



## **Trends in Language Teaching 2022 Conference Post-Conference Proceedings**

Editor  
Anthony Brian Gallagher

OKINAWA JALT Trends in Language Teaching 2022 Conference was a fully online conference with participants from Okinawa and beyond held on Sunday, January 30th, 2022 (09:30-17:00 Tokyo Time)

Website Link <https://okijalt.org/>



The Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) is a nonprofit organisation dedicated to the improvement of language teaching and learning.

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

<https://jalt.org/>

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Okinawa JALT has two main purposes:

(1) professional development for language teachers; and (2) promoting language education in the community. Our events feature world-renowned scholars as well as local language professionals. We hold workshops to help our members with practical teaching needs.

We also provide opportunities to our members to make presentations and publish research. By working together as a dedicated community of professionals, we can share ideas and improve the quality of our teaching. Workshops and presentations are generally held throughout the year.

Additionally, we offer “Flex Events” for those wishing to organize their own workshops or conferences, as well as advice on how to organise and promote them.

## 2022 Okinawa JALT Events

July 17th, 2022: ***Summer Language Teaching Symposium***

July 29-31st, 2022: ***JALT Performance In Education Special Interest Group 4th Research & Practice Conference / Student Showcase / Film Festival,***  
Co-sponsored with JALT PIESIG.

October 9th, 2022: ***21st Century language Teaching Conference with TYLSIG\****

\*Teaching Young Learners Special Interest Group

\*\* Disclaimer: Events may be in-person, hybrid, or fully online depending on the situation. For more information please check the Okinawa JALT website for details. <https://okijalt.org/>



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### **The Challenge of Change: Hybrid Teaching and Learning during the Pandemic**

*by Sviatlana Karpava.*

*Pages 12-25*

### **Teaching Hybrid Language Courses With a Virtual Audio Mixer**

*by Hiroto Noguchi.*

*Pages 26-30*

### **Teaching Argumentative Writing in Junior High School**

*by Steven Lim*

*Pages 31-41*

### **Student-created infographics as a multifaceted tool in remote teaching**

*by Kristina Bradvica Šančić & Ana Kovačić.*

*Pages 42-54*

### **Operationalizing Sustainability-Related Goals (SRGs) in Japanese Elementary School**

**ESL Classrooms** by Jesse Reidak.

*Pages 55-71*

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Through **JALT**, you can become a member of a local chapter.

***Please consider joining Okinawa JALT*** and having access to our team of dedicated teachers who help each other. Call on our extensive and shared knowledge on creating interesting and engaging presentations. Share your ideas in our regular social evenings, get advice on how to go about practicing before you present in a friendly atmosphere with a group of tremendously kind and generous people. Grab the regular opportunities and get involved in language education. Meet, share, and collaborate!



## Keynote Speaker

### Doroth Zemach

Dorothy Zemach taught ESL and other foreign languages (including one she's not fluent in) for over 20 years in Asia, Africa, and the United States of America. She holds an MA in TESL from the School for International Training in Vermont, USA. Now she concentrates on writing, editing, and publishing ELT materials and textbooks and conducting teacher training workshops. Her areas of specialty and interest are teaching writing, teaching reading, academic English, testing, and humour. She is a frequent plenary speaker at international conferences and is active on social media.

#### Keynote: Hell in the Hallways: Future Proofing Your Career

"Whenever one door closes," as the saying goes, "another door opens. But it's hell in the hallways." Even before the pandemic hit, I was contemplating the evolving nature of work in our profession. What does it mean to hold a "full time job"? Is freelancing something you work up to, or work to get away from? Should experience bring a higher salary for the same work, or for more responsibilities? Is an hour of teaching worth more or less than an hour of working in an office?

And then the move to online learning and teaching so many of us experienced over the last two years—and continue to experience this year—led to even more questions. Is online learning better, or worse, or neither, or both? Should a teacher be paid according to their own local living expenses, or according to students' local living expenses? How do we balance our need to support ourselves with our desire to support economically (and emotionally) challenged students? How much of what we do—not just teaching but writing articles, giving webinars, professional development, and so on—should be free and how much should be paid? What are the options for someone who loves their job but feels underpaid? How can we future-proof our careers for uncertain times? What would change hellish hallways into inspiring corridors? I'm not going to pretend to have definitive answers; I don't think there are definitive answers. But I'd like to share with you the questions I've used to focus and adjust my own work life and mentor others. The conversation about how we work and how much we work and what all that is worth is one we should be having, not just with ourselves and our employers but throughout our profession.

Okinawa JALT held its online Trends in Language Teaching 2022 (TLT2022) conference on Sunday, January 30th, 2022. The theme for this TLT conference was the “Challenge of Change”. The past couple of years have been challenging for educators around the world, both as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic and due to the various secondary issues that have cropped up in the wake of the pandemic. We invited anyone who would like to communicate how they have dealt with any of the many challenges they have faced during the past year or two and what suggestions they have for others in similar situations.

The conference welcomed the following types of synchronous presentations:

- \* Research presentations (25 minutes + 5 minute Q and A)
- \* Best practice presentations (25 minutes + 5 minute Q and A)
- \* 3-minute presentations on any language teaching-related topic (3 minutes)

Also welcomed were the following types of asynchronous presentations:

- \* Virtual poster presentations (submitted as an image or PDF file for asynchronous presentation via an online gallery)
- \* Less-than-5-minute recorded presentations on any of the above (link to YouTube video)

Please check the website for additional details and information.

Post-conference publication opportunities continue to be available at future Okinawa JALT conferences and through the Okinawa JALT journal.

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## **FOREWORD**

We were delighted to host the Trends in Language Teaching 2022 International Conference, themed "The Challenge of Change". And we were pleased to welcome the many scholars who chose to share their knowledge and insight during the conference. The selection process for each of the presenters was thorough and strict, ensuring only the best were accepted. Since 2014, the Trends in Language Teaching International Conference has been a groundbreaking and historical event for the Okinawa Chapter of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT). Now it is an annual event featuring leading academics, from here in Japan and from abroad, giving presentations on current developments and insights on modern language education.

## **WELCOME TO OKINAWA JALT!**

We would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to all of the volunteers and the new team of officers who have been working 24/7 to help create and promote an atmosphere of learning, sharing, and professional development. We would also like to thank the many presenters and attendees who will be joining us for the conference and are looking forward to many interesting and insightful presentations from everyone. The Okinawa Chapter is one of 32 regional chapters within JALT. In addition to regional chapters, there are 30 Special Interest Groups, which allow members to explore their area of interest with like-minded educators. Okinawa JALT is an active chapter that sponsors four conferences a year. We have members from a broad range of teaching contexts, from pre-K-12 to postsecondary schools and private language schools. We have a diversity of nationalities and areas of specialisation. We encourage you to learn more about our organisation and consider becoming a member of JALT, one of the largest and most active professional organisations for language teachers in Japan.

Anne Hendl & Max Diaz  
Trends in Language Teaching 2022 Conference Co-Chairs



Japan Association of Language Teachers  
Okinawa Chapter





# **The Challenge of Change: Hybrid Teaching and Learning during the Pandemic**

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## **Abstract**

The outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) has affected the higher education sector, and e-learning has played a significant role during the ongoing present crisis. Digital technologies in higher education facilitate the learning/teaching process, thus creating a student-centred environment (Bates & Sangra, 2011; Johnson et al., 2016). Both teachers and students should have relevant training and support in order to use new technologies in efficient and effective ways. This study investigates the issues of student engagement in a hybrid learning environment, their attitudes towards online and face-to-face teaching and learning, the use of information and communication technology (ICT), the development of students' cognitive, social and self-directed learning skills, and future EFL teaching during a teaching methodology/teaching practicum course.

## **Introduction**

Educational institutions have had to adjust to new circumstances due to the pandemic (Ali, 2020; UNESCO, 2021), as well as to adopt new online platforms and different methodologies, which require both knowledge and relevant professional competencies for their successful implementation. Thus, both professionals and students have had to be trained in the use of tools for remote teaching and learning. It has become clear that more investment in technical infrastructure is needed.

Virtual teaching and learning have certain advantages, such as flexibility, the opportunity to be connected anywhere in the world, and not needing to commute to the university campus, whereas face-to-face learning brings students and their teacher together in class, thus giving them equal access to resources without any technical difficulties, such as unstable internet connections (Hwang, 2018; Verde & Valero, 2021). Recent research by Tait (2018), Bergdahl and Nouri (2020), and Reimers and Schleicher (2020) has shown that students' satisfaction is correlated with factors such as innovation and the use of ICT. Amongst the disadvantages of online and hybrid teaching are technical problems, such as the failure of cameras and microphones, slow/erratic internet connections at home, and

students' lack of motivation and engagement (Hwang, 2018; Simpson, 2018; Traxler, 2018; Leoste et al., 2019; Goodyear, 2020; Hod & Katz, 2020).

Face-to-face learning has certain advantages, as teachers and students can share the same physical classroom, which has been found to be effective for students' academic success (Konopka et al., 2015; Crisol Moya, 2016; Anderton et al., 2021). Given the current COVID-19 situation, more universities have introduced distance-based degrees, teaching, and programmes (Ben-Chayim & Offir, 2019; Ali, 2020; Hodges et al., 2020; Chick et al., 2020). Online teaching allows students to use technology and to attend classes remotely in synchronous and asynchronous ways (Hodges et al., 2020; Sandars et al., 2020), and students have the opportunity to watch recorded sessions whenever is convenient for them (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Ali, 2020; Bao, 2020).

At the same time, distance education, which was not affected by the pandemic, should be differentiated from emergency remote education, which forced teachers to improvise and to switch their face-to-face teaching to online platforms in the absence of adequate infrastructure support (Singh & Hardaker, 2014; Hwang, 2018; Daniel, 2020; Evans et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2020; Panisoara et al., 2020; Anderton et al., 2021). Hybrid and online teaching are associated with certain requirements, as both teachers and students need to use microphones and cameras for video conferencing (Hwang, 2018; Bao, 2020; Salikhova et al., 2020).

According to Lightner and Lightner-Laws (2016), Nuruzzaman (2016), and Heilporn et al. (2021), blended learning is a combination of online and classroom education. Verde and Valero (2021) attempted to make a distinction amongst different types of blended learning, while Misseyanni et al. (2018) and Bao (2020) defined hybrid education as a combination of online and face-to-face teaching and learning. Recent research has shown that hybrid teaching has an impact on students' academic progress and learning outcomes (Lightner & Lightner-Laws, 2016; Beatty, 2019; Binnewies & Wang, 2019; Mumford & Dikilitas, 2020). Mirror rooms, in which half of the group is present in the classroom and the rest of the students attend online, is another option for teaching, particularly during pandemics (Misseyanni et al., 2018). As blended learning presupposes an alternation between face-to-face and online teaching and learning, one option is to have a semi-present context (Cândido et al., 2020).

Verde and Valero (2021) conducted a study of the effects of the pandemic on tertiary education; their findings showed that both students and teachers found online teaching to be comfortable, accessible, and effective (Hwang, 2018; Leoste et al., 2019; Goodyear, 2020; Wang et al., 2020).

Amongst the benefits of blended education are the optimisation of the use of academic resources, control of capacity, and social distancing, all of which help to overcome the digital divide and to foster active and autonomous learning, the enrichment of knowledge, and didactic resources and skills (Beatty, 2019; Binnewies & Wang, 2019; Goodyear, 2020; Raes et al., 2020). Some of the disadvantages of online and hybrid teaching are technical problems, such as the failure of cameras and microphones, internet connections at home, and students' lack of motivation and engagement (Hwang, 2018; Simpson, 2018; Traxler, 2018; Leoste et al., 2019; Goodyear, 2020; Hod & Katz, 2020).

Our study aimed to investigate students' perceptions of their online and hybrid learning experiences during the pandemic, particularly the challenges and opportunities they have encountered since early 2020. The following research questions were investigated:

#### **Research questions:**

1. What are the students' perceptions of online and hybrid teaching and learning?
2. What are the students' needs, challenges and opportunities related to their online and hybrid learning experiences at university?
3. Have the students' online and hybrid learning experiences affected the way they intend to teach in the future?

#### **The study**

##### ***Participants***

This study investigated students' perceptions of their experiences of online and hybrid teaching/learning, as well as their challenges, needs and opportunities, and the implications for their own teaching practice in the future. The participants were 49 university students (third and fourth years; 41 females and eight males). Their ages ranged from 18 to 25 years (Mean = 21.13, Min = 18, Max = 24), their first language (L1) was Cypriot Greek, and they all resided in Cyprus. The students also knew and used other languages, such as Italian (14/28.5%), Arabic (5/10.2%), Russian (5/10.2%), German (5/10.2%), Turkish (3/6.1%), French (4/8.1%), and Spanish (9/18.3%).

The participants in this study were students who were participating in a teaching practicum (TP) EFL methodology course at a public university in Cyprus. They were required to prepare lesson plans,

to teach, and to observe their peers. In addition, they were asked to keep reflective journals and to complete classroom/peer-observation and self-evaluation forms (after teaching a lesson). They also had the opportunity to express their views, thoughts, and reflections via blogs, to discuss various issues in class, and to receive feedback on their teaching practices from their tutors and peers.

### ***Materials and procedure***

In this study, the researchers mainly employed a qualitative research approach for the data collection and analysis. The analysis of blog entries focused on the students' perceptions of online and hybrid teaching and learning, including the advantages and disadvantages, the relevant needs, challenges and opportunities, and the strengths and weaknesses of hybrid and online teaching during the COVID-19 crisis. They could also write about their attitudes towards and perceptions of online teaching and learning, as well as about their personal experiences and challenges regarding the use of online platforms and digital tools. Finally, they were asked to express their views about whether online and hybrid teaching and learning would continue in the post-COVID-19 era and whether they would implement online and hybrid modes in their teaching practice in the future.

The students wrote online blog entries (via Blackboard) once a week after their sessions (10 blog entries per student). The length of the blog entries ranged from 100 to 500 words, and there was no word limit. The students could view their peers' blogs and comment on them, while the tutor provided comments and feedback for each blog entry. The blogs were a form of formative assessment (or assessment for learning); the topics were based on the material covered and class discussions, and included teaching methods and methodologies, affective domains, the role of culture in teaching and learning, lesson planning, lesson aims, objectives and stages, lesson delivery, their teaching practicum, anticipated problems and possible solutions, the role of a teacher in class, error correction, explicit and implicit teaching, the use of technology, critical digital literacy, the blogging experience, classroom management, and other learner/teacher- and classroom-related issues.

## **Results**

### ***Students' perceptions of online and hybrid teaching and learning***

The analysis of the data revealed that the students, who were future EFL teachers, had both positive and negative attitudes towards online and hybrid teaching and learning. Overall, it appears that the

students preferred face-to-face teaching and found it to be the most efficient method, but they did admit that, as the online mode was related to the development of technology and the educational process, it could be the only way to teach during exceptional circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Amongst the disadvantages of the online teaching and learning experience were long hours spent in front of the screen, isolation and limited socialisation, lack of concentration, and technical problems. Not every student was able to follow and understand the content of the course/subject during the online session. The online mode also affected the students' participation and engagement in class – in particular, shy and introverted students were not involved in classroom discussions; see Example (1):

- (1) Online teaching and learning are a significant evolution in language learning and learning in general, but face-to-face learning is the best for me. More specifically, online learning and teaching is useful in difficult times such as in a pandemic. It enables learners and teachers to continue doing their job but it affects the learning experience, as it is more difficult for the learners to understand the lesson. In addition, the students may be shy to participate and ask questions in an online environment than in a regular classroom setting (Student 6).

At the same time, the students reported some *positive sides* of online and hybrid teaching, such as *flexibility, being able to be connected, and joining the class from home* without the need to *commute to the university campus*; see Example (2):

- (2) During COVID-19, we have experienced and we still experience many aspects of our lives differently. In order to adjust to the numerous changes, we had to find solutions that would help us be productive even in those kinds of situations. However, what affected us the most as students was the online teaching. At first, it was really difficult for me as a student to understand that, from now on, from some time, I will have to be behind the screen of my laptop and I have to give 100% in that kind of situation. I could not concentrate, and sometimes I had technical issues that stopped me from keeping up with the lesson. In my opinion, it also made us antisocial, we were no longer trying to communicate the way we were before. On the other hand, we got to be at our homes, which was more comfortable and that

is one of the main reasons I think students were not missing classes as much as before (Student 34).

According to the participants, hybrid teaching was quite challenging both for students and teachers as it requires digital knowledge and skills in order to be able to address various teaching- and technology-related issues and to appear in front of students in real and virtual classes; see Example (3):

- (3) Nowadays, after quarantine, students also have the opportunity to experience hybrid education. Hybrid teaching can be challenging for the professors and students as they must pay attention to both physical class and online class. It takes a lot of time to adjust, having two classes simultaneously, looking at the students in class, and bearing in mind that there are other students in the class as well, connected online (Student 7).

#### ***Students' needs, challenges, and opportunities: Online and hybrid learning experiences***

Due to the pandemic, the students' only options were online teaching or hybrid learning, for nearly two years. They had mixed feelings and attitudes towards this situation. Reflecting on their experience, they could see both the positive and the negative aspects. Apart from the comfortable environment of their homes, flexibility, and time efficiency, online teaching allowed them to have different modes of attendance, with or without their cameras and microphones on, which provided more freedom for them and they could decide when to have a short break or to have a snack; see Example (4):

- (4) Personally, I have been taking online classes for almost a year and a half. Therefore, I am experiencing vividly the so-called online learning. My attitude towards online classes is ambivalent. I tend to see the positive things in every situation, so I can mention many advantages of online teaching and learning. First, you do your classes in the comfort of your own home, so you do not spend time getting ready and driving to university or school. Also, at home, students are free to stand up, move their bodies, and eat something during their lesson. For me this is very helpful because little breaks help me stay focused and concentrate more. Moreover, school and university teaching rooms are unpleasant and have very uncomfortable

chairs. This makes the lives of the students more difficult. At home, students have the opportunity to do their classes in a cosy room sitting somewhere comfortably (Student 2).

The students acknowledged that online teaching and learning was a safe option for them during the pandemic, and that they had also developed their digital skills and digital literacy. However, they had certain challenges related to their virtual learning experience, such as a lack of motivation and concentration. According to the participants, the online format did not facilitate discussion and the students missed real communication with their peers and instructors; see Example (5):

(5) My online learning experience consists of both positive and negative attitudes. More specifically, the positive side regarding online teaching is that it was more convenient and safe when the pandemic was at its peak, and that I learnt how to use digital tools such as Microsoft Teams that I didn't know how to use before. On the other hand, I experienced some negative effects of remote learning such as demotivation and concentration problems. More specifically, sometimes I was demotivated in online lessons as it is not the same as sitting in front of the computer and 'watching' a lecture with going to the university and sitting in the class while also interacting and hanging out with friends. In addition, sometimes I had difficulties concentrating in the lectures as it was difficult for me to stay focused while sitting in front of the computer and sometimes I was not feeling comfortable to participate and ask questions in the online environment (Student 45).

Amongst the challenges that the students experienced were technical issues and the internet connection, as well as a lack of interest and motivation because, compared to physical classes, online sessions seemed boring and not engaging, as well as lacking interaction and discussion. The presence of teachers in face-to-face classrooms is of great importance because they guide and support the students and make the learning process and the academic outcomes successful; see Example (6):

(6) Online classes have some challenges. Even though it is easy for most students to use online platforms and digital tools, sometimes problems occur. For example, many times I lost internet connection or technical problems occurred, such as my device shut off or froze and I missed important things the teacher was saying. Plus, online lessons can be extremely boring due to the lack of interaction with our classmates and our teacher. I noticed that it's more likely for me to participate when I am in class rather than in an online lesson. Also, I like when I have my

teacher teaching in front of me, it keeps me focused. Teachers' energy and gestures, the whole energy of the class, it's an experience online lessons cannot provide to a student fully (Student 25).

### ***Implications for future teaching***

Most of the students believed that online and/or hybrid teaching will be implemented even after the pandemic, but in-person teaching will still be the preferred option. They considered certain advantages of remote teaching and learning, as it provides many opportunities for global education and technological development; see Examples (7) and (8):

- (7) In my opinion, I think that online teaching and hybrid learning are going to remain in the post-COVID time but to limited extent; that is, to the extent that face-to-face learning cannot take place such as in the case of learning in which the learner and the teacher live in two different countries. I believe that online learning and teaching will not replace face-to-face learning as, in my opinion, live teaching is the best method for absorbing the information in the lesson properly, and for interaction to take place, not only between teacher and students but also amongst students themselves (Student 21).
- (8) Reflecting on all my experiences now in online and physical classes, all I can say is that I am blessed first and foremost for having an education either online or with a physical presence. I prefer physical classes but I find it necessary to continue online if the circumstances are not allowing students, teachers and professors to be in classrooms. Online education will remain because there are many benefits regarding students that want to be in institutions that are far away from them and would have the opportunity to be in online classes in every corner of the world. I have friends and family members who had this opportunity, to be for example in Cyprus but study in other countries as well or do seminars online, attend conferences and have the opportunity to broaden their horizons and enjoy having access to every form of education that technological advancements have provided today for us and facilitated our lives in this way (Student 38).

However, some students had strong opinions that online and hybrid teaching would not continue after COVID-19. They believed that physical teaching was more efficient because it provided real communication and there was no harm to mental and physical health. Virtual teaching might not be the best option for group teaching, as there could be 'free riders' or students who were not willing to participate in class, and it was difficult for a teacher to encourage them due to being seen on the screen and not being physically present in a real class. The participants believed that it was difficult to have practical classes in online mode. Much depends on individual differences and the students' willingness to learn, as well as their responsibility for their own studies. Some students were quite sceptical about the role of technology in language teaching and learning; see Examples (9) and (10):

(9) I think that online and hybrid teaching and learning will not remain when COVID goes away, simply because we are humans, and we need human interactions. If we are all day in front of a computer for our lessons and to do our projects, we will harm our mental and physical health. In some cases, online meetings will remain but, when it comes to online classes, I feel that they will not continue because they have more disadvantages than advantages (Student 17).

(10) Personally, I have never been a particularly big fan of online teaching when it comes to group classes. All the difficulties both teachers and students have to face in a normal classroom are magnified tenfold in an online environment. Uninterested students place a very heavy burden on the teacher, and the fact that everything is done online gives them even more opportunities to get lazy and not be active and engage with the material. At the same time, many courses that are more practical than theoretical become either extremely difficult or downright impossible to do online, quite frankly due to their practical nature. I must, however, admit that, when it comes to one-on-one online learning, I can safely say from my own experience that it does not pose serious issues, provided that both the teacher and the student are willing to learn and work hard. If these conditions are not met, then learning cannot take place. As a final thought, I have never really understood why 'modern' technology has been glorified to this extent when it comes to language teaching. People have been learning things for quite a few thousand years, and they certainly did not have access to fancy equipment. I believe it is time that we stop acting as though flashy presentations and online

tools are the way that students learn better and stay motivated because, quite simply, they are not.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

The aim of this study was to examine the perceptions of students who were to become future EFL teachers regarding their online and hybrid learning experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, the challenges and opportunities that they experienced, and the implications for their own teaching practice in the future. The analysis of the data indicated that the participants had mixed feelings and attitudes towards online and hybrid modes of teaching and learning. On one hand, they found online teaching and learning to be effective in terms of critical literacy development, which corroborates the findings of the previous research by Bates & Sangra (2011). Both the students and their instructors had to adjust to new circumstances, to acquire new digital skills, and to learn how to use various tools and platforms, which was quite challenging, particularly at the beginning of the pandemic when they lacked proper infrastructure, training, and support. This is in line with recent research conducted by Ali (2020), Evans et al. (2020), and Hodges et al., (2020). The students acknowledged that online and hybrid teaching were flexible and convenient modes for teaching and learning, and that they could study in synchronous and asynchronous ways in the comfortable environment of their homes without the need to commute to the university, which appeared to be a similar pattern to that identified in the recent studies by Verde and Valero (2021), Hodges et al., (2020), and Sandars et al., (2020).

On the other hand, they felt that in-person teaching was more efficient because they had direct contact with their instructors and peers, and could ask questions and have fruitful discussions in class, which could enhance the students' motivation and engagement. There were no technical issues with internet connections and digital tools, which is in agreement with recent research (Goodyear, 2020; Hod & Katz, 2020). According to the participants, face-to-face learning facilitated the students' participation in class, better comprehension and retention of the material, and led to their academic success, which is in accordance with Anderton et al.'s (2021) research findings.

Most of the students believed that online and hybrid teaching and learning would continue after the pandemic because these modes of delivery are convenient and flexible. Distance learning and technological developments are currently on the increase and will continue in the future. At the same time, the students, who were future EFL teachers, were concerned about the role of technology in

language teaching, as it might not provide the most efficient method. The participants were in favour of in-person teaching because it creates a student-friendly environment, facilitates comprehension and the learning process, and leads to better academic outcomes. It is important to continue research with a focus on both teachers' and students' perceptions of online and hybrid teaching, and to compare different settings such as secondary and tertiary education, public and private spheres, and approaches in different countries.

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# **Teaching Hybrid Language Courses with a Virtual Audio Mixer**

Hiroto Noguchi

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## **Abstract**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many university courses went online. Some universities decided to return to in-person instruction as the pandemic abated. Due to social distancing guidelines and classroom capacity limitations, some universities could not avoid dividing students into two groups for hybrid classes, although most university classrooms are not designed for this type of class. Additionally, the assigned classrooms are usually too large for language courses. This has resulted in the use of microphones because instructors and students are not allowed to speak loudly. However, it is not easy to conduct such a course when an audio output cable is not available from the classroom audio system. This paper shows how hybrid classes can be taught inexpensively in an under-equipped university classroom.

While courses were taught entirely online in the academic year of 2020 at most universities in Japan, more and more universities returned to in-person instruction in 2021 as the number of reported cases of COVID-19 decreased. Almost all universities followed the strictest precaution measures, even when people were only required to wear masks and use disinfectant in public transportation and commercial facilities. As a result, universities could not provide enough classrooms because they instructed students to practice social distancing by only sitting at every other desk. Moreover, classroom participants were not allowed to speak in a loud voice. The use of microphones was thus necessary as participants had to maintain their distance from each other in large classrooms. Hybrid classes should be avoided because they decrease the likelihood of students coming to campus (Ishii, 2021) and because it is difficult to monitor two groups of students (Demura, 2021). This paper summarizes how a hybrid class can be taught in a typical university classroom designed for traditional in-person classes using a virtual audio mixer.

## **Types of Courses**

University classes can be divided into two types: in-person and online. Furthermore, online courses have three subcategories: synchronous, asynchronous, and hybrid (Guillemot, 2021). Hybrid classes

are a type of online class in a broad sense as they use online meeting systems to broadcast in-person classes live online. However, in this paper, the term “online class” refers to fully remote online courses and does not include hybrid courses.

### **Hybrid Classes in an Under-equipped Classroom**

Traditional in-person classes taught in a small classroom are the most accessible type of class to conduct in a hybrid style. Under-equipped classrooms are typical university classrooms with microphones, speakers, a projector, and a screen. When lecturers have a small number of students, they need to connect their computer to the projector using an HDMI cable. In this case, the lecturer’s voice should be relayed to students online with a built-in or external microphone connected to the computer. Lecturers do not need to do anything concerning the audio signal coming from the students online. As long as the laptop is appropriately connected to the audiovisual system in the classroom with an HDMI cable, lecturers and students can hear the online voices over the classroom speaker. However, students cannot hear the voices of their peers on-site. The instructor must repeat what the students in the classroom say. However, this is not the case at most universities where hybrid classes are necessary.

At such universities, the class size is large and students are divided into two groups. In addition, the classrooms are usually too large for language courses, and students must practice social distancing. Since neither instructors nor students are allowed to speak loudly, instructors have no choice but to use microphones. It is not possible to send the audio signal from the classroom audiovisual system with a cable in these classrooms because the settings are fixed or the cabinet is locked. There are only outlets for input cables, not for output cables. In some cases, it is possible to use an additional microphone connected to the laptop to send the on-site sound from the speakers to participants on Zoom. However, the sound may not be loud and clear enough as the microphone connected to the computer picks up the sound traveling in the air from the classroom speaker. Moreover, because feedback loops occur, using multiple microphones connected to Zoom from different devices does not work unless students use headphones or earphones, which makes the class an online course taken in a classroom rather than a hybrid course.

### **Hybrid Classes in an Equipped Classroom**

In an ideal classroom designed for hybrid classes, the output sound from the classroom audio system

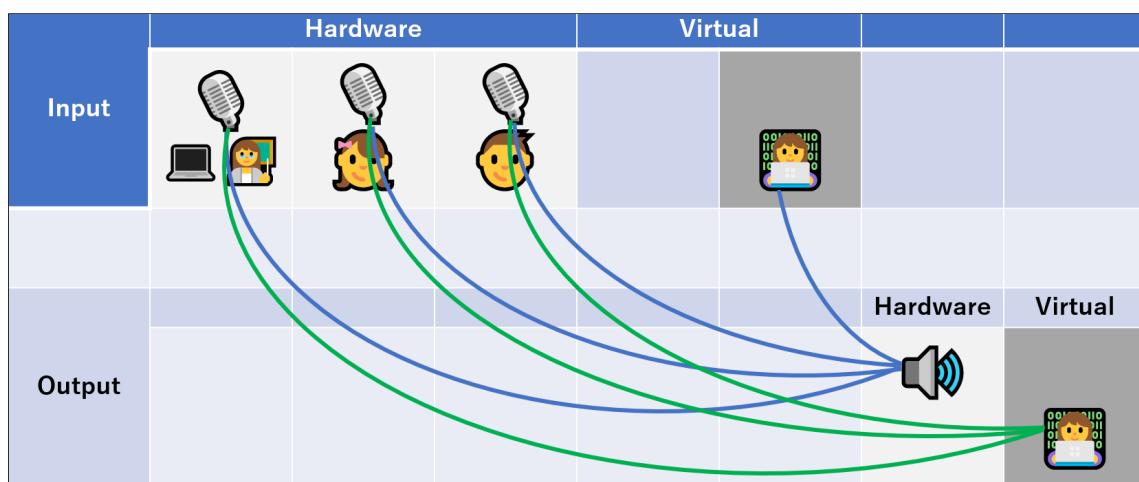
would be available using a USB or mini audio cable. Therefore, instructors would need to plug that cable into their computer and set the cable as the microphone in an online meeting system such as Zoom. It is necessary to send the classroom sound from a single computer so that the noise-canceling system works when the classroom speaker is used.

### Hybrid Classes with a Physical Audio Mixer

Instructors need to prepare microphones and an audio mixer in a typical under-equipped classroom. All of the microphones in the classroom should be connected. Wireless microphones are easier to use, but wired microphones are usually less expensive. Figure 1 shows how sound should be transmitted.

**Figure 1**

How Sound is Transmitted



There are two critical things. First, all the sounds from the classroom and from online should be mixed and sent to the classroom speakers. Second, all those mixed sounds except for the one originating online should be set as the microphone of the lecturer's computer sound on Zoom to avoid feedback loops.

When the instructor or the university has a sufficient budget, they can purchase a physical mixer. However, this piece of equipment occupies space. Additionally, inexpensive physical mixers usually do not have enough channels for microphones or do not provide phantom power for condenser microphones from all of the channels.

## **Hybrid Classes With a Virtual Audio Mixer**

To solve these problems, this paper proposes the use of a virtual audio mixer, VoiceMeeter Banana, which is donationware that is compatible with Windows. The software must first be installed from its website <https://vb-audio.com/Voicemeeter/banana.htm>. Then, the lecturer's computer sound settings should be changed, setting VoiceMeeter Banana as the default playback and recording device. After that, the computer should be connected to the classroom projector and speakers via an HDMI cable, and all microphones should be connected and selected on the mixer. It might be necessary to use converters to connect the microphones to USB ports; the ports supply the power that condenser microphones require. The number of ports can also easily be increased with a USB hub. Each hardware input should be sent to the classroom speakers and online participants, as shown in Figure 1. The virtual input from the online participants also needs to be sent to the classroom speakers so the lecturer and the students in the classroom can hear them. When the instructor wants to play audio files, the other virtual input should also be sent to the classroom speakers. The output channel assigned for the built-in computer speaker should be muted to avoid sound being heard from both the classroom speakers and the computer itself. Noise gates can be set to clear audio.

Although the setting procedure may seem complicated, the audio mixer saves the settings and automatically starts itself by enabling the “Run on Windows Startup” function. All the devices should be connected before booting the computer. If not, the mixer will prompt its user to reselect the devices.

## **Camera Issues With an Audio Mixer**

When an audio mixer is used, the mixed sound is sent online from the lecturer's computer. As a result, the meeting system will keep spotlighting the lecturer's camera. Installing another computer with a camera enables students online to see what is happening in the classroom. Tripods and tripod-mountable web cameras are useful for this purpose. If the instructor uses an external web camera, they do not need to stay in front of their computer. Online students can pin these cameras and switch to Gallery View, or the host or co-hosts of the meeting can manually spotlight their cameras.

## **Further Application**

The second external camera and laptop can be replaced with a smartphone. The front camera of a smartphone also allows students in the classroom to do group activities with students online. The instructor can change group members easily because they only need to move the smartphone with a tripod as the device does not have any cables. This method works perfectly when only one or two students are online because they are quarantined or are international students who are banned from entering the country. When the lecturer turns on the microphone and speaker of the smartphone, they need to turn off the sound from online, or the students in the group need to be in a breakout room to avoid feedback.

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# **Teaching Argumentative Writing in Japanese Junior High Schools**

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## **Abstract**

Writing argumentative essays is challenging for students because they require sufficient lexical and grammatical competence to express their opinion on unfamiliar topics using the conventions of the genre. In this article, I set out the case for teaching argumentative essay writing in junior high school and the guidelines for how to do so. Devised to prepare students for Japanese high school entrance examinations, the writing program builds students' self-efficacy by initially providing heavy scaffolding, then gradually reducing support as the learner gains confidence. A combination of peer and teacher feedback allows students to collaborate on what is traditionally seen as an individual discipline and to exercise analytical skills. By clearly explaining the scoring rubric that primarily rewards production over accuracy, students are encouraged to get over their fear of the blank page.

Due to an emphasis on the importance of communicative skills by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), essay writing in English is an often-overlooked skill in Japanese education (Mizusawa, 2020). The genre of argumentative writing has its own rules and characteristics that require explicit instruction, and teachers sometimes neglect to provide sufficient guidance and opportunities for students to practice. This instruction deficit might be due to concerns over the time-consuming nature of providing assessment and feedback, fears of intimidating lower-proficiency learners, or greater prioritization being placed on the skills given more weight in high-stakes school entrance examinations such as listening and reading. Despite these potential issues, argumentative essay writing can provide significant benefits for both teachers and students and therefore junior high school educators should teach it in a structured and deliberate manner. This article will present the case for the teaching of argumentative essay writing in junior high school, then offer guidelines on how to implement such a program.

## **The Purpose of Teaching Argumentative Writing**

The decision to begin an argumentative essay module is not one to be taken lightly. Though compulsory foreign language education begins in primary school, students are unlikely to have

attempted to write connected English compositions of greater length than a few sentences. However, teaching essay writing in a structured and consistent manner can be extremely beneficial for junior high school students. Focused and persistent argumentative writing practice can prepare students for the high school entrance examinations, train them in the use of writing strategies, develop their writing fluency, and provide a non-verbal outlet for them to express themselves in English.

### ***Meeting Learner Needs***

For both teachers and students in Japan there is an immense pressure to prepare for high school entrance examinations. One reason why teachers tend to eschew communicative activities in the classroom is in order to devote more lesson time to examination preparation (Kikuchi & Browne, 2009). The writing composition questions which feature in high school entrance examinations differ from school to school in terms of the requirements which need to be fulfilled, the form the question takes, and the genre of writing that must be utilized to answer it. One high school might ask examinees to write a letter using three or more sentences to tell a pen pal about their hobbies, whereas another might call for a 40-word paragraph expressing an opinion as to whether elementary school students should spend more time in nature. The latter type of question requires students to construct and express an opinion on a topic which they might never have considered while using infrequently encountered vocabulary. Furthermore, some schools demand specific formats for responses in terms of punctuation and spacing, meaning that if students are unprepared for these idiosyncrasies, the scores they receive could be negatively impacted. By practicing various types of questions and formats, students are less likely to be surprised when it comes to the taking of the entrance examination.

### ***Writing Strategies Instruction***

To help them handle the lengthy and complex texts in high school entrance exams, students are taught reading strategies such as skimming and scanning. The teaching of writing strategies is less common, but no less essential because without the use of strategies, students may struggle to organize their opinions coherently. Students need to acquire strategies such as planning, utilizing frameworks, time-management, and editing to help them cope with the demands of producing a suitable text within a limited period of time.

Planning a response by listing key points ensures that students have a well-supported opinion before they commit their ideas to paper.

These key points can be slotted into basic frameworks, such as answering the question in the first sentence, giving three reasons to support this opinion, then restating the answer in the final sentence. Frameworks provide a platform from which students can formulate a response to any question they might face.

Time-management is essential because students are likely to only have 7–10 minutes to spare for the essay question in the examination; learners need to experience writing under limited-time conditions so that they can understand what they are capable of producing in 7–10 minutes. Without experiencing these simulated exam conditions, they might either approach an essay question without an appropriate degree of urgency or could decide to avoid it under the mistaken belief that the time they had remaining would be insufficient.

Students should be taught to edit their answers by checking for grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors because a post-production period of self-analysis can contribute to their ability to self-correct (Vercellotti & McCormick, 2018). Finally, the necessity of practicing these strategies must be emphasized to the students. Strategy use is important because it has been shown to be positively correlated with learner proficiency (Huang et al., 2009). Teachers should present and practice the same writing strategies with students repeatedly because strategy instruction is most effective when it is a habit rather than an irregular occurrence (Brevik, 2019; Grabe, 2014).

### ***Fluency Development***

Argumentative essays offer students the chance to improve their writing fluency. Nation (2007) portrayed fluency as a vital component of a balanced language learning curriculum and suggested that a quarter of instruction time be devoted to developing it. According to Nation (2007) a fluency activity involves known vocabulary and language features and forces the learner to engage with the activity at a faster rate than they would otherwise choose to do so. Argumentative essays should require the learner to make use of language which is familiar to them in 7–10 minutes. In this way essay writing can serve as a fluency activity that reinforces existing language knowledge. In Japan, many schools follow a structural syllabus in which grammatical forms are taught in order of perceived difficulty. This can lead to forms being taught until they are assumed to have been mastered, before moving on to the instruction of the next form, a method of teaching which Nunan (1998) criticized as ineffective.

Compositions give teachers the opportunity to review previously acquired forms either by explicitly encouraging students to make use of a specific grammatical structure, or through what Ellis referred to as a focused task (2009) in which the use of a linguistic feature is suggested by the nature of the task itself.

### ***Non-Verbal Communicative Outlet***

At the Japanese junior high school level, writing is often inextricably linked with the notion of accuracy. Whether that accuracy is lexical or morphosyntactic, the aim of producing a piece of text is often to exhibit knowledge since it allows teachers to clearly examine learners' understanding of linguistic forms (Nemoto & Beglar, 2019). Conversely, communication is primarily associated with speaking; students' communicative competence is evaluated based on their ability to vocalize English under conditions which might be detrimental for learners who suffer from foreign language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). Being asked to produce verbal output for assessment can be challenging since it does not merely demonstrate knowledge of the mechanical aspects of producing English (e.g., pronunciation, intonation), spoken English assessments often require students to adopt certain performative actions (e.g., eye contact, gestures) in order to be judged an effective communicator. This focus on oral production as a means of evaluating communicative ability may be a source of frustration for some learners as it favors more extroverted personalities. Although teachers need to train students to be able to communicate orally, by giving students the opportunity to express their opinions through writing, learners are able to display communicative skills in a medium which does not require an instantaneous response. For learners who need time to form their opinions before committing to them, written rather than oral communication can be a more comfortable way of expressing their opinions.

### **Fundamentals of Teaching Argumentative Writing**

Argumentative writing is a complex discipline and as such it can be challenging for teachers to know where to focus their instruction. In the following section I will set out some principles which will ensure that students are not overwhelmed by the prospect of producing compositions and will provide a path to improved learner self-efficacy. Argumentative essay writing can be implemented successfully by using the other three skills to develop background knowledge, providing adaptable scaffolding, prioritizing of fluency, and through the use of actionable feedback.

### **Develop Schemata Using the Four Skills**

If taught as an isolated skill, composition writing might be a daunting prospect for learners. Inherently a solo endeavor, argumentative essay writing requires learners to form an opinion on a topic with which they could be unfamiliar or uninterested, leading them to become disengaged. By using the writing component as the culmination of a class using all four skills, teachers can develop learner schemata on the topic throughout the lesson, allowing learners to form their own opinions through exposure to those of others.

Pair or group speaking activities are a valuable first step in getting the students to engage with the subject. Using a topic related to the composition question for these discussions leads learners to retrieve relevant grammatical structures and vocabulary which they have previously studied. The speaking activity serves as a way to recall their own knowledge as well as tap into the knowledge of their peers.

Listening activities, on the other hand, give the teacher the opportunity to review relevant vocabulary and present alternative perspectives on the topic.

Short spelling tests can reintroduce previously studied words for students to make use of in answering the question, whereas activities which require learners to listen to different viewpoints can help them to form their own opinions by giving them something with which they can agree or disagree.

The reading activity, in which learners analyze sample answers to locate errors, serves the dual purposes of providing students with model answers to base their own responses on, in addition to raising their awareness as to frequently made mistakes and sensitizing them to these error patterns (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). The model answers can also be used to introduce useful essay frameworks and grammatical structures.

Through input enhancement, highlighting certain forms, or input flooding, using a form repeatedly, teachers can suggest the usage of certain grammatical structures by increasing their saliency (Brown & Lee, 2015). Genre writing instruction requires learners to be repeatedly exposed to examples of the genre in meaningful activities in order for students to become familiar with its conventions (Yasuda, 2011).

Through engaging with the topic with speaking, listening, and reading activities, students are prepared not just linguistically, but are invested mentally and thus are primed to tackle the argumentative writing question.

### ***Utilize Scalable Scaffolding***

One of the major challenges facing teachers is that they may have a wide range of English proficiencies in a single class. Building students' schemata and linguistic knowledge using activities covering the four skills gives all students the tools they will need to answer the question. But, in order to develop as argumentative essay writers, students need to utilize only as much assistance as they feel is appropriate. So, while less confident writers should be encouraged to make use of the vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and frameworks provided by the teacher, students who wish to challenge themselves should be encouraged to use their own linguistic resources and adopt a less rigid answer format using connectives and multiple clauses. Providing multiple model answers for student analysis allows the teacher to highlight the differences between simpler and more complex answers and demonstrates that there is a degree of flexibility as to how the question can be answered. Sociocultural theorists suggest that, whilst learners might initially require significant amounts of scaffolding, once they no longer require assistance, teachers should stop providing it (Lantolf et al., 2020). In large classes, such finely tailored scaffolding is less feasible, and as such teachers must rely on students taking responsibility for mediating their own learning.

The form of the response is not the only aspect of argumentative writing that needs to be scaled appropriately; learners also need to be built up from answering questions on common topics to more esoteric ones. Depending on the school, the subject matter addressed in the entrance examination differs drastically. In the 2021 entrance examinations, one high school in Saitama prefecture asked students to recommend places in their area to visit, whereas another posed a question concerning the ethical dilemmas posed by the proliferation of AI in the workplace. Teachers need to start by using topics with which students are comfortable to let them familiarize themselves with the patterns and frameworks utilized in composition writing, as well as the demands of producing a response in a limited period of time. Asking students to describe what they did last weekend is an appropriate introduction to composition writing because it only requires students to use the past-simple tense, common vocabulary, and the response can be factual rather than opinion based, leaving the learner to focus on fluent production. Teachers need to consider the factors of

learner topic familiarity and linguistic familiarity when determining what questions are appropriate for their students. Though the ultimate aim should be to tackle more complex and unfamiliar topics, building up to that level of challenge should be done at an appropriate pace.

### ***Focus on Fluency***

The purpose of any task must be reflected in its assessment. Since the primary goal is to develop fluency, it is important to use a scoring system which first and foremost rewards fluency over accuracy and complexity. The rubric I use, which is presented to the students prior to each writing session to remind them of their need to focus on volume, awards an A for writing 40 or more words, a B for 20–39, a C for 10–19, and a D for less than 10 words. This grading method could be perceived to be overly simplistic and exploitable, but considering the purpose is to help students conquer their fear of the blank page, it is better to reward effort than to punish errors. The addition of a plus, minus, or neither of the two symbols adds an element of nuance to the letter grade since it is determined by accuracy, complexity, and originality. By clearly explaining both the letter grade and plus/minus system, students can appreciate the prioritization of fluency whilst recognizing that the traditional writing assessment foci are contributing factors.

To further emphasize the importance of fluency, test conditions must be adhered to as rigorously as possible. Before starting the composition, a few minutes should be set aside for planning because this facilitates greater fluency in the task (Yuan & Ellis, 2003). Once the writing task begins, it needs to be conducted in silence, without access to resources such as textbooks and dictionaries, and with a strict time limit because, according to transfer appropriate processing (Lightbown, 2008), knowledge is more accessible when the conditions under which it was acquired are similar. When first introducing argumentative essays to students, longer time limits of up to 15 minutes can be given but teachers should gradually reduce this until the composition can be completed in the space of 7 minutes in order to simulate the time-sensitive nature of the high school examination.

### ***Provide Active Feedback***

Providing students with feedback is important because it is what the majority of learners want (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). However, in my own teaching context, it is not unusual to have 400 essays which need to be graded and returned within the space of a week. With such a large number of essays to look at, less than a minute should be spent per essay on assessment and feedback in order to make

regular writing practice practical and sustainable for the teacher. In order to give the students meaningful and actionable feedback, teachers need to employ the use of peer feedback and indirect feedback.

Ferris and Hedcock (2014) advocated for the use of peer feedback because it results in more feedback than the teacher is able to provide alone. Ferris and Hedcock (*ibid*) also suggested that being aware that their peers would read their work motivated students to engage with the writing task seriously, and that the peer feedback process would lead to improved self-analysis and self-correction. Once the time limit has expired for the composition, students should exchange papers with their peers and have 3–5 minutes to read them, write a comment, check for errors, and offer advice. Training students to look for commonly-made errors such as missing punctuation, incorrect capitalization, and spelling mistakes gives low-proficiency students the confidence to provide valuable feedback to their peers. This feedback period gives the students the chance to see writing as a collaborative process in which they can offer and receive help to improve their compositions. By seeing the work of their peers, students are also exposed to a more authentically level-appropriate model response to the question than the ones provided by the teacher. Following the allotted peer feedback period, students are free to use the remaining few minutes of the lesson to work on their essay alone or with assistance from their peers, the teacher, or material resources.

Teacher feedback should take the form of underlining three errors made in the text. Selectively addressing errors is necessary because to highlight all errors is a laborious process for teachers and that degree of feedback can be overwhelming for students (Ferris & Hedcock, 2014). It is important to choose errors students will be capable of self-correcting and do not require written prompts for explanation. Like peer feedback, these errors include spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, but also subject-verb agreement and errors related to tense. Learners are encouraged to correct these errors and to look for others; though a maximum of three errors are underlined, the students are told that it does not mean there are only three errors. This form of feedback demands a more active response than teacher correction as negative feedback requires more learner involvement than positive feedback (Mackey et al., 2000). If learners submit a revised version, the teacher may choose to adjust their grade accordingly. Students are motivated to engage with the feedback because it can lead to a concrete improvement in their assessment. If there is concern that students are eliciting the help of others to rewrite their essays, teachers can ask for metalinguistic explanations of the changes made from the first draft. For errors that are less simple for learners to self-correct such as word order,

articles, and prepositions, teachers should consider reviewing the linguistic feature at the start of the next lesson, especially if similar errors are widespread amongst the class.

## **Conclusion**

Argumentative writing is challenging for EFL learners because it has specific conventions, can demand a wide variety of linguistic resources, and may force learners to engage with unfamiliar subject matter. For students who have up until this point only been writing on the sentential level, it is a significant step up. This challenge is compounded by the fact that learners are expected to produce compositions under limited-time conditions. For these reasons, explicit instruction and the opportunity to practice essay writing is essential. Rather than just preparing students to take the high school entrance examination, it prepares students for the transition to high school English. This more academic form of English, which places greater emphasis on the ability to organize thoughts in a logical and coherent manner, is considered the next stage in their foreign language development.

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## **Student-created Infographics as a Multifaceted Tool in Remote Teaching**

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### **Abstract**

COVID-19 pandemic has challenged teachers and students on all levels of education to quickly adopt new methods and tools. This article presents an example of best practice employed to overcome some of the challenges of teaching English for Specific Purposes to undergraduate students during the pandemic. Teacher-created infographics have proven to be a useful instructional tool, but in this case it was used differently by having students create their own content. Student-created infographics became a multifaceted educational tool which allowed the students to develop new skills and learn through a practical assignment that engaged them on all levels of cognition according to the revised Bloom's taxonomy. It allowed assessment and evaluation of their knowledge, which was especially useful in the context of remote teaching. Finally, the infographics were used as a promotional tool for the academic institution to reach the general public, and an educational tool for other students.

## **Introduction**

### ***COVID challenges***

This case study reports on the implementation of infographics in English for specific purposes (ESP) courses at two faculties of the University of Zagreb that were taught remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. As evident from the reports of the national agency for science and higher education AZVO, COVID-19 has created many challenges for teachers and students in Croatia (AZVO, 2020 and AZVO, 2021). Institutions suddenly needed to generate a lot of content in very little time to compensate for the lack of direct contact with our students. Live online lessons quickly proved ineffective due to large group sizes and inadequate system capacity of the national distance learning platform - Merlin. It was not possible to conduct online testing properly, as described, for example, by Tan et al., (2021), as it was not possible to organize adequate monitoring for the number of students we had. In addition, it was more difficult to grade exams online due to the limitations of the Merlin platform as students experienced different technical issues with online lessons and exams. Overall, it was hard for teachers to connect with students, and it was strenuous for students to not be able to meet with peers and teachers in person. All of this led to students being less motivated and engaged during the second year of online lessons (AZVO, 2021).

### ***Solutions***

To respond to the lack of direct contact with our students and avoid system limitations, all the course content was moved online, all lectures were prerecorded , and many additional interactive online exercises were created to facilitate independent learning. Weekly live Q&A sessions were also organized in periods of lesser demand to discuss the course topics, share opinions, and answer questions after the students had watched the pre-recorded lecture. Lecturers remained constantly available via email, Zoom and Teams if students had any questions or problems. To ensure effective and reliable evaluation, a short written online exam and a project task were selected. After carefully considering the learning outcomes set forth in the syllabi and evaluating different options, infographics were chosen as the students' project task.

An infographic (short for information graphic) is a type of picture that blends data with design, helping individuals and organizations concisely communicate messages to their audience (Smiciklas, 2012).

## ***Infographics***

Humans rely heavily on visual information 80% of the sensory input we receive is visual (Jensen, McConchie, 2020) and 27% of the cerebral cortex is predominantly visual in function compared to about 8% dedicated to auditory, 7% to somatosensory, and 7% to motor functions (Van Essen, 2002). Our brains process visual information simultaneously as a whole, while text is processed in a much slower, sequential manner. By combining data with design, infographics enable visual learning by allowing us to absorb complex information more quickly and easily (Smiciklas, 2012).

Smiciklas explains that infographics are an effective communication tool because they correspond with the dynamics that characterize modern digital communication. Firstly, attention economy, unprecedented exposure to information from numerous sources results in short spans of superficial engagement making attention a precious commodity. Secondly, "word of mouse" or shareability, people are more prone to engage with and share short, condensed forms, and often see sharing longer content as disrespectful of other's time. Thirdly, aesthetics, our brains are looking for new, visually appealing content. Well-designed infographics tick all the boxes of modern digital communication by representing the gist of information in a visually appealing package that is easy to absorb (Smiciklas, 2012).

Infographics are often regarded as a modern means of communication, however, humans have communicated visually ever since cave paintings and hieroglyphics. The first infographics were those created by Nicole d'Orseme, Leonardo da Vinci, William Playfair (the pioneer of data visualisation with his book, "The Commercial and Political Atlas and Statistical Breviary"), Florence Nightingale, and Charles Joseph Minard. During the 1930s and 1940s, Otto Nerath developed a modern visual communication model using icons and pictures to teach ideas and concepts. In the 1970s and 1980s, mainstream media adopted infographics to facilitate the comprehension of difficult issues (Smiciklas, 2012). Today infographics are used for academic, editorial, and marketing purposes with different aims and characteristics (Lankow, Ritchie, Crooks, 2012).

There are three different formats of infographics, static (fixed information and passive interaction, output is still image), motion (fixed information and passive interaction, output is animated), and interactive (fixed or dynamic information input with active interaction, output is shaped by the user) (Lankow, Ritchie, and Crooks, 2012). Static infographics are versatile in application, the simplest and quickest to make, and require only the basic design and digital

competencies which makes them ideally suited for student projects. Students who already have or wish to develop more advanced skills might be interested in creating interactive infographics.

### **Theoretical background and framework for using infographics**

Various studies have shown that infographics are a valuable resource for teachers and students that facilitates comprehension, increases the speed of acquisition and the retention of knowledge, makes learning more appealing and relevant, improves engagement, and develops the skills required in the contemporary digital culture (Al-Mohammadi, 2017; Mod Noh et al, 2014; Pisarenko and Bondarev, 2016; Shanks et al, 2017; Alyahya, 2019). With 65% of the population being visual learners and it being physically easier for the audience to engage with information visually (Smiciklas, 2012), it is not surprising that infographics are a successful teaching tool. In today's world both communication and learning are profoundly changed by technology, pushing users to develop new communication skills and digital competencies. Contemporary students are far more likely to look for information in short digital forms from informal sources than to consult traditional, formal sources such as research papers or textbooks that are much longer and far more complex. Teaching students to read text is no longer sufficient and visual literacy becomes increasingly important. Teachers need to respond to information and media literacy demands of the contemporary digital culture by designing tasks that develop visual literacy and utilize modern contemporary communication media. Infographics grab the attention and concentration of the new generations of students more accustomed to short digital forms of communication (Islamogluetal 2015; Arlwele, 2017). They are also helpful in increasing general visual literacy and developing practical digital competencies and design skills crucial across disciplines in the contemporary digital culture. When designing an infographic, students engage in critical analysis of the material in the same way as when writing a traditional essay. The only difference is that in the infographics the thesis is presented visually and in the traditional essay textually (Matrix and Hodson, 2014). In order to be able to equip students with 21st century literacy skills, teachers need to keep up with the new technologies. For infographics to be used successfully, teachers need to be educated on how to create and apply them effectively. The need for teacher training and education in visual literacy, contemporary communication media, digital competencies, and design skills becomes ever more evident (Ozdamli and Ozdal, 2017; Fadzil, 2018). A well-designed infographic allows us to reach learners that have different learning styles, abilities, and capabilities, ensures better retention of information, improves the understanding of the information, ideas and concepts delivered, and

enhances the skills of critical thinking as well as developing and organizing ideas (Mod Noh, et al., 2014). In an environment where remote learning is becoming more common, it is important to find appropriate tools to facilitate independent learning. Infographics are particularly well suited for online and blended courses that combine full- and part-time students or students of different disciplines (Matrix and Hodson, 2014). Student feedback confirms that the task is perceived as useful, relevant, and engaging (Bicen and Beheshti, 2017; Alrwele, 2017; Alyahya, 2019).

### **Method and procedure**

Designing infographics is a task that engages students on all levels of cognition as described in the revised Bloom's taxonomy. On the very basic level, students had to remember the vocabulary and definitions used in the lectures and use them in their infographics. To be able to complete the task, they had to understand the course content, decide if the infographic they are creating relates to the course content, and explain the concepts related to the course topics. They used their analytical skills to research a topic, and categorize, compare, and organize information from their resources. They critically examined the available resources and carefully selected the information that would be included in their infographics. They demonstrated their visual literacy and digital competencies and applied their knowledge by transforming textual information into a new, visual form to present their topic to other students. They also acquired new design skills that they applied to create an original piece of content from the acquired information and visuals. The paper by Shanks et al. provided useful instructions and notes on timing and administering the assignment (Shanks et al., 2017).

### ***Project procedure at the Faculty of Traffic and Transport Sciences***

The task was administered during the COVID-19 lockdown in the fall semester of the academic year 2020/2021 to the second-year undergraduate students enrolled into the English language course of the Faculty of Transport and Traffic Sciences of the University of Zagreb. The course teaches English for specific purposes, namely, English for transport and logistics. The topics of the course include: telephone networks, autonomous vehicles, electric vehicles, urban rail transport, airports, micro-mobility, apps in transportation, multi-modal transport, current trends in logistics, and warehouse organization.

Students watched a pre-recorded lecture that explained in great detail what infographics are and how they are made. They worked individually and selected their own topics related to the course

topics. In the lecture, they learned about the different types of infographics in a video from Venngage and how to choose the one that suits their topic and purpose. They were provided step-by-step guides on how to make infographics, and abundant resources if they needed further assistance. Students used a planning template created by the teacher to plan their infographic and submitted their sketch for approval. Providing feedback before students started their work helped in avoiding some major mistakes at the very beginning. Students were also introduced to the many tools they could use to create their infographics and instructed to choose the design tool that best suited them. They watched a TED talk by David McCandless "The beauty of data visualization" (TED, 2010) to learn in an interesting and approachable way how data is processed into information, presented, and interpreted. They also learned about copyright, Creative Commons licenses, and citing sources. Many examples were provided for reference and further feedback was provided after submitting the first version of the infographic. The final version of the infographic was graded using a rubric that was included and explained in the pre-recorded lecture. Considering that some students might not have access to the required tools during the lockdown, there was an option to create the infographic in a traditional form as a drawing or a poster.

### ***Project procedure at the Faculty of Food Technology and Biotechnology***

This task was administered during the COVID-19 lockdown in the fall semester of the academic year 2020/2021 to the first-year undergraduate students of the Faculty of Food Technology and Biotechnology of the University of Zagreb enrolled into English for specific purposes course, which focuses on English used in the areas of biotechnology and food science. The topics of the course included: macronutrients, micronutrients, nutrition labels, laboratories and equipment, GMO technology, bacteria, food processing technologies, fermentation etc. For the infographic assignment, the students had to sign up in groups of five to six at which time they were assigned a topic from the lectures on macro and micronutrients. They watched a pre-recorded lecture that explained in great detail what infographics are, how they are constructed, and which tools they could use in creating their own submission. They also learned about copyright, Creative Commons licenses, and citing sources. Many examples were provided for reference and further feedback was provided after submitting the first version of the infographic.

Canva was recommended as a creative tool but not the only one permitted so the students were permitted to choose the design tool that best suited them. The teacher demonstrated to

students how she used the Canva tool to try and create her own infographic and used her experience to provide useful practical advice to students. In the lecture, the students also learned about the different types of infographics, about step-by-step guides on making infographics and abundant resources if they needed further assistance. Students could ask the teacher for help in clarifying anything and they could also get help at every step of the way. The students submitted their infographics for corrections and feedback and worked on them until they reached the final version. The practical work on infographics was not graded numerically but it was a mandatory part of the course that needed to be successfully mastered and completed.

The infographics were then published on a specially created Instagram page with a caption explaining the topic of the infographic. All content on this Instagram page was publicly available and created by students, but monitored by the teacher.

## **Results - Student-created infographics as a multifaceted tool for remote teaching**

### ***Infographics as a learning tool***

By successfully completing the assignment, students did not merely learn the course content, but were able to acquire and apply important visual literacy skills required by the 21st century digital culture. They learned about the difference between data and information, how data is processed into information, and how to present information visually. They were introduced to the basic elements and rules of design and had a chance to practice and improve their digital competency skills using their preferred design tools. They were able to present a professional topic to the public in an accessible way and discovered the value of visuals in teaching and informing. They learned about the difference between original content and plagiarism, and how to properly select and cite sources. They learned how to abstract a lot of data and choose the most appropriate way to present the key points. Students who worked in groups also had a chance to practice their cooperative skills and task delegation.

The task was well suited for large groups and an excellent supplement to prerecorded lessons and did not negatively affect the teacher or student workload. It allowed students and teachers to develop visual literacy and gain valuable skills. It also increased student engagement as students were more motivated to work on topics they could relate to and felt that their learning was purposeful. They also enjoyed the project more than writing a test.

Student feedback was collected only informally, as that was out of the scope of this article.

### ***Infographics as an evaluation tool***

The task enabled an easy and accurate evaluation of students' knowledge, which was especially useful in the context of remote teaching. The key tool for this was a well-prepared rubric that was presented to students before they started working on their task.

At the Faculty of Transport and Traffic sciences, the course grade was based on 70 points. Students could earn up to 25 points for the infographic assignment, 25 for a short, written composition, and 20 for an online written exam. The students who opted out of the assignments could complete the course through a traditional written exam. Out of 128 students, 83 participated in the task, 11 opted out of the task and passed through the traditional exam, while the remaining students had to repeat the year. The table below shows how the students completed the course and their final grades. The students who completed the course were graded on a scale from 2 - adequate to 5 - excellent.

**Table 1**

*Students' final grades at the Faculty of Transport and Traffic Sciences*

	Completed the course	2 adequate	3 good	4 very good	5 excellent	Failed
Took the traditional exam	11	8	3			
Participated in the task	83	9	23	23	26	2
Total	94	17	26	23	26	2

### **Discussion**

Overall, students were engaged, motivated, and successful in completing their task. No formal feedback was collected, but the informal comments were positive. The assessment rubric for the infographic assignment included five elements, as follows: Topic and Title (topic and title are clear, interesting, and relevant); Structure and Content (infographic is informative; main point, secondary points, and supporting details are well structured and clear, data and information is accurate); Type and Layout (the type of infographic is well suited to the content, information is well organized, and the infographic conveys its message clearly); Graphics and Style (infographic is simple and visually

appealing; visual elements support the content and make data and information easy to understand); Sources and Copyright (infographic is an original piece of work; sources are clearly cited and reliable). Students could earn up to 5 points in each category for a total of 25 points.

At the Faculty of Food Technology and Biotechnology the students work was not evaluated numerically, but through reaching the desired outcomes and creating a successful infographic that satisfied the standards of being visually appealing, concise, clear, correct both in professional and language terms and a piece of original work. The students cooperated among each other and with the teacher who provided feedback. The students who would have failed to complete this task, would not have been able to successfully finish the course. Luckily, all the students were engaged, motivated, and successful in completing their task. No formal feedback was collected, but the informal comments were positive. The students were especially proud of showcasing their work online as they could share this with other people who were able to see a piece of their work.

### ***Infographics as a promotional tool***

According to Alexa et. al.(2012), marketing plays a major role in any organization, and universities need to use it as well in order to adapt and succeed in the changing environment. The internet and social media are useful tools that universities can use to better communicate with their target groups (Alexa et. al, 2012). Being able to show to the public something that they created as a part of their course was an appealing aspect of this task for the students but for the institution as well. Publishing infographics online enabled the faculty to reach more people, promote their work, increase the online presence of the institution and make it more appealing to the target audience and potential students. The students also have an online repository of their work through which they can easily find the topic they want to learn more about or revise what they have learned. Furthermore, the public can learn more about the topics from food science in an interesting and visually appealing way and from a more reputable resource since the infographics were made by students using relevant resources. Thus, the uses and advantages of using infographics as a promotional and educational tool have proven, through practical use, to be manifold in this particular case.

## **Conclusion**

Infographics are not a new concept but can be a powerful tool in the contemporary digital communication culture. In the world saturated with data and information, they manage to capture the normally fleeting attention of the modern reader and help understand the gist of information quickly. Using infographics in education proved to have many benefits, from helping students understand course content and learn more easily and quickly to developing visual literacy and digital competencies. Creating their own infographics engaged students on all levels of cognition and increased motivation by making learning purposeful. The assignment remains appropriate for large groups of students with different levels of proficiency and learning styles and provides a balanced evaluation tool in terms of student and teacher effort. It also successfully resolves the issues of distance learning by creating teacher-student and peer-to-peer (if there is peer-to-peer evaluation) interaction that is usually lacking when working with large groups online.

Another benefit is that the infographics created by students can be used to promote the institution by reaching out to the public on social media. This case study reported the successful application of infographics in English for specific purposes courses at two faculties of the University of Zagreb that were taught remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and the benefits of implementing it. Overall, the experience in this case study speaks greatly in favor of using infographics in teaching, especially in remote teaching, but further formal evaluation of the tool is needed to verify what was learned through our practice. Further research should be conducted to formally and properly measure task reception and effectiveness in terms of ease, speed, and level of acquisition and retention of knowledge and skills. It would also be beneficial to develop a framework for teachers and organize workshops to train teachers in using infographics with their students to achieve the desired results.

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# **Operationalizing Sustainability-Related Goals (SRGs) in Japanese Elementary School ESL Classrooms**

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## **Abstract**

The United Nations created 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). Many ministries of education have striven to incorporate SDGs into their curriculums since SDGs officially commenced in 2015 with an expected completion date of 2030 (MEXT, 2021). Implementing the 17 SDGs in Japanese elementary school settings using English can be particularly challenging due to the intricacies embedded in the various goals. Simplifying aspects of the SDGs into sustainability-related goals (SRGs) provides students with enhanced accessibility to concepts that are otherwise outside of the scope of elementary school-aged learners.

Integrating SDGs into ESL classrooms has become increasingly popular in many elementary schools in Japan as can be evidenced by private schools advertising SDG lessons taught in English. The lesson plan included in Appendix A, supporting literature, and lesson rationale are provided so that educators have a framework for simplifying SDGs into SRGs. Aspects of TBLT, CBI, and pre-task/task/post-task sequences are discussed in relation to operationalizing SRGs in ESL elementary school classrooms.

## **Introduction**

The United Nations proposed 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for educational institutions to use as an approximate blueprint to create a more livable future (United Nations, 2015). The SDGs were implemented in 2015 and have an intended completion point of 2030. The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) requested that teachers integrate SDGs into program curriculums (MEXT, 2021). The 17 SDGs contain complexities that young learners would find challenging in their L2. SDGs can be incorporated into L2 curriculums for young learners if SDGs are greatly simplified. The proposed lesson plan found in Appendix A is focused on how students can simplify SDGs into sustainability-related goals (SRGs). The purpose of the lesson plan is to encourage students to co-construct SRGs that they feel are relevant in their daily lives. Studying SRGs in English is an exciting new way to incorporate content-based lessons into an ESL curriculum.

A combination of pedagogical approaches can be used to introduce young learners to SRGs. Task-based language teaching (TBLT) offers the ability to present sustainability-related realia to students (Willis & Willis, 2007). Via pre-task/task/post-task sequences (Shintani, 2019), learners should be able to collaboratively brainstorm, discuss, and create skits regarding SRGs relevant to their lifestyles. The pedagogical design of the lesson plan—shown in Appendix A—is intended to act as a base upon which more SRG content can be layered in the future. Meddings and Thornbury (2009) wrote that the number of young learners studying English will outnumber all other age groups within the next few decades. It is of paramount importance that SRGs are introduced to young learners so that they have time to discover which SRGs best fit their lifestyles. The aim of this study was to methodologically outline how to implement SRG lesson material in a content-based ESL classroom.

## Literature Review

The theoretical principles utilized in creating the lesson plan included in Appendix A are student autonomy, task-based language teaching (TBLT), sociopolitical considerations, and pre-task/task/post-task design.

Willis and Willis (2007) wrote of the importance of bringing the real world into the classroom and the importance of providing learners with experiences in the classroom that reflect what is happening in students' lives—or communities—outside of the classroom. Operationalizing TBLT for young learners can be enacted if educators are willing to try young learner-specific TBLT (Carless, 2002). TBLT lessons are highly communicative, so young learners must possess a basic conversational L2 ability. If the young learners possess a basic conversational ability, they must also be provided with enough autonomy to develop original ideas in their L2.

Without autonomy, learners cannot fully develop their ideas; allowing students to build original content during class time provides a more deeply enriching educational experience (Benson, 2011). Young learners are sometimes not given the ability to develop autonomous ideas, but there are methods for helping them to accomplish this goal (Carless, 2002). One such example is allowing young learners to make pictures of their thoughts and feelings if they struggle with outputting their ideas orally (Carless, 2002).

Delivering lessons that incorporate TBLT and autonomy-related principles is not straightforward—utilizing a pre-task/task/post-task lesson framework (Shintani, 2019) helps students process and develop lesson content effectively. If students are not given a pre-task (i.e., planning time)

before a task, it is sometimes difficult for them to successfully execute the main task with a clear understanding. Post-tasks allow students to report back to their classmates for the dual purpose of knowledge consolidation and keeping learners engaged in performing the main task (Shintani, 2019). Locating interesting content to develop into pre-task/task/post-task design depends on group-specific student interests and classroom dynamics. Providing learners with collaborative writing assignments is an excellent way to promote cohesive group work (Manchon, 2011). Writing assignments can generally be converted into pre-task/task/post-task configurations.

Deploying a pre-task/task/post-task design with a focus on student autonomy connects well with what Richards and Bohlke (2011) called “meaningful learning outcomes” (as cited in Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 199). Developing meaningful learning outcomes is a subjective process.

Crookes (2003) referred to a host country’s local philosophy of education as ethnopedagogy. Educators teaching overseas must consider various learning outcomes viewed through the lens of their cultural ideas, host country ethnopedagogy, or hybridization of both. Without considering the intersection of local culture and methods for classroom management, students can foreseeably become disagreeable during class time. Allowing students to use their L1 can be an excellent way to circumvent such learner disagreeability—as long as L1 use does not usurp overall student L2 use. Many ESL programs try to eliminate students’ L1 use during class time. There are, however, instances when allowing students to utilize their L1 during group work can help students stay on-task (Laufer & Girsai, 2008; Leeming, 2011).

Fundamentally, teachers can build what Foster and Hunter (2016) referred to as tailormade experiences that best suit learner needs. Developing home cooked lessons that are not available in teacher’s guides is a slow and tedious process replete with road bumps. Scaffolding student autonomy and collaboration is a laborious process for teachers according to Jackson and Kaplan (1999). The authors wrote that teachers should curate a collaborative learning environment containing handcrafted resources (Jackson & Kaplan, 1999). Richards (2002) discussed the value of teachers utilizing a bottom-up (e.g., art-craft conception) approach. Utilizing such an approach allows teachers to create original multi-lesson plans that can incorporate TBLT, student autonomy, and collaborative writing while concurrently respecting local host country ethnopedagogy.

## **Teaching Context**

The study was carried out at a private Catholic elementary school in Japan. There were approximately 650 learners that made up the total elementary school student body. The school had an international program but did not feature total immersion-styled learning. Half of the classes were designated as *sogo* (EFL), while the other half were called *kokusai* (ESL). The *sogo* classes followed the traditional MEXT curriculum, and the students received between 1–2 hours per week of EFL instruction. The *kokusai* classes received content-based instruction (CBI) for most of their classes—with the exception of grade 5–6: math, social studies, and science classes. The *kokusai* students also studied Japanese in their L1. The *kokusai* students studied between 75–90% of their classes in CBI classrooms taught by team teaching dyads—one native English speaking teacher (NEST) and one Japanese teacher who holds a MEXT-certified Japanese elementary school teaching license.

The proposed lesson plan included in Appendix A was designed for a grade 5 *kokusai* English class at the elementary school. The English curriculum for *sogo* classes is quite regimented, whereas the *kokusai* curriculum is quite open and flexible because of the increased number of overall weekly English classes. The elementary school management welcomes the implementation of original content (e.g., Appendix A). Because the NEST colleagues teach content-based classes such as science, there is a distinct need to create a crossover between English and content-based lessons. An Example of such crossover is the inclusion of SRGs studied in the science classes into the English classes. Such crossover learning reinforces subject material and gives the students a chance to apply their ideas and L2 skills in creative and challenging new ways (Lyster, 2017).

The students in the grade 5 *kokusai* classrooms were between 10 and 11 years old. The students possessed a range of diverse language backgrounds. A small number of the students were returnees or were born into families where at least one parent used English as an L1. Either of these conditions generally ensured that such students would have stronger English abilities than their classmates. The vast majority of the students at the elementary school had Japanese parents and spoke Japanese at home, however, many of the students participating in the *kokusai* stream also attended afterschool programs for additional English learning. The majority of the students possessed intermediate level English proficiency and could maintain English conversations as long as their interest in each topic remained.

## **Lesson Goals**

The terminal and enabling objectives that appear in Appendix A were created with one crucial undergirding theme: introducing young learners to SRGs in an age-appropriate manner. In standard *sogo* lessons at the elementary school, the NEST co-workers and the researcher focused wholly on English education and did not introduce SRG content. It was possible to introduce the SRG content into the *kokusai* classroom because of the utilization of a content-based language teaching (CBLT) approach. Lyster (2017) defined CBLT as an approach in which content classes (e.g., science, geography) are studied in students' L2. Lyster (2017) also wrote that CBLT is a more interesting and motivating way to achieve purposeful communication in an L2 over a typical grammar-based approach. In Kyoto, several private elementary schools have started utilizing CBLT or related content-based approaches. Such pedagogy is in demand by parents and can even be considered as trendy nowadays (Heras & Lasagabaster, 2015).

One of the significant differences that enable CBLT to be taught in ESL classrooms and not EFL classrooms has to do with testing. Many EFL curriculums are on a tight schedule, and the teachers need to make sure that their learners will be able to pass MEXT appointed tests. However, because ESL and CBLT classrooms meet more frequently and there is a general lack of standardized content testing (Dalton-Puffer, 2006), content teachers have more leeway about which lesson materials that they can bring into their classrooms. The NEST colleagues teach various content-based classes such as science which can be used to pre-teach concepts (e.g., SRGs) before executing such content during regular English classes.

It is possible to produce two very different types of language users. The first can obtain high marks on tests and can read and write exceptionally well. The second type of language user might score slightly lower on tests, and their reading and writing might not be particularly advanced. Nevertheless, the latter student is more likely to be able to cognitively integrate multiple sources of interdisciplinary thoughts and then verbally output the synthesized consensus they have reached. It is impossible to satisfy all educational criteria simultaneously (Swann, 2018), but the lesson plan included in Appendix A is designed with the goal in mind to straddle the divide between the two types of language users discussed above.

It would be ideal for students to learn about—and be able to discuss—world issues (e.g., SRGs), but not at the expense of their reading and writing skills. So, the lesson plan was designed with careful balance so that the students could develop and refine their conceptual content-related ideas

and practice reading and writing concurrently. In an increasingly globalized world, educators can consider providing their students, as early as possible, with sustainability-related conceptual tools that they can apply in their daily lives.

## **Lesson Plan and Rationale**

### ***Pre-Task 1: Sustainability Icebreaker***

The grade 5 students at the elementary school involved with this study possessed familiarity with SDGs and knew that the topic had become somewhat of a focal point in Japanese society—as is evidenced by SDG adverts on prominent display on commuter trains and more widely around Japanese cities. Studying non-traditional topics during English classes might pose difficulties for students unfamiliar with the subject material. To circumvent this concern, the lesson plan is designed to begin with an icebreaker which also serves as a pre-task. The pre-task is designed to segue into the main task and concludes with a post-task. A pre-task/task/post-task design was selected because research (Shintani, 2019) had demonstrated educational gains for students utilizing such a framework.

During the pre-task, students are presented with realia related to SRGs (e.g., a tumbler, an eco-bag, and a bicycle bell). The researcher decided to utilize realia because Willis and Willis (2007) aptly demonstrated that using realia during class helps link the classroom to the real world. The lesson plan is focused conceptually on ways to improve society, so it is critical to establish a linkage between the classroom and life outside of the classroom. SRG-related realia should be contrasted with environmentally harmful items (e.g., a disposable cup, a plastic bag, or a model toy car). Students should then be asked to discuss—in dyads—whether they would prefer to use the SRG-related item or the environmentally harmful item. Such consciousness-raising activities align with task-based language teaching (TBLT) precepts (Willis & Willis, 2007). Pairing students in dyads reduces teacher-centeredness in the lesson and allows students to engage with their interlocutor utilizing both aural/oral (i.e., input/output) streams—thereby maximizing students’ dyadic speaking and listening opportunities during the task (Lambert et al., 2017).

### ***Task 1: Brainstorm SRGs***

Task 1 is for student dyads to generate as many SRGs as possible. As Dornyei (2001) wrote, if teachers want to relate class content to student experiences, teachers need to discover what types of experiences students are having outside of the classroom—which can be facilitated via group

discussion and brainstorming. Rather than dictating to students which SRGs they must study, brainstorming was utilized to discover—and share—what was already happening in students' lives—relating to SRGs. The students should be asked to record their brainstormed material into their notebooks. It is essential for students to write vocabulary, ideas, and other concepts into their notebooks as a tool for self-study and review. Students can keep their writing as a record of what they studied, and it can also be utilized to conduct a review of lesson material while concurrently practicing reading. As Grabe (2017) wrote, "students only become good readers by reading a lot" (p. 308).

Students should be informed about post-task expectations—they must agree upon their two top choice SRGs and report them to the classroom in dyadic tandem. As Shintani (2019) discussed, having post-task expectations pushes students to focus more attentively on tasks because they will be aware that they will need to output what they have produced.

### ***Post-Task 1: Reporting SRG Selections***

Students are then asked to report their top two SRG choices that were most relevant to their lifestyles in dyadic tandem. Their brainstormed ideas (i.e., spoken output) are then written onto the board. Many of the brainstormed ideas will undoubtedly be collocations, or rather, what Uchihara et al. (2021) referred to as lexical bundles. Learning lexical bundles is advantageous for students as they can learn a combined larger number of vocabulary items compared to single word vocabulary items (Uchihara et al., 2021). Many students will provide collocations that do not match native-speaker English. An example taken from the study is "food for hungry people." There are collocations that are more familiar to native speakers, such as "help feed the poor" or "help poor people." The lexical bundles provided by the students can be revised before being written on the board.

Arriving at more collocationally accurate structures will involve two steps. First, is to seek corrective feedback from the students for inaccurate collocations written on the blackboard. Ellis (2006) suggested that students provide each other with corrective feedback rather than the teacher performing the function—to deepen student learning. If students cannot collaboratively arrive at a collocationally correct phrase—a phrase that native speakers of English would commonly use—then they can be assisted. Reading collocations that are written on the board and then writing the collocations into their notebooks will provide students with reading practice which is in line with benefits discussed by Grabe (2017).

### ***Pre-Task 2: Collaborative Skit Writing Example***

Shintani's (2019) proposed pre-task/task/post-task design does not appear to present multiple-use limitations within single lessons; nor does it prohibit ending lessons—and continuing them later—between the tripartite stages of the task framework. A second task should be utilized in the lesson plan, but the post-task should serve as an icebreaker for the follow-up class.

The second task begins with a pre-task focusing on collaborative skit writing. The task should be modeled on the board by numbering a vertical axis of speaker turns as pictured in Appendix A—and then providing the first line of dialogue as an example for the students. The dialogue should involve humor rather than seriosity (e.g., “I love driving to the convenience store that is very close to my apartment”). Humor will be incorporated to parse the disconnect between the embedded gravity of SRGs and—the majority of—young learners’ lack of deep cognitive understanding relating to social issues. Dornyei (2001) wrote that the use of humor uplifts the overall classroom atmosphere—which is necessary when introducing young learners to impactful social issues such as SRGs. Students will be asked to contribute additional content to the exemple model skit being written on the board. Creating a collaborative group-based model for the task can succinctly demonstrate the desired task outcome and help students’ overall motivation (Brown & Lee, 2015).

### ***Task 2: Commence SRG Skit Writing***

Students will discuss—in dyads—which SRG topic they would like to select and use for skit writing. The lesson is not negatively impacted if more than one dyadic group selects the same topic because each dyad will generate an autonomous skit. Allowing the students the chance to brainstorm SRGs, freely select a topic, and then create their own dyadic SRG skits are all examples of autonomy in the classroom. Giving learners the ability to study autonomously and make such decisions for themselves provides them with an increased impetus to learn (Benson, 2011).

The students should then be notified that the current lesson will be one of three and that they will be afforded time to complete their skits during the upcoming weekly classes. As Teimouri et al. (2020) suggested, challenging students with multi-lesson activities will help improve overall student motivation-related grit. Coupling autonomy with grit-building precepts will help scaffold student progress over the course of several lessons. Students should be reminded to incorporate as much humor as possible—without going overboard—into their skits. Dornyei (2001) proposed that inserting humor into classrooms will give students an added boost to what otherwise could become a dull and

unrewarding writing assignment; young learners generally enjoy lighthearted activities in which they can share school-appropriate humor.

### ***Lesson Closure***

The lesson closure is aimed at providing students with an overview of the remaining two lesson segments so that they can plan accordingly. Students should be encouraged to meet with their dyadic group members outside of class to collaboratively generate new ideas about directions they would like to take in the following classes. Ericsson and Harwell (2019) discussed the tenets behind deliberate practice; working with a coach (i.e., teacher) and diligently spending time on skill-building—whatever the skill might be—to improve overall performance. Helping students discover the value of collaborating outside of class time is a crucial skill they will need as they progress in their academic lives.

Creating a multi-tiered lesson that will benefit from students collaborating outside of class time, is key to the proposed lesson plan. If the students can engage in some semblance of deliberate practice during the weeklong gaps between classes, they will glean benefits from their efforts, such as participants in Ericsson and Harwell's (2019) study did. Students should also be told that they will be able to use tablets to create digital aids for their presentations. They should also be permitted to hand-make visual aids such as posters and be allowed to bring in school appropriate props. Such autonomy (Benson, 2011) provides students with the freedom to personalize their skits, where such personalization and freedom of choice are not generally afforded to grade 5 elementary school students in Japan.

### ***Limitations and Conclusion***

The limitations of the lesson plan rest primarily on curriculum-related time constraints. MEXT (2021) proclaimed that educators in Japan must do their best to incorporate SDGs (SRGs) into classes, yet many Japanese homeroom teachers already report facing difficulties finishing the regular curriculum before the end of each term—without factoring in sustainability-related studies. Many Japanese homeroom teachers at the elementary school say they would like to incorporate SRGs into their classes yet find it challenging to find the time to do so. If homeroom teachers are to incorporate more SRG content into their Japanese-taught courses, it could provide the students with a baseline understanding of SRGs in their L1 before encountering such content in their L2. Many of the students

in this study—although in grade 5—reported limited encounters with SRG content before taking the class proposed in Appendix A. This is a limitation inherent to the rushed implementation of SDG content by MEXT. Curriculum building is a slow and delicate process, and any amendments to a longstanding curriculum—within Japan or elsewhere globally—would ideally be accompanied by teacher training sessions, and something more impactful than a PDF document provided by MEXT (2021).

A further limitation includes students who are part of EFL streams; such learners would have a very difficult time learning the content proposed in the lesson plan. There are several ways to provide EFL students with SRG content, but such methodology is outside the scope of this study. ESL students possessing a beginner level of English would also potentially have difficulty with the proposed lesson plan. The difficulty level of the lesson plan provided in Appendix A needs to be considered pre-implementation; the lesson plan can, of course, be up- or down-ratcheted in difficulty to suit a multitude of teaching contexts. The limits to which should be carefully designed to match the targeted goals of the school.

A consideration related to hypothesis testing raised by Spada (2011) addressed further study limitations, “it also takes time to ask the right questions” (p. 226). Indeed, pedagogical trends rise and fall in the world of education (Swann, 2018), so educators need to be careful how they choose to invest their time. Meddings and Thornbury (2009) cautioned that accessible materials and hi-tech trends might not be the best way to capture active engagement that helps young learners to concentrate. SRG content is at the cusp of cutting-edge education, but we must take pause and echo Spada’s (2011) consideration about asking the correct questions; such as: are educators and school managers taking the time to ponder whether this new content can (a) be inserted into curriculums in a meaningful manner, and (b) will it have staying power, or will it just fizzle out? Longitudinally speaking, answers to such questions will slowly start appearing in educational literature, but for the time being, teachers may be left to wonder if creating SRG lesson content is the correct decision.

Helping students find what Zull (2012) referred to as joy in the classroom is a massive challenge. Presenting learners with content that directly intersects with their everyday lives is a window into deeper learning territory that many other forms of legacy education cannot provide. Young learners commonly have trouble connecting with the study of classical music, integers, or ancient history—notwithstanding some exceptions. One of the most telling ways a teacher can gauge if their students are genuinely interested in a topic is if they engage in some form of deliberate

practice (Ericsson & Harwell, 2019) outside of class time and of their own accord. Such devotion to classroom content demonstrates that students are taking time out of their playtime to engage with classroom material. James (1890) wrote, “the more interest the child has . . . the better he will attend” (p. 267). Enjoying class content enough to study during school recess must be a form of joy related to education; otherwise, the young learners would be outside on the playground.

Studying SRG content is about guiding students to discover their ethos for how they would like to interface with sustainability-related issues surrounding them in their everyday lives. Such lesson sequences of SRG content can be seen as a “process rather than as a product” (Ellis, 2012, p. 238). Such processes of self-discovery are challenging to plan, but with hard work and attention to detail, educators should be able to assist their students with discovering where they stand on a multitude of world issues. Students are not only studying content during class time; they are actively building worldviews. Teachers can refer to James (1890/1992) for a concrete reason why SRGs should be implemented in ESL-based classrooms in Japan “Education, in short, cannot be better described than by calling it the organization of acquired habits of conduct and tendencies to behavior” (p. 730).

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## **Appendix A - Lesson Plan**

*Target Audience:* Elementary school students in Kyoto, Japan

*Learner Level:* Grade 5; intermediate proficiency ESL learners

*Class Members:* 20 students

*Duration:* 45 minutes

### ***Terminal Objectives***

Students will be able to:

- Discuss and understand the differences between sustainable vs. unsustainable items.
- Begin collaborative SRG skit writing.

### ***Enabling Objectives***

Students will be able to:

- Co-construct word collocations to describe SRGs that relate to their daily lives.
- Provide corrective feedback to group members and classmates throughout the lesson.

### ***Materials***

- Sustainability-related realia (eco bag, tumbler, bicycle bell)
- Student notebooks
- Blackboard/whiteboard

#### ***Pre-Task 1: Sustainability Icebreaker (5 min.)***

- Introduce sustainability-related realia (e.g., eco bag, tumbler, bicycle bell).
- Compare sustainability-related realia to environmentally harmful realia (e.g., a plastic bag, a disposable cup, a model car).
- Pair students and briefly discuss which item—sustainable or unsustainable—they would prefer to use in their daily lives.
- Have a few student dyads report their preferences and underlying reasoning.

#### ***Task 1: Brainstorm SRGs (7 min.)***

- Ask paired students to brainstorm more SRGs that they feel are important at home and in their communities.
- Have students write down their list of SRGs into their notebooks.
- Notify students that they will have to report their top two choices of SRGs to the classroom.

***Post-Task 1: Reporting SRG selections (13 min.)***

- Have paired students stand up and report their top two SRG selections.
- The teacher writes all SRGs onto the board.
- Incorrect SRG word collocations are rearranged with the assistance of student feedback (e.g., students report “stop hungry”; something more suitable should be elicited from the classroom such as “stop hunger,” or “share food with poor people”).
- Students should write down all SRG collocations that the teacher writes onto the board.

***Pre-Task 2: Collaborative Skit Writing Example (5 min.)***

- The teacher and students agree upon an example topic (e.g., ride a bicycle).
- The teacher writes the following sequence onto the board:

1:

2:

1:

2:

1:

2:

- The teacher writes down the first line in the exemplar skit (e.g., “1: I love driving to the convenience store that is very close to my apartment.”)
- Students are then encouraged to contribute more lines of dialogue.
- After several lines of skit dialogue have been written on the board, the teacher asks the students to choose an SRG topic and develop a skit in paired groups.

***Task 2: Commence SRG Skit Writing (10 min.)***

- Students are told that they will receive additional time on the following lesson to complete their skits; the current lesson is 1 of 3 (or 4).

- Student focus should be placed on collaboratively developing the SRG that they think will make the most exciting skit presentation.
- Students should focus on making skits as fun as possible (humor should be encouraged).

***Lesson Closure*** (5 min.)

- Explain to Ss that they will have one whole class (lesson 2 of 3) to wrap up their skits and create digital/visual aids (using tablets).
- Presentations of the skits will commence on lesson 3 of 3.
- The skits will be recorded with student tablets and played back to them (during lesson 3 of 3).
- Encourage students to write more with their dyadic classmates before the next class meeting.

***Author Biography:***

Jesse Reidak hails from Toronto, Canada. Jesse has been teaching in Japan since 2008 and has taught in kindergartens, elementary schools, junior high schools, high schools, and universities. He is employed at a private elementary school in Kyoto. Jesse attends Temple University, Japan Campus. His research interests include TBLT and novel teaching approaches. Jesse has contributed articles to various publications as well as serving as an editor for Temple University Japan's Studies in Applied Linguistics.

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