The Importance of Names: Same Peer Recognition

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This paper explores the importance of students knowing each other's names in a classroom situation and that this knowledge encourages interpersonal communication, community, a sense of identity, and psychological safety within a class. This knowledge can also factor into academic and social success. Over eighteen months, student feedback responses from participants in six compulsory tertiary English courses were gathered and then reviewed. Courses drawn upon were advanced Global Skills (GS) (second-year listening and speaking course), advanced Reading and Writing (RW) (first-year course), and intermediate Listening and Speaking (LS) (first-year course). Referring to U.S.-based works exploring both identity and the use of "name tents" in establishing a sense of belonging for students, responses to activities where the author's students used mnemonics to remember their classmates' names was the main focus of this review. A number of student evaluations highlighted a sense of enhanced study environments due to knowing class members' names, a finding which correlates with the results of overseas' studies. The study is in the preliminary stages, and a more rigorous analysis of feedback will be undertaken in the future.

この論文では、教室の中で学生が互いの名前を知ることの重要性について探求すると共に、この知識がクラス内での対人コミュニケーション、共同体、アイデンティティの自覚、そして心理的な安心を促進するということについても研究する。このことは、学業や社会的成功につながる可能性もある。本研究は18ヶ月間にわたり、6つの必修英語科目を履修した学生のフィードバックを収集およびレビューした。使用したコースは、上級グローバルスキル（GS）（2年生のリスニングおよびスピーキングコース）、上級リーディングおよびライティング（RW）（1年生のコース）、中級リスニングおよびスピーキング（LS）（1年生のコース）である。このレビューは、学生の帰属意識の確立におけるアイデンティティと「ネームテント」の使用の両方を調査した米国の研究を参考に、学生がニーモニックを使用してクラスメートの名前を覚える活動にどう反応したかに焦点を当てた。多くの学生の評価は、クラスメイトの名前を知ることによって学習環境が向上したという感覚について述べており、この結果は海

外の研究結果とも一致する。本研究はまだ初期段階であり、今後より厳密にフィードバックを分析する予定である。

This paper outlines the significance of first- and second-year students of compulsory English courses at a Japanese university where students recognise one another's names. This recognition can contribute to the development of interpersonal communication, community, a sense of identity, and psychological safety within a class. Knowledge of classmates' names can also indirectly factor into students' successes, both academically and socially. Student feedback responses from participants in six compulsory EFL courses taught by the author over an eighteen-month period (first-year advanced RW, first-year intermediate LS, second-year advanced GS) were collated and then inspected. U.S.-based works informed this review which investigated both identity and the effectiveness of the use of name tents in a large undergraduate biology class to encourage a sense of belonging for students. In addition, student feedback collected by the author on activities that encouraged the use of mnemonics to remember classmates' names is explored. The mnemonic system the author uses is whereby students choose an English word that begins with the first letter of their given name and something they like beginning with the same letter; this is used by everyone to remember them. For example, Apple Ayako likes avocadoes. This is a fairly common memorisation technique (Argawal, 2023). Some of the student evaluations imply that knowledge of classmates' names might encourage healthy study environments, a finding which corresponds with the results of overseas studies. The author's main goals were to discover whether benefits to knowing classmates' names were similar for undergraduate Japanese EFL learners and U.S. university students, and to also explore the effect of this knowledge on peer-to-peer relationships in the Japanese EFL classroom. This is a preliminary study and more thorough analyses of wider data will be undertaken in the future.

A sense of community and belonging can foster confidence and encourage exploration of identity. It can also precede motivation and engagement, particularly in the classroom (Alderman & Green, 2011; Booker & Campbell-Whatley, 2018; Cohn-Vargas & Steele, 2016; Dörnyei, 1998; Norton Pierce,

1995; Orejudo et al., 2020; Parsonson, 2012; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013). Learners of English as an additional language, whether they be in language classrooms or day-to-day life, have and develop multiple identities, some elements of which might not correlate with how learners more generally perceive or understand themselves (Dörnyei, 1998; Goharimehr, 2017; Norton Pierce, 1985; Rahimian, 2015). This can be disconcerting for learners, and confidence can decrease when attempting to use a target language, particularly as practical levels might not facilitate the levels of expression and communication that users desire. Negative perception of self and from others can stymie users (Dörnyei, 1998; Goharimehr, 2017; Norton Pierce, 1985). As such, the language classroom, or classes that are conducted in non-native tongues, can be far from psychologically safe (Goharimehr, 2017; Norton Pierce, 1985; Rahimian, 2015). "Identity safe classrooms" is a term used within U.S. education circles, but the idea can be applied more widely (Cohn-Vargas & Steele, 2013, p. 5 in Cohn-Vargas & Steele, 2016, p.23). These classrooms promote a sense of security "based on positive relationships with the teacher and among students" (p. 23). They are "intentionally free from teaching practices that implicitly or explicitly link students' identities...to academic performance" (p. 23). This sense of security can, however, precede academic and social success for students (Cohn-Vargas & Steele, 2013 in Cohn-Vargas & Steele, 2016). As stated above, using a different language for expression and communication can be threatening, particularly in compulsory classes, and/or as a beginning EFL student (Dörnyei, 1998; Goharimehr, 2017; Norton Pierce, 1985). Therefore, especially in communicative situations, feeling safe and developing trust and respect for fellow students is important (Booker & Campbell–Whatley, 2018; Cohn-Vargas & Steele, 2016; Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2023).

Similarly, teachers are better able to manage and connect with classes if they establish good relationships with their pupils (Alderman & Green, 2011; Carpenter et al., 2009; Cohn-Vargas & Steele, 2016; Orejudo et al, 2020; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013). Knowing their students' names (and students knowing their teachers' names) and being able to call on students directly can contribute

towards effective management (Parsonson, 2012; Tanner, 2013) and also help develop beneficial relationships (Cooper et al., 2017). Likewise, it can be easier for students to relate to one another if they have a sense of the other's identity. If a name can be put to a face, interaction and understanding potentially flows more readily. Cooper et al. (2017) reported students feeling more invested in classes, and some being more likely to contact teachers regarding both course issues and welfare if they perceive their names as known (Cooper et al., 2017). This can help lead to the identity or psychologically safe classroom. Finn and Zimmer (2012) outline how connection to instructors and peers is routinely used as a gauge of what Finn (1989) called student "belongingness" (p. 123), a commonly used term in studies of student engagement (Christenson et al., 2012). Students have reported that knowledge of names contributes to these connections (Cooper et al., 2017). Communication, collaboration, and active listening are some other elements conducive to a welcoming classroom community (Booker & Campbell-Whatley, 2018).

Research on students knowing one another's names suggests that some identified with one another beyond being a number due to the use of name tents (Cooper et al., 2017)

The Study

Research Questions

U.S. research on the use of name tents in tertiary education (pieces of paper folded to create a tent with a student's name on one side) shows good results for forming positive relationships from both student to teacher (and vice versa) and from student to student. Mnemonics, the system this author uses, are also a way for teachers to remember students' names and for students to remember one another (Argawal, 2023).

For courses that incorporate communicative practices, encouraging the remembrance and use of names within a classroom setting is "a low-effort, high-impact practice" (Cooper et al., 2017, p. 12). U.S. studies conducted on the positive effects on stakeholders of knowing each other's names have weighed up the worth of not only teacher-student relationships when names are used, but

student-student relationships (Booker & Campbell-Whatley, 2018; Cooper, et al., 2017; Poorvu Center, 2021).

Some common benefits highlighted in Cooper et al.'s 2017 research (studying the use of name tents) and corresponding research include the following: easier and more regular communication for stakeholders; broadening of horizons as communicative barriers decrease; student discussion of lesson topics outside of main classes; increased student confidence and community building; senses of belonging and being known; and feeling less like a "face in the crowd" (pp. 17–18).

Taking the benefits reported above into account, and considering the literature mostly focused on native users of English within non-language classroom settings, the primary objective of this study was to investigate whether similar benefits and attitudes were found among Japanese EFL learners the author teaches. Furthermore, a number of studies focused on the relationship between instructors and students, but the author was especially interested in knowing how classmates' names might affect peer-to-peer relationships in EFL classes. The following research questions were identified to achieve this aim.

1. Are the benefits (if any) for Japanese EFL university students learning their classmates' names similar to those for U.S. tertiary students in non-EFL situations?
2. Which peer-to-peer benefits to learning one another's names, if any, did the Japanese university EFL students focus on?

Methods

In order to establish whether Japanese EFL university undergraduate students benefited in similar ways to U.S. undergraduate students if their names were remembered by their peers and instructors, and to explore the effects of this on peer-to-peer relationships, 174 general class feedback forms from six compulsory English courses taught across three semesters from 2022–2023 were analysed by the author. Details of the participants, instrument and procedure of research follow.

Participants of the study and setting

For this preliminary paper, responses from both semesters of 2022 and the first semester of 2023 have been used (174 responses from 191 students). Participant details can be seen in Table 1. The compulsory English classes were made up of non-English majors. The total of the class sizes differs from the number of responses received because not all students completed the feedback task or even attended classes. However, the majority of students submitted feedback

Materials

From approximately 2013 onwards, the author has asked students for written reflection in English on their classroom experience at the close of semesters. The author provides a survey in English, generally consisting of nine reflective questions about classes. Answers longer than a few words to the questions are requested. Surveys are not in Japanese since the courses are high level English classes. There were nine general questions on the surveys used for this research, and some answers to the following questions (below) contained information about mnemonic activities or classroom atmospheres. These were analysed for this paper:

- What can you remember learning this semester?
- Which activities did you enjoy the most? Why?
- What was enjoyable and you're glad that you learned it?
- What was difficult, but worthwhile?
- Please leave a comment about the class.

Table 1

Information on Participants

	Second-year GS Students	First-year RW Students	First-year LS Students
2022 (Semester 1)	33	34	X
2022 (Semester 2)	29	29	X
2023 (Semeseter 1)	X	39	27

Procedure

The surveys were made available to students via the Microsoft Teams LMS in the last lessons of the semesters. The study of this material is secondary use of non-identifiable information and is within keeping with the author's university's guidelines when conducting research in classes. Each of the submitted forms was searched for information about activities involving knowing names and also about the classroom atmosphere. Data were analysed by inputting responses containing these aspects into a table and noting where similarities occurred. These incidences were then examined for student attitude towards the activities, and percentages were calculated based on this data. The responses were also examined holistically to gain insight into student attitudes regarding the use of peer names and its potential impact on the overall classroom atmosphere.

Results

Cooper et al. (2017) extensively explored the use and effects of name tents as a memory aid. However, the author uses a common mnemonic system (Argawal, 2023) described in the introduction. In a semester with 28 lessons, the first few lessons include these activities. The nicknames, as the students call them, are also available in the LMS for reference.

Thirty-four responses to the feedback form distributed included information about the activities involving remembering names and their use (about 19%). Twenty-three (about 13%) of these were positive, eight (approximately 5%) were negative, and three responses were neutral (approximately 2%). Even amongst those deemed negative (students who described the activity as difficult), all but one also highlighted positive aspects of remembering names.

The survey did not contain a pointed question explicitly asking students about their opinion on the use of mnemonics for remembering names in the classroom. Therefore, the fact that almost 20% percent of all students chose to comment on the activity unprompted is indicative of the activity being memorable for a number of them. Some responses contained no overt reference to the mnemonic activities but commented on the classes being friendly and relaxed, and that students found it relatively easy to make friends. Table 2 displays

Table 2

Responses Related to Learning Names and/or Classroom Atmosphere

Responses	Number of students*
Knowing more students in the author's classes than in other classes.	1
Relaxed and friendly class atmosphere	10
Enjoying pair work and tasks	10
Making friends	5
Useful for the future	1
Useful for task work (in the English class)	5
Difficult task but worthwhile (and fun)	5
Shift in perspective from meeting a variety of students	1
Disliked task and considered it overly time-consuming	1

* The total is more than 34 due to some responses addressing more than one category.

some common themes in the students' responses to the questions detailed earlier.

The most common responses related to the atmosphere of the class (10) and working with partners (10 each). "By taking this class, I was able to learn the names of this class members and get involved. It was very fun. Thank you to all my friends" (Student E, 2022). Responses referencing mnemonic activities as a pathway to making friends, being useful for tasks and being difficult were of an equal number (5 each). Student J explicitly stated that they disliked the task. "I think self-introduce time (tell each other's nicknames) was too much." (2023). Student A stated that the task was useful for future interactions, citing interpersonal communication (2022). Related to classroom atmosphere, Student K wrote, "I was able to communicate with people [from] various place in Japan and countries around the world. As I interacted with them, my values changed."

Discussion

Results from end-of-semester feedback comments in the author's classes since 2013 generally mirror the findings of some U.S. studies. Cooper et al. (2017) observed that knowing names helped U.S. students build community, increase confidence, and communicate more easily with others. Student B (2022) wrote in reply to the question of which activities students enjoyed the most, "At the beginning of the class, we had the opportunity to memorize the names of the class members along with their nicknames, which I think was useful in subsequent classes." Student B highlights remembering names, so they have isolated it as an important task. This task seems to have helped in building community in that knowing one another's names "was useful in subsequent classes." This also implies that it helped with communication, considering that all of the English classes were communicative. To further support this claim, Student E wrote, "By taking this class, I was able to learn the names of this class members and get involved." They specifically mention their involvement in the class stemming from learning member names. This suggests that knowledge of members names assists in community building. Knowing names helping facilitate easier communication ("get involved") is assumed by the author from this response.

Not explicitly stating names, but related to classroom atmosphere, Student M wrote, "This class is one of my favourite classes in this university. It's not just that the teachers and students in the class get along very well, but in such a relaxed learning atmosphere, you can really learn a lot of knowledge that you couldn't learn before." As a number of students link the welcoming atmosphere of the class to having learned one another's names at the beginning of the course, this aspect might be more widely applied. If this is the case, Student M's comment seems to support the general idea that a psychologically safe classroom could lead to academic success (Cohn-Vargas & Steele, 2013 in Cohn-Vargas & Steele, 2016), and that knowing classmates' names could contribute to this. Thirteen answers specifically mention learning nicknames and connecting this either to a "fun" or enjoyable class, or to helping the class run smoothly. Again, this seems to imply that learning one another's names can help facilitate a healthy classroom environment, build student confidence, and aid in communication, as noted by

Cooper et al. (2017).

Although no response specifically referred to discussion of class topics away from the main lessons, future research has supported this observance, and student L stated, "I know many students in this class, and I remember less people in other classes than in this class. The students were very friendly and [I was] happy to discuss with them" (2022). This response could imply that student L interacted with students from the author's classes outside of the lessons ("I know many students in this class."). Five responses state that students made friends, suggesting that these relationships have extended beyond the lessons. Conversely, some students worried whether they could make friends at the start of the course, and possibly learning each other's names added to a classroom atmosphere where they felt welcome, as seen in student D's response: "I am really enjoyed in our class this term. I … joined our class online for a long time. I used to be very afraid of nobody will willing to talk with me when I came to Japan and [physically] joined our class. But everyone were friendly and I worked with my partners very happy in these classes" (2022).

Cooper et al. (2017) noted a broadening of horizons as communicative barriers decrease with knowledge of classmates' names. Student A (2022) wrote, "Although it is ridiculous, I think it is [worthwhile] to remember the names of the people in the class, although it is very difficult for foreign students, but it may be good for the future interpersonal relationship." Moreover, student K (2022) believed, "I was able to communicate with people various place[s] in Japan and countries around the world. As I interacted with them, my values changed." Although student K's meaning is not clear, it would appear that classroom interactions helped the student develop new connections with others, which might have affected the way they viewed the world ("As I interacted with them, my values changed"). Student K's feedback does not specifically mention the learning of names. However, the author believes that knowing each other's names can help lead to a classroom atmosphere where students are more comfortable exchanging information with each other (as required by tasks), which seems to be supported by some of the replies of other respondents.

It would appear that a number of students enjoy using mnemonics to

remember one another's names as outlined in the method. Students seem to have found it a relatively easy way of facilitating classroom community and a sense of belonging.

Conclusion

This study is in its preliminary stages and naturally enough has a number of flaws. There is, however, a reasonable database. Responses students have provided over the years correlate with many of the findings of pre-existing literature, although most of the literature considered for this paper concentrated on student/teacher relationships rather than same peer relationships. Within the studies on same peer relationships, it would seem having a sense of connection to fellow students might encourage enthusiasm and comfort in a class. Within Japan, Carpenter et al. (2009) stated that "Interaction and positive relationships in peer and student-teacher interactions are crucial to creating a social ecology in which positive group dynamics can be cultivated and meaningful learning supported" (p. 299). The author agrees with this statement, and feels that promoting the remembrance of classmates' and student names helps lead to this. Social networks can lead to unintentional motivation (Carpenter et al., 2009), and this is not disputed. Safe and interesting classroom atmospheres can aid healthy student-student and student-teacher relationships, and that this atmosphere can possibly be partly achieved through student (and instructor) awareness of participant names. If instructors are not particularly concerned with developing an interest in their students, or in facilitating opportunities for students to know one another, then it follows that motivation decreases (Carpenter et al., 2009; Fukuda, 2013). Although remembering names is not suitable for everyone, it seems to be a direct and simple way to establish a form of interest among all stakeholders. A more thorough exploration of current and future data will hopefully expose further trends that support the idea that, as in the US, students learning one another's names in EFL classes in Japan holds many indirect individual, social and academic benefits.

In the author's face-to-face classes, review of student feedback submitted at the end of semesters has regularly highlighted the pleasure students have

in getting to know new people and in making friends. Learning one another's names has regularly been isolated as assisting this.

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