward Hall wrote about this in his seminal book *Beyond Culture*. Japanese people come from a high context culture, which values harmony and group consensus. By contrast native speakers of English often are from a low context culture which values individual opinions. High context culture can be defined as

“groups where people have close connections over a long period of time. Many aspects of cultural behavior are not made explicit because most members know what to think...Low context refers to societies where people tend to have many connections but for shorter duration...cultural behavior and beliefs need to be spelled out explicitly so that those coming into the cultural environment know how to behave” (culture-at-work.com, n.d.)

Ted Miller (1995) also mentions a few more issues Japanese speakers have with discussions in English. They are group-consciousness versus individualism, consensus versus autonomous decision making, self-restraint versus attentive feedback, and orderly turn taking versus floor competition. Students do not want to be the nail that sticks up, and reserve is also valued. The challenge for teachers is to get students to perform in the opposite way they have been culturally conditioned to in Japanese education. Attentive feedback is different in Japanese and in English. In English, it is a way of encouraging people to be more direct or to justify their argument with more examples or reasons. In Japanese it can be seen as a way of acknowledging or publicly agreeing with another person

Importance of Backchannels

Part of a good discussion is to have attentive listeners. This is the purpose of backchannels. Backchannels can be described as words said by a person listening to another

person discussing something. According to Yngye (1970), who coined the term, backchannels can be as explained as:

when two people are engaged in conversation, they generally take turns...In fact, both the person who has the turn and his partner are simultaneously engaged in both speaking and listening. This is because of the existence of what I call the backchannel, over which the person who has the turn receives short messages such as *yes* and *uh-huh* without relinquishing the turn. (p. 568)

In a discussion there is the primary speaker and there are the others that are listening while making brief comments at times to show that they are listening, agreeing, or possibly disagreeing. Backchannels are spoken responses said to the main speaker in a discussion. The problem with English discussion classes is that backchannels are different in English and in the Japanese language.

Pino Cutrone (2005), from Nagasaki University has written about comparing backchannels in English and Japanese, such as about some differences between British and Japanese speakers. He mentions three examples of Japanese culture which have an impact on how students may perform in a conversation in English: harmony in society, silence is golden and ambiguity. This means that disagreeing is not valued, periods of silence (or long pauses) are not considered bad, and being vague in speech is considered good. These are a few problems teachers will face in class.

In addition, in order for the discussion to proceed, the use of backchannels by the listener is essential, as a way to guide the discussion. As mentioned previously, a problem is that backchannels can vary depending on the culture. In English it seems it can be a way to encourage the speaker to be as direct and informative as possible, while also as a way to react and agree or disagree. This is rather different than Japanese, which prefers a more vague or noncommittal way of speaking. Japanese backchannels will not push a speaker to elaborate like in English, and focus more on agreeing and acknowledging what the speaker said, so as to maintain harmony as the relationship between the speaker may be considered to be more important than the opinions expressed.

Although it is important for students to learn correct backchannels in English, Cutrone noticed that some of his Japanese participants in his study used backchannels as a way to participate minimally in a discussion. Participants mentioned that they used backchannels “as a way to avoid speaking due to shyness, lack of confidence in their English ability, and not knowing what to say (Cutrone, 2005, p. 264). In addition, Cutrone (2005) wrote that participants “use backchannels as a way to process information” (p. 265). While this may have been because these were discussions in English with British speakers, perhaps it would be good for teachers to be mindful of how demanding the discussion topic could be for some students.

Difference in Conversational Style

Japanese conversational style has been compared to bowling whereas English conversation is similar to tennis. In Japanese, everyone takes orderly turns in talking and listeners may politely acknowledge what a speaker says and is more likely to praise what the speaker says than to openly disagree. In English, people might interrupt, pause less, challenge and disagree with what the speaker says. In Japanese conversation, challenging and

disagreeing is considered rude and would violate the maxim of manner.

So as to compare, Nancy Sakamoto (n.d.) considers Japanese conversation to be like bowling. People take turns politely. They acknowledge what the person says and move on. In English conversation it is like tennis. In a group discussion someone talks and it goes back and forth. Disagreeing is fine. If you agree with me, tell me why in more detail. My own example is the opposite of what Mr. Darcy felt in the novel the English writer Jane Austen wrote, called *Pride and Prejudice*. Mr. Darcy was amongst people who had to be agreeable and he was too direct and outspoken for them. In our classes we want our students to be more like Mr. Darcy, and to not shy away from expressing their opinions directly. The challenge is that this is not culturally comfortable for some students, since they do not want to be the nails that stick up in class. This might be considered a type of L1 interference, since they have been conditioned not to be opinionated and to stand out in class.

L1 Interference

One hindrance in learning English as a second language could be L1 interference as in a hesitation to speak in a way that one is not culturally used to. Rod Ellis, an expert on second language acquisition, mentioned this issue when he taught in Tokyo at Temple University. He lists seven generalizations. Of the seven differences when comparing Australians and Americans to the Japanese, the most relevant for issues in discussion classes are 1, 2, 4, and 5:

1. Are less verbal, are more inclined to use silence in intercultural interactions;
2. Are inclined to use more back-channeling devices;
3. Can be more direct in situations, in particular those where a lower status person is being addressed, and less direct in others;
4. May lack the politeness strategies to successfully perform face-threatening speech acts such as invitations and requests;
5. Are less explicit for giving reasons for their verbal behavior;
6. Tend to be more formal;
7. Tend to give recognition to status relationships between speakers rather than to the level of familiarity;

(Ellis, 1991)

Indeed, silence and longer pauses are tolerated much more than English speakers would like. Periods of silence can be unsettling for Americans. In the discussion class, tests are limited because of time constraints and teachers may think that silent periods are a waste of time, whereas time could be better spent speaking the target language. Backchanneling is good but is different in Japanese and serves a different purpose as mentioned previously. The need to teach certain speech acts for effective communication is an interesting idea, and is a part of pragmatic competence. As for the last point, one could argue that English speakers are required to explain themselves in discussion and justify their opinions with reasons and examples which can be understood. Otherwise, backchannels will be used to encourage speakers to be clearer and more direct, which is very different than in Japanese, where vague and ambiguous responses are acceptable.

Additional Issues

Possibly one of the bigger problems that students can have in a discussion setting is

pragmatic competence. Students need to use some speech acts and somewhat formal language to guide and facilitate the discussion. Students need to learn to be active participants in order to properly begin and end discussions, and to take part in any discussion, in order to avoid any periods of silence by asking questions or in reacting in some way.

Also, teachers may want to create a friendly, informal atmosphere in the communicative classroom, but when it comes to a class focused on academic discussions, the classroom changes where students are supposed to act in a more formal way.

An additional problem with teaching a discussion class may be that native teachers unconsciously want to teach students to discuss in the way they learned in their own culture. As students may not feel comfortable expressing disagreement, the teacher can accommodate students by teaching them to disagree politely. This is a bit of a compromise as it is culturally more comfortable for Japanese students. Finally, here are some possible solutions to assist students in doing a better job at discussing topics in English:

Possible Solutions

1. Backchannels in English have to be taught since Japanese backchannels are different and tend to be more nonverbal than in English. This includes reacting to what people say and acknowledging when misunderstandings arise.
2. Tie grades to what you want the students to do. Tell students that they will get a higher grade if they can disagree with their partner.
3. Teach students language functions such as how to politely disagree as a compromise. My way of teaching, which is of an American from the East Coast, is too direct for my students so polite disagreement is a way to maintain harmony in the classroom. We cannot force our students to act in a culturally different way, so this is a compromise. Dornyei and Thurrell (1994) also mention other important language functions such as “asking and answering questions, expressing and agreeing with opinions...making requests and suggestions, and reacting” (p. ?)
4. Try role play. Students can be in groups of three and one student can play the role of guiding the discussion. Dramatic techniques might be helpful as part of the challenge is to learn to use the appropriate phrases at the right time. For lower - level students they may need to read sample formal phrases. Students can take turns being the facilitator. This means that students can take turns being a moderator to guide the discussion. This is important since lower-level students may rely too much on the teacher, which forces the teacher to act as a facilitator. All students need to be trained to facilitate discussions without the help of a teacher. An example of this is from the book *Discuss the Changing World* which has sample phrases for guiding a discussion (Nakaya, et al., 2020).
5. Students can try a debate in order for students to improve at giving details, examples and reasons.. For students of science and technology, I think topics about artificial intelligence and nuclear power would work since students can take sides.
6. Have students write about certain topics and have them give reasons and detailed examples to justify their opinions.
7. Teach students conversation repair strategies. Dornyei and Thurrell (1994) mention

several examples. Perhaps the most important are “asking for repetition when you have not heard or understood something; asking for clarification when something is not clear; and, checking whether the other person has understood what you have said” (p.44).

8. Teach students conversational rules and structure. Dornyei and Thurrell (1994) mention the importance of openings, turn-taking, topic-shift, and closings.

CONCLUSION

Discussions in English can be rather challenging for the Japanese learner. Besides learning vocabulary, students need to learn a different style of communicating due to the different ways of discussions in Japanese and English. It is recommended that teachers give students adequate practice in many things. Students need awareness of backchannels in English. They should learn conversation repair strategies when needed. They need to learn that disagreeing is considered to be reasonable and is expected in English. Students should take turns being a discussion facilitator in order to learn phrases needed to effectively guide a discussion. Students are urged to justify their opinions and to give detailed explanations of why they hold certain positions. As this is not simple, students need practice with role plays, or in debate or in written practice in order to improve at participating in a discussion.

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