

For the Language Professional in College and University Education

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Letter from the Editor

Dear readers,

Welcome to the 2025 issue of *OnCUE Journal*. It's been a very busy year for submissions, and I regret we could not fit them all into this issue. What we have is the following great bunch of articles.

Feature Articles begin with **Elliot Clark's** paper on migrant teachers in Japan and their cultural role in the education process of teaching English. Following that, we have **Joshua Cohen's** interesting article on how short-term exercise may provide a boost to L2 reading, which may get students off their chairs before they read. Lastly, **Mitaka Yoneda and Christopher Valvona** have provided a look into using authentic materials such as newspapers and company-related documents in a business English classroom for university alumni.

We also have three Opinion and Perspectives articles. **Pak M. Au** recounts their experience transiting from a corporate office environment in Canada to working in a classroom setting in Japan. **Rory Banwell and Josh Kidd** give us a look at how they changed the university's approach from English for General Purposes (EGP) to English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP). Finally, **Rheumi Jai** provides advantages of using paper in the classroom for such things as role-playing, note-taking, idea organization, flashcards and posters.

For our book reviews section, **Julia Kimura** starts us off with her experienced look at the 2023 second edition of *Communities of Practice Within and Across Organizations: A Guidebook*, by Etienne Wenger-Trayner, Beverly Wenger-Trayner, Phil Reid, & Claude Bruderlein. **Chie Ogawa** then reviews the 2024 *Expertise in Second Language Writing Instruction: Conceptual and Empirical Understandings*, edited by Alan Hirvela & Diane D. Belcher. To conclude book reviews, we have **Jennifer Stewart** examining the 2024 book *CLIL Seeing the World Through Maps* [Revised], by Shigeru Sasajima, Miyako Nakaya, Miyuki Yukita, Yoko Yamato, and Michele Joel.

With COVID-19 largely behind us now, we are getting a few more conference reviews. **Richard Ingham** describes the Nagoya University of Foreign Studies 2025 Symposium. And, finally, **Parvathy Ramachandran** gives us a review of the 51st JALT International Conference on Language Teaching and Learning and Educational Materials Exhibition, which took place at the National Youth Olympic Center, Yoyogi, Tokyo, Japan.

I hope you enjoy this issue and continue to support the College and University Educators SIG whether you are a member or not. Have an enjoyable and safe holiday season and great new year.

Glen Hill
CUE SIG Publications Chair

Feature Article

Migrant Teachers Navigating Cultural Roles in an Outsourced University English Program

Elliot J. Clark
Asia University

This study explores the perspectives of six migrant English language teachers in a Japanese university's spoken communication course, focusing on their beliefs about the purpose of English classes and their perceptions of student engagement with cultural topics. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the author's teaching peers while working at the university through a dispatch company. Although the goals of the institution emphasize practical communication skills, many of the teachers seem to see their role as fostering intercultural understanding, leading to tensions when students favor familiar, Japan-centric topics. Findings suggest that the teachers situate themselves as both language instructors and cultural mediators, although perspectives are conflicted. Some appear to have internalized native-speakerist assumptions, while others question the feasibility of cultural learning within the course's constraints. Frustrations arise when students struggle to engage with foreign cultures, rely on simplistic cultural comparisons, or reinforce an in-group/out-group divide. The study identifies curricular inflexibility and low teacher autonomy as key issues. These factors are potentially leading to misalignments between teacher expectations, student interests, and curricular goals. The study concludes that outsourcing the course may be inhibiting the adoption of a contextually appropriate approach.

本研究は、日本の大学の英語コミュニケーション科目における6名の外国人英語派遣講師の視点を探る。半構造化インタビューを通じて、英語教育の目的や文化的话题に対する学生の関心を調査した。派遣先の教育機関は実践的なコミュニケーション能力の育成を目的とするが、多くの講師が異文化理解の促進も重要と捉え、それに対し学生が日本中心の話題を好むことに葛藤を抱いていた。本調査から講師の役割認識には個人差があるが、講師たちは自らを語学指導者であると同時に文化の仲介者として位置づけていることが示唆される。一部はネイティブ・スピーカー主義的な考えを内面化する一方で、他は文化学習の実現可能性が、カリキュ

ラムの制限により懐疑的な意見もみられた。学習者が異文化への関与に苦戦したり、文化を単純な比較に還元したり、内集団／外集団の区別を強化したりする場面では、講師側にフラストレーションが生じる。また、カリキュラムの柔軟性不足、教師の裁量の制限が鍵であると認識しこれらが教師の期待・学生の関心・カリキュラムの目標の間にミスマッチを生じさせる可能性がある。本研究は、当該科目の外部委託が、文脈に即した教授法の採用を妨げている可能性があると結論付けている。

Migrant teachers are often employed to teach English communication classes in Japanese universities. The way in which they view their roles is likely to be shaped not only by personal teaching philosophies but also by institutional expectations and societal discourses about the value of native-speaker teachers. Course objectives typically include improving students' oral communication skills and preparing students for participating as global citizens (Rivers, 2013), aligning with the goal of cultivating "global human resources" (Burgess, 2012, p. 79): people who are equipped with the language and intercultural skills to facilitate cross-border economic activity. However, Japan has relatively poor foreign language outcomes and low levels of immigration; it is also geographically isolated, and there are many practical and economic barriers to studying abroad (Burgess, 2012). Under such circumstances, migrant teachers and their students may come to see their English classes not only as spaces for language learning, but in part as unique venues for exploring foreign perspectives.

Despite the significant influence that migrant teachers may have in their students' intercultural education, their views on their roles' cultural purposes remain underexplored in the academic literature. Typically, investigations of their roles in Japanese English language teaching (ELT) tend to focus on native-speakerist structures, which position native English-speaking teachers as ideal language models and keys to accessing Western culture (Holliday, 2005). Matikainen (2015) provided insights into how teacher and student views of cultures of learning are sometimes misaligned. Furthermore, Stapleton's (2000) survey of migrant English teachers working in Japanese universities revealed that most of the respondents saw the teaching of *small c* culture as part of their role. However, fewer studies have investigated how migrant teachers view their English classes' *big C* cultural purposes or how they perceive student interest in

cultural topics.

The present study¹ employed a peer interviewing method to uncover the attitudes of six teachers in the author's former context of a spoken English communication course. As the course was run by a dispatch company, this study also investigated some of the possible effects of the little-studied trend of outsourcing language courses in higher education (Goodhew, 2025). This study is likely to be of interest to teachers reflecting on their own cultural roles, as well as to decision makers considering how to integrate culture into the curriculum.

English for Intercultural Education and Native-Speakerism

The integration of culture has long been considered important to language teaching as it relates to the *small c* of “culturally influenced beliefs and perceptions, especially as expressed through language, but also through cultural behaviors that affect acceptability in the host community” (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993, p. 6). The more concrete *big C* aspects of culture, such as history and geography, although potentially interesting to discuss, are considered of less importance to language teaching as “they do not provide an intimate view of what life is really like in the target culture” (Purba, 2011, p. 51).

The issue of integrating culture in ELT is complicated by English's status as a common international language spoken by people with diverse cultural backgrounds. Hollenback (2017) found the simplification of culture along national lines in textbooks unsatisfactory in furthering learners' intercultural communication. Furthermore, the approach of associating cultural learning with English learning has been critiqued for reinforcing perceptions of English as tied to inner circle (Kachru, 1985) English-speaking cultures. Kubota (2002) argued that an approach to internationalization that foregrounds inner circle cultures, rather than fostering a truly global outlook, more accurately results in anglicization. In the Japanese context in particular, there is a concern that the blending of cultural and English learning frames anglophone society as a foreign other. Such a framing risks the perception of English as existing outside of the mainstream of Japanese society, potentially restricting its adoption (McVeigh, 2002; Seargeant, 2009).

A further complication for the integration of culture in ELT is the central role of native English-speaking teachers, who are prized for their authenticity as linguistic and cultural models (Seargeant, 2009). Despite extensive critiques of native-speakerism, this ideology continues to influence ELT in Japan (Toh, 2019), as it does in many other contexts (Hopkyns, 2022). This paradigm contributes to the sense that English is owned by its native speakers (Matsuda, 2003) and ignores the growth of English as an international language between outer and expanding circle English speakers (Honna & Takeshita, 2014). Moreover, native-speakerism privileges Western TESOL methodology, inhibiting the development of more contextually appropriate approaches (Holliday, 2005; Toh, 2019).

The EC Program

The English Communication (EC) program at X University (XU; both pseudonyms) provides a case study of how native-speakerism and assumptions about English's cultural role may play out in a university setting. Designed primarily to improve students' spoken English communication skills, the program lacks explicit *big C* cultural goals. However, the ambiguous yet constrained role of its teachers risks the reproduction of default assumptions about their cultural purpose.

XU is a public university. Its undergraduate students do not typically major in English but are required to gain four credits of English Communication (henceforth EC) to graduate. Most students' spoken ability corresponds to CEFR B1 descriptors. Weekly 90-minute EC classes are provided by a dispatch company, ABC (a pseudonym), which oversees the curriculum and employs the instructors. EC instructors are required to be native English speakers with a bachelor's degree and either a year's experience teaching at a university or a basic teaching certificate (e.g., CELTA). These requirements are lower than the typical requirement of a relevant master's degree for directly hired faculty (Butler, 2019). ABC has created a marketable service by implementing standardized lesson plans and assessments. However, this rigidity also reduces teacher autonomy and entrenches a static Western TESOL curriculum and methodology. Furthermore,

EC is often formally referred to as NSE (presumably Native Speaker of English). The idea that the instructors' linguistic or cultural status is more important than their pedagogical expertise is therefore implicit at an institutional level.

Studies indicate that under disempowered circumstances, migrant teachers may come to identify as cultural and linguistic resources, or even entertainers, rather than educators (Breckenridge & Erling, 2011; Simmons & Chen, 2017). Furthermore, a working environment that prizes foreign teachers' exotic nature leads some to embrace their celebrity status and others to resent it (Rivers, 2013; Simmons & Chen, 2017). This situation is likely to shape how the EC teachers perceive their role and therefore how they engage with their students.

The goals of EC focus on oral communication skills, critical thinking, learner autonomy and communicative competence. The curriculum is typical of communicative language teaching, with minimal *big C* cultural content present in the course textbooks. Students can sometimes decide what topics to discuss. Research suggests that Japanese university students tend to select topics which are close to their own lives, preferring local topics to international ones (Wolf, 2013). A similar pattern can be observed in EC students' end-of-semester presentations on topics freely chosen by students, which frequently center on Japanese culture, student life, or social issues. Given that EC teachers may see themselves as responsible for encouraging a global outlook due to their institutional framing, student and teacher priorities on topic selection are likely to diverge. This divergence suggests a point of tension in the program, which inspired the present study.

The study focused on the following two research questions:

- What do the migrant teachers in the course believe to be the purposes of their English classes, particularly in relation to culture?
- What opinions do they have of the content of student in-class production, particularly in relation to students' approaches to cultural topics, and what tensions arise as a result?

Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design, using semi-structured interviews to explore how migrant teachers in the EC program perceive the purpose of their classes and their students' interest in cultural topics. A qualitative approach is well-suited to this type of inquiry as it allows for an in-depth exploration of individual perspectives. Semi-structured interviews are especially appropriate for their ability to provide flexible questioning while maintaining consistency across participants (Dörnyei, 2007; Patton, 2002).

Participants and Data Collection

I recruited participants from among my EC teaching peers. Of the sixteen instructors, eight volunteered, and six were selected as representative of EC in terms of experience, nationalities, education levels, and gender balance. Five men and one woman were selected. All participants were from a variety of inner circle English-speaking countries, although Participant 4 reported growing up not speaking English at home. The sample represents both typical gender imbalances (Nagatomo, 2016) and the bias towards inner circle native-speaker teachers in Japanese ELT (Hashimoto, 2020).

All participants provided written consent after reviewing a research description outlining the aims of the study. I have obscured the participants' names, genders, and nationalities and any other identifying elements in the demographic information (Table 1) and the results to ensure their anonymity. All interviews were conducted in person, totaling 238 minutes of data. I used an interview guide structured around an opening statement, background questions, content questions, suggested probing questions, and an open-ended closing question (Dörnyei, 2007). The content questions can be found in the Appendix. As I was a peer in the program, I leveraged acquaintance interviewing advantages, such as shared experiences and established rapport, to produce candid responses (Garton & Copland, 2010).

Data Analysis

I manually transcribed all interviews into a spreadsheet, marking pauses and laughter before making analytic memos summarizing each interview (Dörnyei,

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Length of service in EC	Length of teaching career in Japan	Prior English teaching experience	Academic qualifications
1	2.5 years	28 years	JET Program, eikaiwa, ELT management, kindergarten	Bachelor's degree, master's in TESOL (in progress)
2	0.5 years	16 years	Eikaiwa, corporate, other universities (through ABC)	Bachelor's degree
3	2.5 years	9 years	JET Program, universities (through another dispatch company)	Bachelor's degree
4	2.5 years	4 years	School teaching (in home country), eikaiwa	Bachelor's degree, master's in TESOL (in progress)
5	1.5 years	6 years	Eikaiwa, other universities (through another dispatch company and ABC)	Bachelor's degree
6	2.5 years	17 years	Eikaiwa, kindergarten, ALT in public and private schools	Bachelor's degree

2007). I then began a thematic coding process (Saldaña, 2016):

1. Pattern coding: I identified the main themes inductively from the data rather than using predetermined categories.
2. Category development: I grouped responses into broader themes related to teaching purposes and general topics.
3. Subcategory refinement: I made distinctions between general themes (e.g., “familiar topics” vs. “challenging topics”) and specific subtopics within each theme (e.g., “university life” vs. “social media” for familiar topics).

4. Problem identification: I highlighted specific areas of tension, such as teacher frustration with topic selection.

This process allowed for the emergence of key themes related to teaching objectives and student engagement, allowing me to identify points of interest in the teachers' responses in relation to the study's research questions.

Results

The teachers' beliefs about the purposes of their classes broadly fell into two categories: (1) developing their students' spoken communication skills and (2) cultivating global human resources. Their perspectives on student topic selection focused on (1) familiar topics, (2) challenging topics, (3) Japan-centric topics, and (4) topics on foreign countries and culture.

Beliefs About the Purposes of University English Classes

All the teachers described speaking skills as a core focus, often positioning university ELT as a corrective to students' prior English instruction. Participant 1 (P1) explained that "One of the reasons is for them to be able to realise it's not a subject and use it as a tool for communication." P2 similarly noted that "Many haven't experienced a class where they take the lead." There was, therefore, a general support for ABC's communicative Western TESOL methodology among the teachers.

Beyond communication skills, the teachers also emphasized intercultural communication, framing the course within broader internationalization-through-ELT discourses. P3 speculated, "[XU] really do want to balance that idea of being able to communicate and encouraging flexibility and freedom of thought and expression, and I think there is a bias towards English being that kind of forum."

Preparing for the workforce and studying abroad were highlighted as other key purposes, although some teachers expressed doubts that their students really need English for their future careers. Economic and systemic barriers to travelling and studying abroad were cited by the teachers, as well as the effects of COVID-19 on student interest in going abroad. P4 suggested that even absent practical barriers, students may be unlikely to go overseas, observing that "They

love Japan. Japan's got everything they need, and they're not dissatisfied with their conditions." Despite these doubts about student interest in engaging with the world outside of Japan, there was a broad acceptance that the course has cultural aims in addition to its linguistic aims, with P6 stating that they believed "[XU] want us to keep it outside of Japan."

Perspectives on Student Topic Selection

The teachers had mixed reactions to students' topic preferences, particularly the tendency to choose familiar or Japan-centric themes. Some accepted this as a natural willingness to communicate strategy, while others expressed frustration. P5 determined that students may gravitate towards familiar topics because of their limited language ability, observing that it "takes the edge off" when their discussion partners share contextual knowledge. Conversely, some teachers expressed boredom with hearing the same topics repeatedly or acknowledged that other teachers may be bored. P3 explained as follows:

You do kind of have to pressure [students] to dig deeper, or maybe even ban certain topics [...] You might have heard this speech way too many times, so you yourself are afraid of being bored to death or grading them negatively because you are disinterested.

Most teachers also indicated that they believed that students should be pushed towards challenging topics, but there were concerns that introducing unfamiliar topics into the curriculum poses risks. While P4 thought that students ought to be challenged, "topics that can polarise or disrupt the harmony" often lead to "silence" when they are presented. There were, therefore, indications that student interest and willingness to communicate clash with teacher interests and objectives.

Participants also highlighted that students frequently choose topics related to Japan, either out of national pride or shared familiarity, but they also expressed frustration with such themes. Although acknowledging that "it's good to be able to describe your culture," P1 described the tendency to talk about Japan as "annoying," preferring that students "get out of their comfort zone." Other teachers indicated frustration with student tendencies to reinforce stereotypes

about Japan or make simplistic cultural comparisons. P6 described one example: “They go ‘Japan has four seasons.’ I go ‘So does [my hometown]!’ They go ‘But we—’ ‘No! We have the same exact seasons in [my hometown]!’” P4 similarly noted that sometimes students express surprise when foreign teachers demonstrate basic knowledge of Japan:

They seem very surprised when I tell them my favourite food in Japan is tonkotsu ramen, because they feel as if I’m not supposed to be able to like that or know that it exists, even living in the country for four years.

Therefore, although the teachers seemed to have mixed feelings about Japan as a topic for pedagogical reasons, there were also signs that they may feel alienated by the insider–outsider distinction that discussions about Japan are perceived to reinforce.

In almost all the participants’ testimonies, there was either an expression of personal frustration or an acknowledgement that frustration is felt by others around how students approach foreign countries and cultures. P1 said that students are “naive” when it comes to other countries, while P3 believed that students are interested but are limited by their knowledge and need more input. P6 focused on how students tend to overlook diversity in Anglophone culture in favor of cultural reductionism, concluding: “I think they don’t understand that most other countries are not homogenous like Japan.” P6 elsewhere referred to being a “cultural attache,” despite also expressing disapproval of the idea of pushing global topics in English language instruction. Showing similar skepticism, P4 questioned whether a migrant teacher-led English class alone can cultivate a global mindset:

I think the thing that produces a global mindset is actually being global, going to another country, getting another perspective, experiencing that culture firsthand. We can try to simulate it by exposing them to these topics but it’s [...] just going to go into that box of foreign stuff.

A degree of ambivalence was therefore shown by the teachers towards the idea of students exploring both Japanese and foreign cultural topics, especially as doing so is often found to reinforce rather than erode in-group/out-group divides.

Discussion

Although the teachers firstly highlighted the linguistic goals of the course, they unanimously seemed to believe that EC also had both *small C* and *big C* cultural goals. Without a clear institutional mandate, the instructors may have concluded that their classes should have a cultural dimension from their institutional framing as native speakers, their beliefs about the purpose of university, broader societal discourses on ELT, the implications of their presence as foreigners in the classroom, their perception of student needs and interests, or their experiences as migrants in Japan. While *small c* intercultural competence is widely accepted as an important element of ELT (Byram, 2021), integrating *big C* culture appeared to be creating tension. While the teachers on the course were keen for their students to engage with international culture, their students were led by knowledge and interest to engage more with local and familiar topics.

Several instructors expressed frustration with students' stereotypical representations of both foreign and Japanese culture. Their frustrations seemed to stem from their outsider status in their own classrooms as well as students' lack of cultural knowledge. Cater (2020) observes that repeated exposure to well-worn essentialist cultural narratives, such as the belief that only Japan has four seasons, has "a slightly alienating effect" (p. 65) on migrant teachers. There were signs in the present study that these beliefs were contributing to teacher burnout. Kubota (2002) warned that native-speakerist ELT may encourage dichotomous comparisons between Japan and an essentialized West. Although the teachers did not see themselves as the source of this tendency, and some pushed against the idea of being cultural attaches, their responses also often aligned with assumptions that internationalization is best facilitated by migrant English teachers. While the teachers seemed well intentioned in their aim to encourage deeper engagement with foreign culture, it was clear that they were having limited success within the confines of this weekly spoken communication course.

The prescriptive nature of the curriculum, organized by the dispatch company ABC, may contribute to the tensions between teachers and students. The curriculum provides little *big C* cultural content, yet the students seemed

to be expected by some of their teachers to exhibit deep cultural knowledge in their final presentations. Stapleton's (2000) survey found that teachers tended to integrate culture "randomly" (p. 301). Similarly, in this study, despite the lack of opportunities to introduce cultural elements during the semester, the teachers appeared to focus on culture when both teachers and students had greater freedom to do so. Involving instructors in decisions about the curriculum may lead to a more considered, satisfactory approach to exploring culture. Furthermore, a post-method approach, which emphasizes locally adapted methodologies (Canagarajah, 2006), could provide a more effective and achievable alternative to teaching intercultural communication than uncritically applied Western TESOL. Within an English as an International Language (EIL) framework, rather than simply learning about other countries, emphasis would be put on learning English for "self-explanation and mutual understanding across cultures" (Honma & Takeshita, 2014, p. 66). Nevertheless, since the university and ABC do not require EC teachers to be active scholars in applied linguistics, both the course designers and the instructors may be unaware that alternative paradigms to Western TESOL exist, particularly as EIL remains underrecognized in Japanese ELT (Toh, 2019). This gap underscores the potential value of empowered teacher-researchers in shaping university policies and reveals the limitations of relying on dispatch companies to administer standardized university courses.

This study's findings contribute to the literature exploring migrant teacher experiences within single institutions (Rivers, 2013; Stewart & Miyahara, 2011) and build on research on teacher views on culture in Japanese ELT (Matikainen, 2015; Stapleton, 2000). However, the focus on a single course run by a dispatch company means that the findings cannot be used to make generalized conclusions about other migrant teachers in other university settings. The use of peer interviewing may also have led my participants to give socially acceptable answers.

Future research could build on my findings by doing the following:

- Investigating EC student perspectives about how they see the role of culture in their English classes.

- Examining classroom interactions and evaluation feedback to see whether the tensions revealed in this study are present in class or reserved for teacher-to-teacher discussions.
- Repeating the study in other university settings, particularly those with greater pedagogical flexibility and more academically engaged teachers, to see if the results differ.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the ambiguous cultural role of migrant teachers. Previous research suggested that migrant teachers often find themselves occupying unclear professional roles as cultural ambassadors and entertainers as well as language teachers (Breckenridge & Erling, 2011; Simmons & Chen, 2017). This same tendency was present in this study. Furthermore, an inflexible curriculum, coupled with frustrations about student's lack of cultural knowledge, seems to have led to misalignments between teacher expectations, institutional objectives and student interests. This situation has perpetuated default assumptions about the role of native speakers in Japanese ELT, inhibiting moves towards more contextually appropriate approaches to teaching intercultural competence.

These findings do not necessarily indicate that migrant teachers should be excluded from their students' broader intercultural education. Rather, they expose the tensions that may arise when migrant teachers are constrained as educators due to an overemphasis on their native speaker status and a tightly controlled curriculum. Addressing these concerns may be unrealistic within the institutional framework of a university course run by a dispatch company. Directly hiring faculty members with academic backgrounds in TESOL to teach these classes would likely result in improved teacher autonomy, responsiveness to student needs and academic engagement. Making such changes could advance X University's ELT practices and better serve its students and teachers, as well as Japan's broader internationalizing efforts.

Note: 1. This article is a revised version of the author's master's dissertation

completed at the University of Birmingham.

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Appendix

The main content questions from the interview guide are shown below.

1. What do you consider to be the purposes of English language classes in Japanese universities?
2. What topics do you find your students to be the most motivated to talk about in English?
3. How interested in topics concerning foreign countries and cultures, like travelling abroad and foreign entertainment, do you consider your students to be?
4. How interested in topics which are more focused on Japan do you consider your students to be?
5. What other considerations should there be besides student interest for choosing topics for university English classes?

Feature Article

Using Physical Exercise to Boost L2 Reading Comprehension and Fluency

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Previous research has revealed that as little as 10 minutes of physical activity can enhance cognitive performance, boost motivation and energy levels, and help to reduce stress. However, the majority of these studies were conducted using specialized equipment or with children as participants, which limits the generalizability of their findings. Studies investigating the effects of exercise on second language learning, while promising, have primarily focused on vocabulary acquisition rather than other areas of language acquisition, such as literacy. To address these gaps in the literature and build on evidence that suggests exercise can positively affect brain function, the study reported here used a paired-samples, multiple trial design to test the efficacy of a brief stair climbing protocol as a means of improving reading speed and comprehension. Twenty-six lower intermediate-level EFL students took part in the (11-week) study which measured their ability to comprehend a reading passage after an active or sedentary treatment. The results suggest that engaging in acute bursts of movement and exercise prior to reading can significantly impact comprehension and reading speed. The discussion section considers the findings and concludes by addressing some of the limitations associated with this small study.

先行研究では、わずか10分程度の身体活動であっても、認知的パフォーマンスの向上、動機づけや活力の増大、ストレスの軽減に寄与し得ることが示されている。しかし、これらの研究の多くは、専用の測定機器を用いた条件下、あるいは児童を対象として実施されており、知見の一般化可能性には制約がある。運動が第二言語学習に及ぼす影響を検討した研究は有望な結果を示しているものの、その焦点は主として語彙習得に置かれており、リテラシーなど、言語習得の他領域に関する検討は十分とは言い難い。こうした研究上の空白を補い、運動が脳機能に肯定的な影響を及ぼし得るというエビデンスを踏まえて、本研究では、短時間の階段昇降プロトコルが読解速度および読解理解の向上に資するかを検証した。研究デザインとして、対応のあるサンプルを用いた複数試行 (paired-samples, multiple trial) デザインを採用し、低中級レベルのEFL学習者26名を対象に、11週間にわたり、活

動的条件(運動)または座位条件(非活動)後に読解課題を行わせ、その理解度を測定した。結果は、読解前に短時間の身体活動・運動を行うことが、読解理解および読解速度に有意な影響を及ぼし得ることを示唆した。考察ではこれらの知見を検討するとともに、本研究が小規模であることに伴ういくつかの限界点についても論じる。

The notion that exercise is good for the head and for the heart is not new. As far back as the 5th century B.C.E., Hippocrates recognized there was a connection between the brain and the body. Since then, other physicians, philosophers, and scholars have asserted that physical activity and mental well-being are intertwined. Plato felt it necessary for youth to be trained in gymnastics as well as literary and artistic matters (Young, 2005), and Maimonides suggested that a person's mental well-being depends on their physical well-being and vice-versa (Rosner, 1984). More recently, developmental molecular biologist John Medina (2009) called exercise *cognitive candy*, and neuropsychiatrist John Ratey (2008) claimed that the effect of physical activity on the mind is so profound that we ought to prioritize the benefits to our brains over the benefits on our bodies.

However, according to the World Health Organization, over 80% of adolescents and 31% of adults worldwide do not meet the recommended levels of physical activity (World Health Organization, 2024). These numbers are discouraging when one considers the affordability and ease with which exercise can be done relative to the rewards of doing it regularly. In addition to conditioning the body, motion and movement have been shown to positively affect mental processes like planning, scheduling, problem-solving, inhibition, and working memory (Ratey & Loehr, 2011), and to reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2025). Physical activity is also believed to contribute to neuroplasticity by increasing blood flow to the brain, facilitating the release of various neurochemicals, and stimulating the production of new neurons and synapses (Ratey & Hagerman, 2008). It stands to reason that other cognitive functions may be influenced by physical activity, too.

Reading, for example, is intricately connected to cognition. It involves the orchestration of complex mental processes like decoding, prediction,

comprehension, visualization, and recall, as well as other higher-order thinking strategies like inferencing and strategy use (Van den Broek & Espin, 2012). When good readers read, they exhibit the attributes commonly associated with fluency: speed, accuracy, and prosody (Kuhn et al., 2010).

For students learning a second or foreign language (L2) the importance of reading fluency cannot be overstated. Developing adequate speed, accuracy, and comprehension is an essential first step toward proficiency (Gorsuch & Taguchi, 2010) and language mastery (Geva, 2006; Koda, 2007; Richards, 2006). Reading has also been shown to help learners increase their vocabulary (Webb & Nation, 2017) and to improve their critical thinking and memory capacity (McVay & Kane, 2012). Proficient readers may also experience greater academic success (Lesnick et al., 2010) and may have more career opportunities later in life (Barton, 1999). Although the ability to read can vary among individuals, it can be improved with practice and therefore deserves more attention in language learning classrooms and curriculums.

Studies examining the impact of physical activity on executive function, a general cognitive construct, have produced fairly consistent results. Regardless of whether exercise is acute or chronic or the subjects are young or mature, the literature overwhelmingly suggests motion and movement can have a substantial beneficial effect on healthy individuals' cognitive capacity (Best, 2007; Guiney & Machado, 2013). For example, a landmark study by Winter et al. (2007), investigated whether high-impact running prior to vocabulary training could influence word retention in 27 physically active German young men. Participants' learning performance was observed in three conditions: high-impact anaerobic sprints, low-impact aerobic running, and a period of rest. The researchers found that subjects who engaged in two sprints lasting less than three minutes each exhibited a 20% faster learning rate compared to groups who had exercised moderately or remained sedentary. The behavior change was accompanied by rises in peripheral levels of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) and monoamines (including dopamine, norepinephrine, and epinephrine), suggesting enhanced retention of acquired knowledge. Winter et al. (2007) concluded that incorporating high-impact physical activity into study

routines could be a promising way to boost learning outcomes.

Building on Winter et al.'s (2007) findings, Schmidt-Kassow et al. (2010, 2013, 2014) conducted a series of experiments examining the influence of aerobic activity on brain function and language learning. In one such study, Schmidt-Kassow et al., (2010) tested whether physical activity during vocabulary encoding improved subsequent recall. The study featured two conditions: a spinning protocol, where participants cycled while learning vocabulary and a seated protocol, where participants learned passively. Twelve native German speakers (four males, age 19-33) studied 80 French vocabulary words over three weeks, with three learning sessions per week. In each session participants were presented 80 French-German word pairs twice. At the end of every third session, researchers conducted vocabulary tests as well as electroencephalogram tests which measured brain activity. The spinning group exhibited stronger brain responses and had significantly better vocabulary retention ($p < .01$), indicating that simultaneous physical activity during vocabulary learning could lead to enhanced memorization and may promote greater semantic processing.

In a subsequent study, Schmidt-Kassow et al. (2013) sought to replicate and expand on her earlier findings by measuring physiological markers and BDNF levels in female participants engaged in stationary cycling or sitting still. The study involved 81 monolingual German women (18-33 years old), divided into three groups ($n = 27$ per group). Participants learned 80 Polish-German word pairs in two sessions, and then took two vocabulary tests. The first treatment group cycled before learning, whereas the second group cycled during the memory encoding stage. Both of these groups outperformed the control group, with the simultaneous cycling group showing the most significant improvement. This suggests that physical activity may enhance L2 learning when it occurs in close proximity to exercise. Despite subjects' improved recall, serum BDNF levels did not significantly correlate with their learning performance, and the authors emphasized that differences in BDNF levels did not account for the learning effects. Thus, although physiological measures were collected, they did not explain the observed vocabulary learning differences.

The following year, Schmidt-Kassow and her colleagues again investigated

the effects of exercise on vocabulary learning (Schmidt-Kassow et al., 2014). Forty-nine German young, healthy subjects were tested on their ability to remember 40 Polish words using a crossover design that compared learning while seated versus learning while simultaneously walking on a treadmill. Vocabulary pairs were presented audibly and were randomized and normalized for intensity. In addition to monitoring participants' heart rate, blood and saliva samples were taken for BDNF and cortisol analysis to confirm whether they had influenced learning. A follow-up online vocabulary test was conducted 24 hours after each learning session. According to the results, the researchers found that word recall following moderate exercise was superior and credited participants' enhanced performance to the exercise regimen they had participated in.

Research by Liu et al. (2017) has also found a positive effect of exercise on L2 vocabulary acquisition. Their study involved 40 Chinese young adults, who were divided into two groups: one who exercised on an ergometer while learning words, and another who remained sedentary. Over eight sessions, both groups were exposed to picture-word pairs and subsequently tested on word pairing discernment and semantic judgment of learned vocabulary within sentences. The exercise group exhibited significantly faster reaction times and higher accuracy in verifying L2 words during the word-picture verification task, as well as better performance in sentence semantic judgment. These benefits were consistently observed across sessions. Additionally, in a follow-up test one month later, the exercise group significantly outperformed the control group demonstrating sustained comprehension of the vocabulary learned at the sentence level and indicating that exercise may facilitate quicker processing in L2 tasks.

More recently, Birdsell (2023) examined the effects of light physical activity on the cognitive functioning and emotional well-being of college students. His work investigated how brief bouts of exercise influenced the retention of English phrasal verbs among Japanese university students. Using a pre-, post-, and delayed post-test design, 37 participants were assigned to either a sedentary condition, in which they sat and read, or an active condition in which they walked on a treadmill before studying target vocabulary. While immediate post-test scores showed no significant difference between groups, the delayed post-test revealed

that students in the exercise condition retained more phrasal verbs (effect size: Cohen's $d = 0.42$), suggesting a small-to-medium benefit for long-term memory consolidation. Additionally, participants in the active condition reported improved mood, which may have contributed to their enhanced retention. These findings support the idea that brief physical activity before learning can facilitate long-term memory encoding and promote positive affect, offering practical implications for language instruction at the tertiary level.

Although most studies in this field have concentrated on the acquisition of foreign vocabulary, there is promising work being done on how movement and exercise impact reading in native (L1) and foreign language contexts. Mead et al. (2013) demonstrated that acute physical activity significantly influenced the reading comprehension of 258 sixth- to eighth-grade students. Prior to participating in the study, students were evaluated for reading skill, and baseline measurements for weight, body fat, and blood pressure were taken. The researchers then randomly placed participants into an experimental group that completed a 10-minute synchronized stepping regimen (stepping up and down for 10 minutes on an exercise platform) or a control group that did not. Both groups read a passage and answered questions afterward. The exercise group outperformed the control group significantly in reading comprehension, with an ANCOVA $F(1, 281) = 83.1, p < .001$, confirming the significance of the findings.

Fernández Barrionuevo et al. (2023) also investigated the effects of exercise on reading comprehension with a two-month study on 50 Spanish secondary school students reading in a foreign language. Participants were divided into two groups: a control group, which maintained regular classroom routines before taking a reading assessment, and an active-break (AB) group, in which students engaged in 10 minutes of structured, Tabata-style (high intensity) physical activity before completing a reading comprehension test. The test measured literal, inferential, and evaluative comprehension. Results showed the active group outperformed the control group in inferential comprehension ($p = 0.03, d = 0.38; p = 0.001, d = 0.11$) and literal comprehension ($p = 0.003, d = 0.35; p = 0.03, d = 0.47$), while no significant differences were found in evaluative

comprehension ($p = 0.26$, $d = 0.20$; $p = 0.41$, $d = 0.40$). Overall, the AB group had a higher mean score out of 10 (8.10 ± 1.63) compared to the control group (6.77 ± 2.32 , $p = 0.001$, $d = 0.76$) indicating that incorporating short physical activity sessions can enhance reading comprehension, particularly in tasks requiring direct text understanding and inference-making, potentially benefiting the study of foreign language.

A recent study by Cohen (2023) also looked at the influence of physical activity on L2 reading fluency. His work examined whether short bursts of exercise could enhance reading speed and comprehension in L2 among Japanese university students. Over 10 weeks, an experimental group ($n = 6$) engaged in stair climbing before timed reading activities, while a control group ($n = 6$) performed journaling instead. Although no significant differences were found in TOEFL iBT reading comprehension scores between groups ($p = .8797$), the experimental group showed significantly greater improvements in reading speed ($p = .04$) and comprehension scores ($p = .0423$) in speed-reading tasks. These findings suggest that exercise may support fluency development, potentially through increased cognitive engagement and mood enhancement. However, the study's small sample size and lack of direct cognitive measurements highlight the need for further research.

Despite evidence supporting the impact of physical activity on the brain's capacity to learn, not all studies have established a direct link between cognition or brain structure and physical activity in human trials. For instance, Dwyer et al. (1983) conducted a two-phase study with 10-year-old schoolchildren in southern Australia. In Phase 1, over 500 students from seven primary schools participated in a 14-week randomized trial comparing three conditions: a daily endurance-fitness program, a skill development program, and the standard physical education program. While improved fitness was observed, no academic differences among the three groups were found. In Phase 2 of the study, a separate cohort of 216 children who had completed two full years of the adopted activity programs was compared with the original (Phase 1) group. These children exhibited the same overall pattern of observed health improvements while scholastic performance again remained unchanged. Based on the lack of

evidence for exercise's direct impact on grades or learning, the authors concluded that school physical activity programs benefit children's health without compromising or improving academic performance.

Tremblay et al. (2000) explored how increased physical activity related to self-worth, academic performance, and body mass index in approximately 7,000 sixth-grade Canadian children. Although no relationship between physical activity and academic achievement was discovered, the study did find that increased physical activity significantly correlated with self-esteem, regardless of socioeconomic factors and that intense physical activity gradually boosted self-esteem for both genders. However, the authors did not find a correlation between the students' self-reported physical activity and their scores on standardized tests in reading, math, science, and writing.

Building on previous research that suggests movement and acute physical activity can positively influence L2 learning, this study aimed to assess the efficacy of exercise, specifically stair climbing, in enhancing reading speed and comprehension. Additionally, it sought to evaluate the practicality of using a readily available, widely accessible, and cost-effective exercise apparatus. Unlike previous studies conducted in laboratory settings with sophisticated testing equipment, this study used a common stairwell to examine how light physical activity might influence learning in a real-world environment. While many studies have focused on the cognitive benefits of physical activity, they have primarily focused on word learning, leaving a gap in understanding how exercise can impact other areas of L2 acquisition like reading skill. This study addresses this gap by exploring a simple activity that can easily be replicated or integrated into educational settings and that seeks to answer the following two research questions:

1. Does engagement in 10 minutes of sedentary activity versus 10 minutes of physical activity lead to a statistically significant difference in participants' L2 reading comprehension scores?
2. Does engagement in 10 minutes of sedentary activity versus 10 minutes of physical activity lead to a statistically significant difference in participants' L2 reading speed?

Methods

Participants

Twenty-six second-year students (16 female) attending a large, private university in western Japan took part in the study. The students belonged to two intact classes and ranged in age from 19 to 20 years old. Based on their placement test scores, they were considered lower-intermediate level users of English. All of the students provided written consent to participate in the research and were made aware that neither their participation nor their performance in the study would affect their grades. All data were collected on the campus. Any student who missed a class when data were collected was requested to make it up within 14 days or at their earliest convenience.

At the onset of the study, participants sat the reading section of the TOEFL iBT (ETS, 2013) as a baseline measure. A two-sample, two-tailed t-test was conducted to examine the relationship between the two classes' scores. No significant difference was found in the scores between Group 1 ($M = 14.75$, $SD = 5.64$) and Group 2 ($M = 13.93$, $SD = 4.01$); $t(24) = 0.432$, $p = .669$. Thus, the two groups were considered equivalent in accordance with their reading proficiency. After completion of the reading test, all participants then watched a 14-minute video in Japanese demonstrating how movement, motion, and physical activity can benefit the brain and the body. Following the video, the researcher detailed the procedures associated with the study and explained the benefits and challenges associated with voluntarily participating in it.

Operationalization of Variables

The independent variable was the type of activity (sedentary or active) the participants engaged in prior to the reading comprehension task. The active condition was operationalized as a short period of exercise where students climbed stairs continuously for 10 minutes (ascending and descending). The sedentary condition was operationalized as a journaling task, in which participants remained seated and made a journal entry for roughly the same duration of time.

The dependent variables were reading comprehension and speed. Participants completed 10 multiple-choice questions following each reading passage. In total,

there were 10 passages per condition. Each participant's comprehension score for the two conditions was calculated as the sum of correct responses across all 10 passages. This resulted in a single comprehension score per condition for each participant (ranging from 0 to 100), rather than a separate score for each individual test. Thus, the analysis was based on two comprehension scores per participant - one for each condition.

For each passage, participants timed their own reading using a stopwatch on the whiteboard, recorded how long the passage took to complete, and then answered the comprehension questions. A participant's reading-speed score for a given condition was calculated as the average reading time across the 10 passages. This ensured each participant had one reading-speed score per condition. The selection of a 2x2 mixed-factorial ANOVA was based on each participant's 2 comprehension scores (1 per condition) and 2 reading-speed scores (1 per condition).

The study employed a within-subjects experimental design involving multiple trials comparing two treatments and groups. This design method was selected because it allows for stronger causal conclusions and has more statistical power (Meuleman, 2023). Its convenience as a sampling approach also enabled the two participating classes to remain intact. Concern regarding using non-random samples was addressed by utilizing a crossover design, where the two groups alternated between treatments consisting of stair climbing or journaling prior to engaging in the day's reading task.

Smart watches (equipped with a heart monitor, stopwatch, and timer) were used to record participants' progress, and a common stairwell served as the climbing apparatus. Each stair was 17 centimeters high and each staircase contained 22 stairs between floors. Participants also received a ruled, B5-size (182mm×257mm) notebook to record their thoughts and respond to writing prompts on the day when they were not engaged in the climbing protocol.

The study used 20 reading passages and corresponding comprehension questions taken from Millet (2017). Each reading was between 300-450 words and covered topics such as science, history, and health. Readability analyses showed that the 20 texts fell within the grade 6-9 range across standard indices

(Flesh-Kincaid, Gunning Fog, and Coleman-Liau), with Flesch Reading Ease values typically falling between 55-70, suggesting that the passages did not differ meaningfully in complexity. These texts were written expressly for L2 learners to improve their reading speed and comprehension and are freely available for download. Although participants were timed on their reading speed, they worked at their own pace to answer the 10 multiple-choice questions following the reading passage with no pressure of time. After all students finished the questions, the researcher shared the answers for students to check and mark their scores.

Scheduling of the study activities

Group compatibility testing, video screening, and study explanation occurred during Week 1 of the study. During the subsequent 10 weeks, the two groups underwent two alternating treatments: a sedentary treatment (journaling) and an active treatment (stair climbing) prior to engaging in the reading task as displayed in Table 1. To minimize the possibility of a practice effect influencing the results, the researcher assigned Group 1 to begin with Reading 1 and progress sequentially to Reading 20, while Group 2 started with Reading 20 and proceeded backward to Reading 1. Consequently, each reading passage was completed by both groups, with one group journaling while the other climbed. For example, on the first day of the intervention, Group 1 climbed stairs prior to completing Reading 1, whereas Group 2 underwent the journaling treatment before completing Reading 20.

On days when participants were scheduled for an active treatment, they came to class, set down their belongings, and prepared themselves to begin the stair-climbing protocol. All participants then descended and ascended six flights of stairs, three times before beginning the day's reading task. Students were instructed to walk at a self-selected light-moderate pace using a 5-point Likert scale to guide them (1 = extremely light; 2 = light; 3 = moderate; 4 = hard; 5 = extremely hard), although some chose to proceed at a much faster rate. The average climb time for each group was approximately 10 minutes, the average heart rate was approximately 100 beats per minute, and the average distance

Table 1*Experimental Design*

Week	Group 1 reading	Group 1 treatment	Group 2 reading	Group 2 treatment
1	R = 1	S	R = 20	S
1	R = 2	J	R = 19	J
2	R = 3	S	R = 18	S
2	R = 4	J	R = 17	J
3	R = 5	S	R = 16	S
3	R = 6	J	R = 15	J
4	R = 7	S	R = 14	S
4	R = 8	J	R = 13	J
5	R = 9	S	R = 12	S
5	R = 10	J	R = 11	J
6	R = 11	S	R = 10	S
6	R = 12	J	R = 9	J
7	R = 13	S	R = 8	S
7	R = 14	J	R = 7	J
8	R = 15	S	R = 6	S
8	R = 16	J	R = 5	J
9	R = 17	S	R = 4	S
9	R = 18	J	R = 3	J
10	R = 19	S	R = 2	S
10	R = 20	J	R = 1	J

Note: R = reading passage number; S = stair climbing; J = journaling

walked was 750 meters. For context, climbing stairs has a gross energy cost of 9.6 metabolic equivalents (METs), while going down stairs uses 4.9 METs (Teh & Aziz, 2002).

On sedentary days, participants came to class, picked up their journals, and began the writing activity. Like the stair climbing regimen, journal keeping lasted roughly 10 minutes and was done prior to engaging in the day's reading task. Although journal keeping can be considered challenging intellectually (Schoonen et al., 2009), its sedentary nature made it suitable as a placebo activity in lieu of physical activity. Journal keeping has a MET value of ≤ 1.5 (Mansoubi et al., 2015) and was selected as an in-class activity because of its minimal energy expenditure. (It also served as a place-holder activity to fill class time when students would otherwise be engaged in the stair climbing protocol.) Students were encouraged to write continuously in their journals for the duration of the activity without worrying about grammar or spelling. They were also discouraged from using a dictionary or an eraser, to help maximize their production. An optional writing prompt was offered at the start of each journaling activity; however, students were free to choose any topic they wished to write about.

Results

Analysis

A 2x2 mixed-design factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine differences in reading passage scores and times (dependent variables) between the two treatments, journaling versus stair climbing (independent variable) for each reading passage. This approach enabled a robust examination of the treatment effects while accommodating both within-individual variations and between-group differences.

Prior to conducting statistical analysis, the assumption of normality was assessed for both speed and time. Skewness values for time were -0.45 (Group 1) and 0.78 (Group 2), and for score, values were 0.12 (Group 1) and -0.35 (Group 2). As all values fell within the commonly accepted range of -1.00 to +1.00 (Field, 2018), normality was assumed, supporting the use of parametric tests.

Comprehension

As noted previously, participants had two comprehension scores (one per condition), derived from the sum of their correct responses across the 10 passages per condition. Post hoc descriptive statistics indicated that participants in Group 1 achieved a mean reading comprehension score of 7.28 ($SD = 0.53$) for the stair climbing condition and 6.48 ($SD = 0.46$) for the journaling condition. Similarly, participants in Group 2 attained a mean reading comprehension score of 6.95 ($SD = .61$) for the stair-climbing condition and 6.22 ($SD = 0.55$) for the journaling condition. This suggests a potential benefit of physical activity on reading comprehension, though further statistical analysis is needed to determine the significance of this effect.

Tests of between-subjects effects revealed a non-significant main effect of group affiliation on average reading comprehension scores, $F(1, 24) = 2.269$, $p = .145$. These outcomes collectively suggest a substantial influence of treatment type on participants' reading comprehension scores, irrespective of their group allocation.

Time

Analysis by group indicated that participants in Group 1 read passages at an average pace of 127.25 seconds ($SD = 24.94$) following the stair climbing treatment and 131.92 seconds ($SD = 28.16$) after the journaling treatment. Meanwhile, participants in Group 2 took an average of 133.57 seconds ($SD = 25.62$) to read a passage after the stair-climbing treatment and 137.29 seconds ($SD = 23.13$) after the journaling treatment.

A repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was also calculated to assess the effects of the treatments on participants' reading times, with Group as the between-subjects factor. The ANOVA yielded a significant main effect of treatment on the pace at which the readings were completed, $F(1, 24) = 8.356$, $p = .008$, $\eta^2 = .258$. However, no significant interaction between treatment and group was observed, $F(1, 24) = .108$, $p = .745$, $\eta^2 = .004$.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to investigate the efficacy of utilizing exercise as an alternative approach to traditional methods of improving L2 reading fluency. The findings revealed that participants' reading comprehension scores increased significantly after engaging in a brief stair-climbing condition compared to their engagement in a sedentary journaling condition. Participants also read demonstrably faster following exercise, suggesting that motion and movement may have contributed positively to improving their reading fluency overall. The results also contribute to a growing body of literature supporting the use of physical activity to enhance cognitive performance and language learning. Notably, studies by Bidzan-Bluma and Lipowska (2018), Padial-Ruz et al. (2022), and Scudder et al. (2014) have similarly emphasized the potential of incorporating exercise into educational settings. By utilizing a structure found commonly on school campuses, this study addresses a need for practical and cost-effective interventions that can be easily integrated into various educational contexts.

While the outcomes are promising, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research. This study focused solely on reading comprehension and speed. Future investigations should explore the effects of physical activity on other aspects of language learning, such as communicative competence, listening, and writing fluency. Understanding the underlying mechanisms through which physical activity influences cognitive functioning in language learners could also provide valuable insights for designing targeted interventions. Additionally, the data collected in the study was limited. Future research could use a more comprehensive approach to confirming the efficacy of using physical activity to augment language learning, including tests for neuronal and cerebrovascular activity. Employing a different instrument, such as material better suited to measuring changes in overall language acuity might also produce results with greater consistency and accuracy. Increasing the sample size and diversifying the pool of participants would further enhance the reliability and generalizability of the results and extending the period of observation beyond 10 weeks could also provide more insight into the sustained effects of physical activity on language

learning outcomes. Another issue worth noting is that the video participants watched may have influenced their willingness to participate in the study and the effort they made while participating in it. Replicating this study without screening the video could be informative with regard to how beneficial exercise is for acquiring language.

Despite these limitations, the findings have important implications for teachers, curriculum designers, and educational researchers. Integrating physical activity breaks such as stair climbing into language learning programs offers a simple, affordable, yet effective strategy for improving academic performance. For example, in primary education settings, introducing brief periods of stair climbing throughout the day could improve learners' focus and attention, leading to better comprehension and retention. At the middle and high school level, incorporating more daily physical activity like stair climbing could promote cognitive performance and overall health and well-being. At the collegiate level, students could be encouraged to take the stairs more frequently between classes as a kind of life hack that boosts their learning capacity and facilitates better memory retention.

In summary, this study suggests that short bouts of physical activity may have had an impact on L2 reading comprehension and speed among one cohort of participants. The findings appear to reinforce the results of previous research and offer new insight into the way language can be taught to best maximize student achievement.

Looking ahead, educators and researchers should continue exploring the potential of using motion, movement, and light physical activity as interventions in language learning contexts and work toward informed strategies that encourage the development of language acuity by developing evidence-based strategies that support the holistic development of learners.

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Feature Article

The Use of Authentic Materials and Its Potential Impact on Sustained Learning

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Previous studies have shown the benefits of using authentic materials (AMs) in language education. However, the connection between AMs in formal education and language learning autonomy thereafter is not established. This preliminary study investigates potential links between AMs and sustained self-learning. In-depth interviews were conducted with 14 Japanese participants. These participants had learned language using AMs at college and had at least three years of post-college work experience. They reported that learning a language using AMs gave them positive study habits, confidence, and motivation for studying the language independently. Furthermore, they reported it was valuable for learning the language, understanding the world, and offering career insights. The preliminary study ends by inviting further investigation and suggesting that, if the connection between AMs and sustained self-learning can be conclusively established, AMs should be considered for greater inclusion in tertiary language education.

先行研究では、言語教育においてオーセンティック・マテリアル (Authentic Materials: AMs) を使用することによる教育的効果が示唆されている。しかし、大学等の英語教育におけるAMsの活用が、学習者が卒業後において自律的かつ持続的な言語学習にどのように寄与するのかについて、十分な検証が行われていない。本研究は、AMsと持続的な自己学習との潜在的関連を明らかにすることを目的とした予備的調査である。調査対象は、大学でAMsを用いた英語学習を経験し、卒業後3年以上の就労経験を有する日本語母語話者14名である。詳細な面接

によって得られたデータを分析した結果、AMsを活用した学習経験は、学習者に肯定的な学習習慣や自信、そして自律的に学習を継続する動機付けをもたらしたと報告された。さらに、言語能力の向上にとどまらず、国際的視野の拡大やキャリアに関する洞察を得る上でも有益であったことが示された。本研究は、AMsが学習者の持続的な自己学習を促す可能性を示唆する予備的知見を提示したものである。今後、AMsの効果がより明確に実証されれば、高等教育の言語教育におけるAMsの活用を一層推進する意義があると考えられる。

Authentic materials (AMs) are real-life texts, audio, or video used for language learning that are not originally intended as such. Using AMs in language learning boosts language gains, student motivation, general knowledge, and cultural awareness (Richards, 2001). Furthermore, AMs narrow the gap between inauthentic constructs in the language classroom and real-world language use. It has been established that AMs promote autonomy and independent learning (Yoneda & Valvona, 2019). However, it remains unclear whether they encourage self-learning post-formal education. This preliminary study attempts to bridge this research gap by examining the potential link between using AMs in college language education and post-college learning autonomy.

There is general agreement on the definition of AMs (Kramsch, 1993; Richards, 2001; Richards & Schmidt, 2002; Tomlinson, 2012). Materials that have “authenticity” are those “produced for purposes of communication [and] not for purposes of language teaching” (Nunan, 2004, p. 49). To be considered authentic, or what Widdowson (1978) distinguishes as having “genuineness,” (p. 80) the material should not be modified for the classroom (McGrath, 2002). Indeed, “no concessions are made to foreign speakers” (Harmer, 2015, p. 306). The materials should be used the same way in the classroom as in real life (Jacobson et al., 2003). It has been argued that AMs relate exclusively to native speakers (Bacon & Finnemann, 1990). However, Zyzik and Polio (2017) state that AMs are “often, but not always, provided by native speakers for native speakers” (p. 1).

Using AMs increases communicative competency (Gilmore, 2011; Guariento & Morley, 2001; McGrath, 2002; Weyers, 1999). Their use can also increase student motivation, access to cultural information, and exposure

to real language (Richards, 2001; Yoneda & Valvona, 2021). Exposure to real language contrasts with the inauthenticity of textbooks written for the language classroom (Widdowson, 1978). Moreover, using AMs can meet learners' needs and encourage creativity in teaching (Richards, 2001; Yoneda & Valvona, 2021).

AMs serve to bridge the gap between the language classroom (Day, 2003) and the real world (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Yoneda & Valvona, 2021). These materials contain cultural and contextual information for students (Spelleri, 2002). Students' cultural awareness, empathy, sensitivity, inquisitiveness, and positivity increase when using AMs (Garcia, 1991; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2004). In their research about teachers' perspectives of AMs, Yoneda and Valvona (2021) confirm gains in student motivation, enhanced awareness of the world outside the classroom, bridging between the classroom and the real world, and enhanced creativity in teacher approaches. In addition, Yoneda and Valvona (2019) found that AMs improve students' general knowledge beyond their language ability. AMs also encourage students to learn more independently (Yoneda & Valvona, 2019) when they connect to their personal lives.

As stated above, AMs make no concessions for language learners by simplifying the material. However, this increases the possibility that the AM content will be difficult for learners (Richards, 2001). In particular, such materials could have complicated or unfamiliar vocabulary, grammar, and colloquialisms. This could demotivate some students (Gilmore, 2007; Guariento & Morley, 2001), particularly if such AMs are unrealistically difficult. Consequently, Yoneda and Valvona (2019) emphasize the importance of the material's relevance to students.

A further burden is placed on teachers when incorporating AMs into lesson plans (Kilickaya, 2004). Coursebooks tend not to include a lot of AMs. Hence, teachers face the time-consuming work of selecting suitable AMs and developing appropriate activities (Bell & Gower, 1998; Crystal & Davy, 1975; Hughes & McCarthy, 1998; Kuo, 1993). Teachers typically believe that incorporating AMs into coursebooks is important (Yoneda & Valvona, 2019), but this burden makes their use more complicated in reality.

Something is not necessarily good for language learning simply because it is authentic. Selecting appropriate, relevant, and engaging material is crucial to success. Furthermore, as Buendgens-Kosten (2014) points out, native speakers are often emphasized as the source of AMs. This risks undermining the image of English teachers who are non-native speakers. It may also cause students to overlook that English is a *lingua franca* spoken globally. Therefore, selecting appropriate AMs is paramount but also complex and multifaceted.

In summary, the literature generally agrees on the benefits of AMs. Yet, research on whether they encourage sustained learning in post-formal education remains lacking. Therefore, the research question for this study is as follows:

Does the use of AM in formal education have the potential to contribute to student autonomy and sustained self-learning?

Methods

Participants

The participants were 14 English-major college alumni in Japan. These students had taken a Business Communication course and experienced learning English using AMs in certain classes. All participants had at least three years of work experience, a period of time we deemed sufficient to allow us to assess their independent language learning post-college. Table 1 on the following page shows that the participants' professions were diverse, ranging from high school English teachers and international flight crew members to work in logistics, securities, retail, and IT-related companies. These occupations are typical job opportunities for college students.

Prior English Learning

The AMs used previously were related to businesspeople or business topics. These materials were used for reading and listening practice. Newspaper or magazine articles were used for reading, whereas recorded interviews with global business leaders were used for listening. The class was held once a week in the third year for 15 sessions over one semester.

In class, learners first read an article on a certain topic. Next, they listened to

Table 1

Participants' Details

Participant	Profession/company	Participant	Profession/company
J1	International flight crew (A)	J8	Trading company
J2	High school English teacher	J9	International logistics
J3	Ship equipment sales	J10	Airport (freight service)
J4	English teacher at an international school	J11	Apparel industry
J5	IT-related company	J12	Railroad company
J6	Education-related IT tools company	J13	International flight crew (C)
J7	International flight crew (B)	J14	Securities company

material on the same (or a related) topic. It was done in this way to scaffold the learning process effectively with students first seeing difficult English vocabulary and expressions on paper. Additionally, reading an article first enables learners to unlock prior knowledge, build schema, and understand the topic and content. This helps them understand the audio more easily and complete associated activities. After reading and listening, students engaged in in-class discussions with each other about the materials.

Data Collection

The data on participants' current situation, thoughts on their prior classroom experience, and general reflections were collected through semi-structured online interviews in which participants could express their views freely. The main questions we asked were about the following: their current use of English in their jobs; their present English learning practices as working adults; and the perceived effectiveness of the AMs used in their college English courses for their later learning.

The purpose and details of the research were first explained to the

participants, and they signed a consent form. Next, twelve individual interviews and one group interview with two participants were conducted remotely via video conferencing because of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Each session lasted 60–90 minutes to facilitate an in-depth discussion. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim in Japanese to allow for a detailed textual analysis. This approach enabled us to capture nuanced insights into the participants’ experiences and perceptions of the AM’s practical utility in education. It also helped ensure the findings’ reliability and validity in addressing the research question.

Data Analysis

The data from the participants’ interviews were analyzed in the following ways. Text mining was performed to examine the responses to the interview questions using the KH Coder (Higuchi, 2016a). Subsequently, a co-occurrence network diagram was created using Subgraph to examine the relationships between the words (Higuchi, 2016b). Subgraph automatically groups strongly related words using extracted words (nodes) with color codes for each group. The characteristics of this group can be observed by examining the words within the group. To improve the network diagram’s accuracy, we focused on nouns, adjectives, and verbs. Words like “be” and “do” that have no significance were excluded. Sixty of the most frequently appearing words were used to construct a network diagram.

We loaded the questions as “external variables” into the KH Coder to categorize the interview content by each element. Next, we plotted the association between the words and external variables in a co-occurrence network diagram. We extracted characteristic words for each external variable and observed the topics (keywords) discussed. We then extracted and observed sentences containing words deemed characteristic and the words with which they co-occurred.

Results

Current Status of English Usage

Not all the participants reported using English four skills daily at work, and some used only certain skills. For instance, a participant working in securities reported using only reading skills in the workplace. The IT worker indicated that they used writing skills. Notably, the two participants who used all four skills worked in an apparel industry overseas and as an international flight crew member. The participant working in the apparel industry communicated with most colleagues and customers in English. Therefore, it was natural for them to use all English skills in their daily work environment. Except for these two cases, writing and speaking were indicated as the most common skills used in the workplace, depending on the occupation (service and internationally focused roles demanding more speaking, and educational, clerical and specialized professions emphasizing written communication).

Current Learning

All the participants continued to learn English even if their work did not demand proficiency in English. The purpose of learning changes as individuals transition from student to working adult. The respondents frequently stated one of two purposes for having studied English before college admission. One was, “I wanted to enter college.” The other was “I simply liked English.” Studying English during college was driven by the desire to enhance employment prospects. The respondents stated that a “high TOEIC [Test of English for International Communication] score is advantageous for employment.” The purpose of learning English after graduation changed with their work (e.g., “I need English for my work”). Others stated that they were inspired to learn more. One respondent had a stronger desire to speak English than before because they were now free from studying and more motivated to learn.

Current Learning for Work

Below are some of the types of learning in which the participants continued to engage because of their work:

- Watch TED Talks and YouTube videos to increase knowledge and use

them in class (by educators).

- Learn at an English conversation school to observe how students teach and discuss academic topics such as politics and economics.
- Study for the TOEIC (required by the company or for promotion).
- Study for situational conversation with AI (required by the company).
- Study to teach English to committee members to improve employees' English proficiency.
- Study Japanese manuals provided by the company to be able to explain possible questions in English.

Many participants stated that they continue to learn English for work purposes. Some companies provide specific materials to equip employees with English skills. The participant who worked for an airline said there was an e-learning system for employees. Some mentioned that they continued studying English to increase their TOEIC scores and chances of promotion.

Current Learning Unrelated to Work

The following are non-work-related reasons for voluntarily continuing to learn independently:

- Watch TED Talks half as a hobby and half for information gathering and watching presentations.
- Watch English news on TV.
- Incorporate English into daily life so that it is not burdensome. The first method involves watching foreign dramas.
- Increase vocabulary for daily life, as it is needed in international marriages.
- Click on the link and read topics on Instagram when celebrities recommend them.
- Look at news apps when something comes up to check for relatable issues.
- Read original news articles when surfing online.
- Subscribe to and read *The New York Times* app.
- Learn in an English conversation class.

Thus, some participants continued to learn English for their work and made it a habit to use the language. Others did so because English was seemingly

rooted in their lives.

AMs and Previous Teaching Methods

We asked the participants for their views on the AMs they used in college English courses to examine what they perceived as effective in their subsequent learning. The participants' feedback on AMs was divided into six categories: experiences and exposure, usefulness, inspiration, familiarity and relevance, varieties of English, and real English. For each category, the following comments were selected from the participants.

Experiences and Exposure.

- I read newspaper articles in class, so I no longer resist reading English newspapers. (J13)
- I feel reading newspaper articles should not be difficult, and there is no reason I cannot read them because we did it in class, so I sometimes look up words on the Internet and try to get their overall gist. (J10)
- When I was a student, I was exposed to real English once, and I think that helped me become less resistant to it when I started working. . . I try to acquaint myself more with real English. (J14)

Most participants believed that learning English with AMs in college was a good experience, encouraging them to continue learning the language.

Usefulness.

- I thought that it was a study of English that would benefit me in terms of knowledge. The content is useful for learning about the world and English. (J7)
- I felt that classes that dealt with current affairs in some countries would be useful in the future. (J6)

The participants were exposed to AMs as an English teaching tool and to learn about current global affairs. This shows the importance of the topic and content when choosing AMs for classroom use.

Inspiration.

- I was inspired by the speeches and thoughts of businesspeople. When I thought about what I would do, I used them as references for my life. (J5)

- Speeches of businesspeople were interesting for seeing people's ways of thinking. When I thought about what I would use as a reference when deciding on my life, I was very inspired by the way those people thought. (J5)
- When I made a mistake at work, I remembered what was said in the speech and tried to overcome hardship. This spirit is always in my heart. (J1)

The participants were inspired by the content and recalled it later in their lives. Here, the importance of content and its influence on our lives can be observed.

Familiarity and Relevance.

- We read about the companies with which we were familiar. I was able to connect this to my daily life. (J6)
- After listening to an interview with the CEO of a famous company, and when I happened to watch the news about the company on TV, I thought, "Hey, I actually know about this," and I was able to connect it to my daily life. (J13)
- We started job hunting in our third year. We read about companies that were close to us, which left a strong impression on me and led me to think deeply about job hunting. (J9)

The participants remembered the AM content that was relevant to their lives.

Varieties of English.

- I became interested in the fact that people speak English with various accents, including Japanese. This experience is connected to my work. (J2)
- When I listened to an interview with the CEO of a company, I was shocked to hear that people of different nationalities spoke differently. Subsequently, I listened to the English language of people of different nationalities on YouTube. I became interested in the English spoken by people of many nationalities, which is very useful for my current job. (J1)

The participants possibly heard English from non-native speakers for the

first time. They had become accustomed to American English since high school. However, they soon realized that different forms of English are used in the real world.

Real English.

- English in textbooks is like a model of English. It is good to listen to English used in everyday life. (J2)
- In textbooks, you only get words that appear in the textbook, specific words that appear on the TOEIC etc., and I wondered if they were really used in business. In the interview, I understood the English words and phrases that people use worldwide, which is great. (J14)

The participants sensed that the English in textbooks is not exactly what people use daily. For instance, listening materials are recorded in a grammatically clear and easy way for students to listen to. AMs made colloquial usage more recognizable to learners.

Summary

The participants, who were English majors, continued to use or learn English after graduating from college. They reported that:

- They found it valuable to listen to or watch AMs used in real life.
- They were motivated and influenced by the topics and contents.
- They learned the language to increase their world knowledge and career insights.
- They built confidence as English users.
- They acquired positive study habits to enable them to continue learning.
- They felt confident in reading and listening to AMs once they had used them in college.
- They were inspired by the messages and took them seriously later.
- They became more interested in the topics that were relevant to them.
- They also became interested in both their current companies and future potential employers.
- They thought it was a good opportunity to listen to non-native speakers of English, as they encountered these speakers in their jobs.

Discussion

Though this is a preliminary study and further investigation is required to widen the scope and address limitations, the study suggests that AMs are a contributing factor in helping those who have experience in English education continue learning post-college.

The AM content influences learners and becomes significant to them in different ways. For that reason, the content should include perspectives that are inspirational, relatable, and relevant to their lives. Moreover, the English presented in AMs should be diverse and not exclusively the English spoken by native speakers. This helps students realize that there are multiple English language forms. Also, as AMs can be difficult for learners, the material selected should be accessible to them; that is to say, the content should reflect their own experiences, aspirations, or future goals in order to foster stronger engagement and motivation, as the findings suggest. In short, teachers should choose AMs carefully and deliberately.

It is unlikely that traditional textbooks will disappear from most classrooms in the near future. At the same time, the growth of artificial intelligence and digital communication means that authentic and authentic-like language is increasingly accessible for students and educators alike. Given the benefits of AMs as shown in the literature review and suggested by this study, it is essential to consider how this real-world language can be meaningfully integrated into formal education, bridging the gap between the classroom and real life.

While the study does not claim that classroom authentic materials alone led to long-term motivation and ability to study independently, it emphasizes how thoughtfully selected AM—closely related to the English-major students' specialty of Business Communication and grounded in familiar, real-life topics—helped spark deeper interest. After reading and listening to the materials, there followed in-class discussions that encouraged reflection and personal engagement. Some students even pursued further individual research connected to the AMs, developing their graduation theses based on the themes explored in class. This suggests that the impact of the course and the materials may have extended beyond short-term learning and was a possible contributing factor to

sustained motivation.

Future studies are needed to establish more definitively a connection, and the nature of that connection, between AMs and independent post-college learning. If this connection can be shown, it would benefit students to have AMs incorporated more systematically into tertiary language education.

Limitations

There are significant limitations of the preliminary study regarding data collection. While the small sample size (N=14) all from the same college class was deliberate and balanced against practical considerations (such as the difficulties of recruiting a very specific post-college cohort), it does reduce the generalizability of any findings, and the lack of a control group also limits the findings. There is the possibility of skewed results through self-selection bias (Chen et al., 2021), whereby those who volunteered to take part may have been more motivated and engaged with English. It is also possible that students who already have a strong interest in foreign language learning are more inclined to pursue careers requiring language skills and, as a result, are more likely to view their formal study as meaningful and formative. Moreover, participants' awareness of the study's objectives could have introduced confirmation bias (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Finally, self-reporting by participants could be affected by subjectivity and selective memory. Future research into this will need to address these data collection issues.

Other limitations must also be acknowledged. First, the diverse nature of learners' experiences with English outside formal education was not fully captured. Some participants may engage with English regularly through online gaming, social media, or work-related contexts, while others may rarely use it outside of class. This variability suggests that learners' responses to AM cannot be treated as uniform. The study's design did not account for these individual differences.

Additionally, the direct attribution of participants' sustained motivation and learning to the AM used in one course requires caution. The broader context of learners' language exposure must be considered, as multiple factors—both

personal and environmental—likely contributed to the outcomes observed. Therefore, the study should be interpreted as a preliminary exploration of a possible relationship rather than a causal claim.

Finally, this study is preliminary and should be viewed as an initial exploration of the impact of AM on learners' motivation and sustained engagement with English. It acknowledges that the research is still a work in progress and that, while it offers an emerging empirical foundation, the findings are not conclusive. The limitations noted highlight the need for future studies to adopt more rigorous and refined methodologies in order to strengthen these initial findings and develop a more comprehensive and validated understanding of the role of AMs in language learning.

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Opinion and Perspective

Perspectives on Teaching in Japanese Higher Education from Business

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This article reflects upon the author's experiences working in Japanese tertiary education coming from a background in a business environment. As a Canadian, the author shares both work experiences, as well as the inclusive cultural differences, that are part of working in different industries and cultures. It is quite uncommon for tertiary English educators in Japan to have work experience in the business world, as many of them have been employed within the educational sector since graduating from college/university. This article expands on the theme of the transition from working in a corporate office environment in the home country to working in a classroom setting in a foreign country, and the inherent differences, challenges, and observations involved.

この記事は、ビジネス環境出身の著者が日本の高等教育機関で働いた経験を振り返ったものである。カナダ人である著者は、異なる業界や文化の中で働くことの一部である、包括的な文化の違いだけでなく、仕事の経験も共有している。日本では、多くの英語第三教育者がビジネス界で働いた経験を持つことは非常に珍しい。本稿では、母国でのオフィス勤務から外国での教室勤務への移行というテーマについて、その本質的な相違点、課題、考察を展開する。

Switching careers in your thirties can be seen as risky but at the same time a chance to take another direction in life. Wherever this occurs, both opportunities and challenges can arise. This is even more applicable when transitioning to another career and life in a foreign country, disparate from one's own. Working in Japanese tertiary education may not only expand the horizons of foreign English educators with different work backgrounds than education, but at the same time, students can benefit from learning about different industries outside of Japan. This article describes the perspectives of the author living and working both in Canada and Japan and the subsequent career differences not only between national cultures

but working cultures as well.

Working at a Canadian Insurance Company

The author was employed full-time at a Canadian insurance company for almost seven years. During this time, business skills learned on the job were honed and applied over the tenure of the position. In fact, as the job entailed business analysis, frequent communication with both internal and external stakeholders, spoken communication skills, and time management were considered vital skills needed for the position. Furthermore, the author gave presentations to management over recommendations the author developed from assessment and analyses of research on various topics, such as the policies and regulations used in different jurisdictions. As teaching essentially encompasses planning and communication skills, to name a few, these could be transferable from previous work experiences (Tigchelaar et al., 2010). In the author's case, these skills were developed as an analyst in Canada. Just as a boardroom presentation needs to be planned and presented, in a classroom, lessons similarly need planning and presenting to the class.

Working in Japanese Higher Education

Seeking to take another direction in life, the author left the insurance company to work as a university lecturer in Japan. The author wanted to try something different in life and with a graduate degree already in hand, job opportunities in tertiary education were explored. Furthermore, as the author had an interest in working and living in Japan, it was only logical to apply for employment at Japanese universities, which he obtained soon after. In this section, several themes will be commented on, in adapting to a new career teaching in Japanese higher education and differences between the two countries observed.

Language

With the author being a native speaker of English, communication difficulties were next to non-existent in the Canadian workplace because he was familiar with common communication styles. Canada is one of the cultures with Western European roots that rely heavily on low-context communication (Hooker,

2012). Low-context communication is more direct, and Westerners, including Canadians, tend to be franker, with disagreements openly resolved by objective criteria (Hooker, 2012). For example, in Canada, eye contact, one example of body language, is used by individuals when speaking to one another (Hooker, 2012). On the other hand, Japan is a collectivist culture where group harmony is important and people “tend to use high-context communication more because people rely on relational and contextual clues to convey meaning” (Moriizumi and McDermott, 2017, p. 26). In contrast to Canada, eye contact is less common and eye contact avoidance in Japan during conversations “may be a sign of deference or respect” (Sue & Sue, 1977, p. 426). In addition to non-verbal cues, how something is said can have a different meaning between the two cultures.

At the Japanese university where the author was employed, very few individuals spoke English at a conversational level aside from the other English lecturers. Even though the author could communicate in limited Japanese, the intricacies of the high context communication style were a challenge in being careful not to inadvertently offend someone. For example, if a Japanese person is unable to do a work task due to time challenges, it is considered rude to be direct (i.e., saying “No”). Rather, saying “sore wa chotto...” (“that’s a little...”) is considered more appropriate (Yamada, 2015). Foreigners at the university generally were forgiven for these cultural misunderstandings, but it was clearly advantageous to understand this part of Japanese culture, called “kuuki yomeru” (reading the air). In other words, reading social cues in Japan is important because communication is generally more indirect and “the choice of words, tone, and timing are all laden with minute complexities, and misunderstanding or misinterpreting these cues can lead to communication breakdowns” (Shen et al., 2024, p. 63).

Communication Styles with Colleagues

In Canadian workplaces, small talk, meaning casual conversation on basic and generic topics, is important because it shows others modesty and mellowness (Adolphe, 2013). Naturally, this can depend on the workplace culture, with companies having differing degrees of formality. The culture at the author’s

insurance company was generally relaxed, and analysts worked in a professional setting, with a typical hierarchical work structure. The workplace relationships were casual, with colleagues engaged in small talk on a daily basis, and usage of first names was common. In fact, calling someone using a courtesy title such as Mr. or Ms. was perceived as too formal. In addition, during meetings, defending your points of view was not considered discourteous and in fact, actively encouraged, rather than just accepting what was said at face value from senior staff. Management would also “rarely make decisions without consulting their subordinates” (Sun, 2022, p.16).

On the other hand, Japan places strict importance on the “hierarchical nature that permeates Japanese society” (Donald et al., 2004, p. 110) with “kohai” (juniors) showing respect to their “sempai” (seniors). While the foundation of the sempai-kohai relationship starts in school, it applies through one’s working life as well (Donald et al., 2004). In general terms, kohai “are made to show obedience, respect and basic submissiveness to their seniors on various levels” (Konraosson, 2012, p. 18). As a junior lecturer at the university, showing respect to other colleagues was the norm, especially to senior academic staff. Unlike in Canada, during meetings and discussions, it would be considered disrespectful to question what they said. Of course, there would be some exceptions, but the general unwritten rule still stood.

General Office Tasks

At the Canadian insurance company, general office tasks were usually completed by the individual, or in some cases, the departmental secretary. For instance, filling out forms, sending out letters and packages, creating memos, and scheduling meetings were tasks that the author did on a consistent basis, in addition to the regular workload of business analysis. Many of these tasks could quickly be done on computers, the company intranet, and internet. There were seldom any hitches, aside from rare technical issues. As the company wanted to save on paper use, many documents were sent electronically.

In contrast, high-context societies, such as Japan, may require greater paperwork and bureaucracy due to the necessity of close supervision in Japanese

bureaucracy, which is exhibited in multiple layers of bureaucratic checks (Hooker, 2012). Indeed, this was a fact at the university where the author was employed. Many documents submitted by the author to the university administration went through multiple checks prior to approval. Unlike Canada, in Japan, “hanko,” or personalized ink stamps with your name, are used as a signature rather than writing your signature using a pen or pencil (Gent, 2020). Many formal documents need a hanko, including some attendance logs at the university.

Course Syllabi and Teaching Life

As a new university lecturer, class syllabi needed to be created and textbooks chosen before the start of the academic year. During the author’s time as an undergraduate and graduate student in Canada, reviewing a syllabus was one of the tasks of the first class. However, as a lecturer, developing a syllabus was a new experience, especially in a new country. Having read articles about overall English proficiency being low in Japan (Margolis, 2020), it was a challenge to choose textbooks and other teaching materials that would be appropriate for freshmen and sophomore English classes at a Japanese university. As the English proficiency was considered generally low at the university, English materials that were not too difficult and just above what they had learned in the national secondary school English curriculum were chosen. Textbook samples were obtained from various publishers and were chosen based on their recommendations and textbook reviews. Based on the experience with these materials, if they were either too easy or too difficult, adjustments could be made in the following academic year.

Furthermore, based upon conversations with other English lecturers at the university, the consensus was that English levels were a little higher in some departments than others. Thus, the overall approach was not to use difficult materials. Also, it was important to also utilize the blackboard for those students who had difficulty listening and/or understanding what was said. Therefore, care was taken to speak at an appropriate speed and to make sure students understood what to do for certain activities, such as pair work speaking activities.

Lessons were planned using the Communicative Language Approach

(University of Louisiana Monroe, 2021). Rather than teaching grammar, reading, and writing only, emphasis was placed upon both speaking and listening, as these were the English skills freshmen students had lower proficiency with. In fact, it was the first time many of the students had a solo foreign teacher teaching them English, since native Japanese teachers typically taught them English during their time in both junior high school and high school. Also, rather than lecturing, the author made classes interactive and focused on communication with other students as a large component of the class. Many students enjoyed the communicative aspect of the classes because it was a far cry from learning grammar drills in secondary school English classes. Students were also taught about culture in various English-speaking countries from around the world, including the author's home country of Canada.

Although Japanese university students are taught in a lecture-style where they passively listen to teachers or read course notes for the entire class (Takanashi, 2004), in the author's English classes, there is more collaboration going on with students. Classroom activities have to be demonstrated, and assisting students with difficulties is another aspect of the job. At the Canadian insurance company, work was more of a solo nature, compiling research, communicating with stakeholders, and writing reports and research papers. There were weekly team meetings and occasional presentations for management, but for the most part, the job of an analyst was more or less independent.

In Japan, teaching at a university consisted of primarily of teaching classes of 10-60 students, as well as interacting with students and administration over the course of the two semesters during the academic year. The author had to make sure the students understood assignment details. Therefore, communication with students over e-mail was more common, as their reading and writing skills were comparatively better than speaking. Online translation programs could be used if they did not understand something as well. The author also had to alter the level of English spoken depending on the student level, and in some cases, Japanese was used when the student really struggled with English communication. In contrast, in Canada, there were very few communication issues with colleagues, due to no language barriers.

Other Interesting Observations

When one teaches, they are responsible for keeping the class in order. Thankfully, there were no serious problems, other than a few students talking at the back of the classroom or students often checking their smartphones. Compared to an office job where one focuses primarily on one's own duties and those of the team, as a university lecturer, classroom management is an important part of the job. With students from various backgrounds, managing larger size classes can be challenging due to "big differences in the students' ability" (Baker & Westrup, 2000, p. 2). Therefore, research on class management was critical to ensure that any potential problems were minimized for smoother-run classes.

When it came to addressing university lecturers, Japanese freshmen students were unsure on how to address the foreign lecturer. Although they addressed their Japanese teachers with courtesy titles and family name, this was often not the case with foreign lecturers where the author taught. In Canadian workplaces, individuals tend to be "more relaxed with their colleagues and immediate supervisors" (Adolphe, 2013, p. 83). Colleagues refer to each other on a first name basis, although using formalities may be used during initial introductions or formal settings (Rivermate, n.d.). In Japan, non-Japanese workers noted that their Japanese colleagues struggled to find the most suitable address-form for them and that it was common for them to be called either by their first name or first name plus "san" (Okamura, 2009). The author made sure to stress to students on the first day of classes that this was generally considered inappropriate outside Japan and to err on the side of caution by addressing someone using courtesy titles and honorifics, especially during initial meetings. Some students mentioned that they were unaware of this as their Japanese teachers had taught them to only call non-Japanese people by their first names. This could also be due to the prevalence of American media (e.g., movies, TV shows, etc.) in Japan and the casual nature of how individuals are addressed in them.

Takeaways from the Transition in Career and Culture

Working in two different work environments and cultures has been both challenging and rewarding. There are many different types of occupations and

cultures around the world, and knowledge of cultural differences beforehand can make adaptation smoother. Some countries and cultures have many similarities, for example, Canada and the United States, while others, such as from my experience in both Canada and Japan, have wider cultural gaps both in language use and workplace culture.

In an office setting, while working in a small team environment at the Canadian insurance company, we were practically left to our own devices and worked independently, save for occasional team meetings and presentations. On the other hand, the transition to a classroom setting in Japan was challenging in the sense that the author was the sole lecturer responsible for a classroom of students and for tasks including teaching, creating assignments/tests, grading, and classroom management. In addition, working in a high-context culture like Japan presented cultural differences that were at odds with Canadian culture, such as a stricter hierarchical society.

On the other hand, a transition to a new career can be rewarding as well. Although working in an office can have its own merits, working with young minds in a different culture gave the author a broadened perspective on the teaching profession and working in a different culture at the same time. The author felt a sense of fulfillment in helping students understand a foreign language and about the world outside of Japan. For instance, some students were surprised to learn some of the differences between Canada and the United States, as many students had assumed they had similar forms of government. Simultaneously, the author learned about a new culture and the flexibility needed to adapt to it.

Conclusion

As a Canadian living and working in Japan, the current work environment has given the author time to reflect upon the differences between careers and cultures. Effective communication is one of the hallmarks of both working in an office setting and in the classroom. The main differences are the power dynamic, contextual cultural differences, and classroom management involved in a classroom. As it is uncommon for lecturers at Japanese universities to have work experience outside of academia, students can benefit from learning about

different industries outside of Japan from lecturers with business work experience.

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Opinion and Perspective

Curriculum Development and Implementation of an EGAP Program at a Japanese University

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This article details the evolution of a university-wide English program at Utsunomiya University in response to the changing landscape of tertiary TEFL education in Japan. This development was motivated by factors including the internationalization of university education, globalization, and the rise of English as a lingua franca. In response to these factors, the English Program of Utsunomiya University (EPUU) pivoted from a focus on English for General Purposes (EGP) to an English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) approach. This paper outlines the rationale and reasons behind this shift and explains how the specific context informed the type of EGAP implemented. Subsequently, the article describes the development and realization of the new curriculum within the EPUU integrated first-year courses. Finally, teacher training and curriculum alignment are discussed, highlighting the need for ongoing growth to prepare students for success at university and in a globalized workplace.

Introduction

In 2009, Utsunomiya University underwent a significant transformation with the initiation of a university-wide English program, replacing the previous system in which English language education was managed separately by each of the five faculties. This centralized approach aimed to standardize and enhance the quality of English education across the university. The newly initiated English Program of Utsunomiya University (EPUU) became mandatory for all first- and second-year students and embraced a progressive agenda aligned with contemporary pedagogical approaches at the time. The first-year courses focused on English for General Purposes (EGP) and the second-year courses targeted academic

skills such as essay writing, presentations, and debate. However, with the rapidly evolving landscape of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), numerous pedagogical and theoretical shifts prompted a major transformation in 2022, shifting to strengthen the English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) approach at all levels. This paper describes this recent curriculum development and implementation of this approach at the first-year level.

To enhance global integration, the Japanese government aims to promote the internationalization of higher education and to create global-minded human resources (MEXT, 2003; 2009; 2018). Universities are recognised as fundamental in providing students with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in a globalized world. Consequently, there has been a growing demand for universities to revise, develop, and modernize their instructional approaches. Taking the pedagogical and theoretical shifts in English education into account, EPUU administrators decided to develop an EGAP program for its first-year curriculum. In 2009, EPUU had implemented academic skill courses in its second-year English program, and consequently, transitioning from an EGP to an EGAP-focused curriculum was viewed as a necessary step to prepare students for second-year courses and a proactive step towards pedagogical alignment.

There has been a move to implement EGAP curricula in Japanese tertiary institutions at the undergraduate level since the early 2000s (Iijima et al., 2021). However, the uptake in many universities has been slow as evidenced by a JACET 2018 survey which found that only 232 out of 848 teachers polled had taught EAP courses at the tertiary level. These findings by Terauchi et al., (2021) surmised that although there were some university-wide EGAP curricula already in place in Japan, this type of education was still in a developmental infancy stage.

First, this paper outlines and details the reasons and rationale for the adoption of this EGAP approach in the first-year program with reference to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) policy and current literature. The paper then explores how Utsunomiya University's English program was developed to meet the specific demands of the context and student body. In the subsequent section, the development of an

EGAP approach for the first-year curriculum is described. The key components discussed include (a) development of a Can-Do framework with unified syllabi and grading, (b) selection of appropriate course materials, and (c) measures to promote autonomous learning. The paper concludes with a description of future challenges and goals for the development of EPUU.

The Reasons for Curriculum Development

The Japanese government has emphasized the importance of internationalizing higher education, aiming to equip Japanese students with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in an increasingly globalized world (MEXT, 2003; 2009; 2018). This has resulted in a noticeable shift within Japanese universities, where the focus has moved from general English programs to those with an academic orientation or a specific purpose (Ruegg & Williams, 2018). Consequently, there is a growing demand for English programs and educators to adjust their instructional approaches, placing greater emphasis on teaching specialized English (Kobylinski & Prasad, 2018).

Related to globalization affecting tertiary education, the trend of glocalization and the rise of English as a lingua franca which has led to shifts in teaching pedagogy and theory. These approaches have challenged antiquated ideologies of “native speakerism,” and concepts such as “the setting of non-negotiable norms and conventions, or the training of speakers of other languages to adopt the culture of English-speaking countries.” With increasing attention on globalization, there is a prevailing understanding that students will need to “interact within and between a range of cultures, as well as operate within academic and professional discourse communities both locally and internationally” (Terauchi et al., 2021, page ix). Therefore, it is important to consider local needs and contexts while also maintaining a practical focus on how students will need to connect to the wider world using English. A further priority when implementing curriculum development at EPUU was related to the need for integration and coordination. The program oversees language classes for all first- and second-year students from six faculties. Students require eight credits (which equates to eight English classes) to graduate from their respective

undergraduate degree. In the academic year, there are 66 first-year classes taught by 17 teachers, and there are 36 second-year classes taught by approximately 21 teachers. From 2023 another level was added, with two full-time staff teaching third- and fourth-year students (Figure 1).

Given the extensive scope of the program, there is a need for efficacy, coordination, transparency, and standardization. Appropriate academic course objectives were developed to establish and coordinate a fully integrated curriculum from first- to fourth-year both within the program and between the program and faculties. The result is integration between all sectors of the program; horizontal integration, which connects the differing classes at the same levels, vertical integration, which connects the program at different levels or years of study, and intra-university integration, which connects the program to each faculty's English education (Figure 2).

Why is this kind of curriculum integration necessary? Without a transparent program strategy, teachers are not adequately supported and potentially left to their own devices in deciding key areas such as program content and assessment. In this situation, it is difficult to determine what skills or content a student

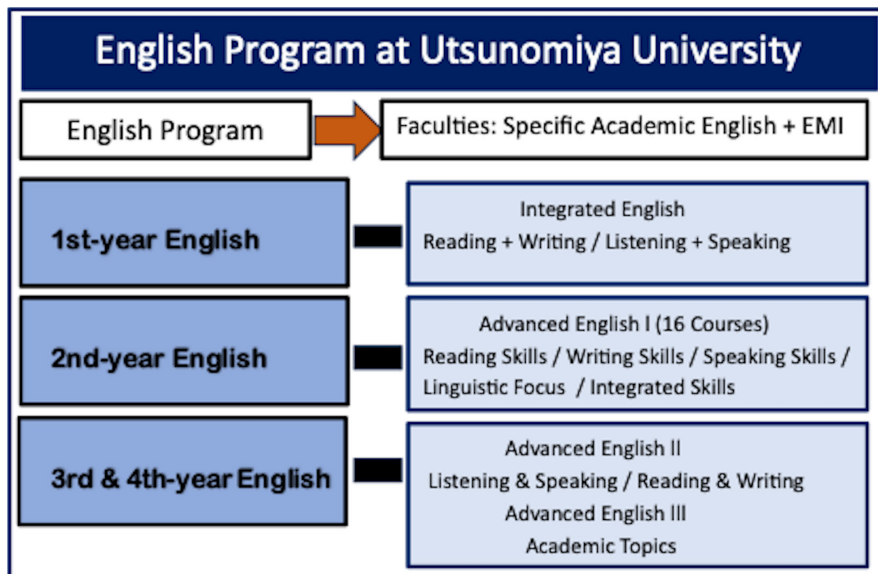


Figure 1. EPUU Structure.

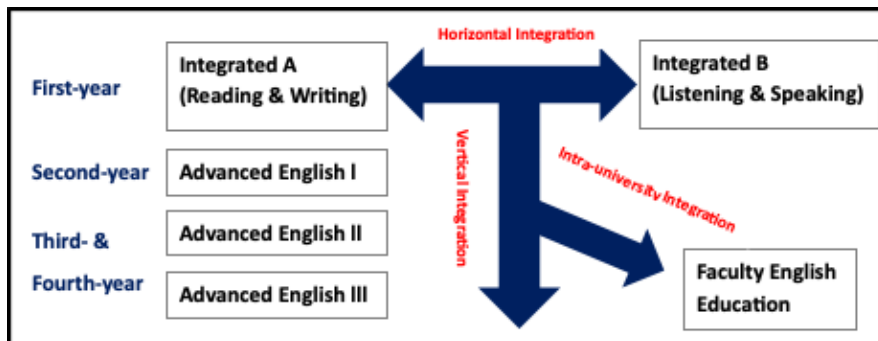


Figure 2. EPUU Program Integration.

has acquired on completion of their university English language education (Townsend, 2018). In short, a coordinated approach in language programs can help ensure that different courses of a program are integrated to maximize student learning at university (Prichard & Moore, 2016).

The Rationale for an EAP Approach

An important feature of English education in Japan is that there is no formal continuity between high school and university curricula. University English instruction does not begin where high school courses end (Underwood & Glasgow, 2018), and therefore, there is limited pedagogical guidance for higher education institutions. English for General Purposes (EGP) refers to the teaching and learning of English for everyday communication. It aims to develop general language skills that can be used in everyday life situations, such as social interactions, travel, or personal communication. The goal is to enable learners to communicate effectively in everyday situations. On the other hand, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) focuses on developing and practicing language skills that students will need to cope in their academic and professional lives. There are two main branches of ESP: English for Occupational/Vocational/Professional Purposes (EOP/EVP/EPP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). EAP can be divided into two branches: English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) (see Figure 3).

Since the early 2000s, researchers within Japan have highlighted the importance of introducing EAP instruction at the undergraduate level

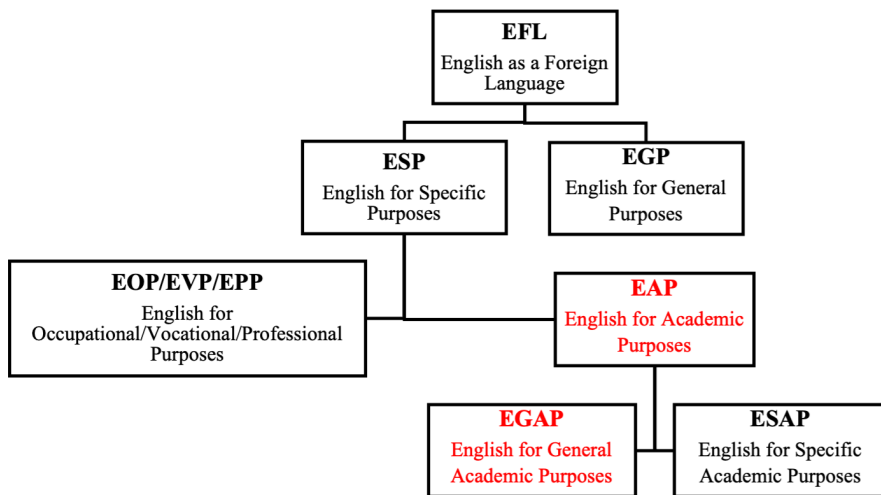


Figure 3. Description of ELT

(Morizumi et al., 2010). A prevalent approach to EAP in Japan involves incorporating it as a central element of the university-wide core English curriculum especially for first- and second-year students. This has been observed in smaller Japanese universities and has now gained traction in larger institutions (Takahashi et al., 2021).

- In the context of EPUU, program administration determined that English education should fall under the rubric of EGAP for several reasons:
- It addresses students' needs and enhances the students' future success by focusing on specific goals and outcomes aligned to their needs whether for higher education or professional settings.
- It is goal directed and time limited – gives students focused, realistic objectives/goals that can be completed within the limited time frame of university English education.
- It promotes learner autonomy, a key component of university education with the goal of promoting life-long learning.
- It promotes global citizenship by teaching students' intercultural communication and core academic skills that can be applied to

international contexts.

- It is a research-driven approach that can be continually developed to meet the dynamic needs of students.
- It aims to prepare students with the multimodal skills they will need for their futures in higher education or professional settings.

In summary, the program's university education is intended to serve as a foundation for students' academic and professional lives

What Type of EAP Was Appropriate for the Context?

First, it was critical that changes to the English program be context appropriate, in other words, they needed to be suitable for the institution, students, and the teachers. Japanese tertiary institutions have their own unique contexts, yet the vast majority of EAP research and pedagogy has been developed according to Western academic practices and does not correspond to the socio-educational and linguistic landscape or the academic practices of Japan.

Therefore, while EAP concepts and pedagogy developed in English-speaking countries offer useful suggestions, their approaches cannot be easily adapted as-is to Japan due to the fundamental differences in students' academic needs and language proficiency. (Iijima et al., 2021, p. 82)

EPUU provides English instruction for all first- and second-year students from the faculties of Education, Engineering, International Studies, Regional Design, Agriculture and Data Science. This diverse student body has varied needs for different knowledge and skills in English. In addition, on the teaching side, while EPUU lecturers are professionals in language education or related fields, they tend not to have the specialized knowledge in content and skills related to the student faculties.

Second, EAP is generally focused on and designed for higher level learners. The English proficiency of the target students must be considered. Lower English proficiency students often require targeted English language preparation to succeed in more advanced EAP study. This is a common concern in Japanese higher institutions where some universities have reported beginner level students assigned to level inappropriate EAP or English Medium Instruction (EMI)

courses (Ruegg & Williams, 2018). Given that diagnostic testing using the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) and classroom-based testing identified the majority of EPUU students at the CEFR A2-B1 level, adopting a level-appropriate EAP approach was critical in order to align course objectives with student's needs.

The third point is that EAP programs have generally been designed and developed in ESL contexts as preparation for English speaking universities. Therefore, most EAP courses aim to prepare students to interact with faculty, classmates, and materials in English speaking countries. Within the context of EPUU this was not a requirement as the students were not intending to transition to English speaking institutes.

Considering these situational factors, an EGAP curriculum was deemed the most appropriate due to its emphasis on general study skills, academic content applicable across all faculties, and its flexibility to accommodate lower-level students. The academic skills and language knowledge acquired through EGAP could then be applied by students in their respective fields or professions.

The Necessary Steps

According to Iijima et al. (2021, p. 86), systematic curriculum management and quality assurance are essential for implementing an EAP program. This process involves establishing and disseminating the program's objectives, such as using Can-Do lists to build a common understanding among students, teachers, and the university, along with utilizing unified syllabi, materials, and evaluation criteria across relevant groups. Additionally, external English exams are employed for student-level placement, gauging progress, and assessing program effectiveness.

EPUU has established unified syllabi, course books, and evaluation criteria for all first-year courses, promoting consistency in academic standards. External English exams, such as the TOEIC, are used for class placement and to assess student progress at the end of each semester. While TOEIC is not necessarily the most effective measure of EGAP skills, it is recognized by the university as valuable for students seeking employment. To address deficiencies associated with relying solely on the TOEIC, EPUU also uses in-house exams to measure

the academic skills of all integrated students.

To effectively implement an EGAP approach, the focus of the new curriculum development includes the following key objectives: 1) standardizing syllabi by establishing course objectives in the form of Can-Do lists with aligned grading criteria, 2) introducing new course materials that support the revised academic approach and objectives, and 3) promoting self-autonomous learning among students.

The First-year Curriculum Development

The first-year course's curriculum has gone through several changes to align with an EGAP approach. Students take three English lessons per week: two reading and writing classes, and one listening and speaking class.

1) The Objectives (Can-Do Lists), Syllabi, and Grading

All the first-year courses are guided by a list of objectives. These objectives, in the form of Can-Do lists, were developed and disseminated to all relevant parties, the students, the teaching staff, and the university administration. Presenting course objectives through Can-Do statements provides clear standards to be attained at successive stages of language learning within a program (Ware, Robertson, & Paydon, 2011). These describe the pieces of a puzzle within each level or course that when put together, reveal the whole curriculum and provide clear goals and measurable achievement for both teachers and students. Using such descriptors promotes transparency and coherence in the development of English language curricula (Nagai & O'Dwyer, 2011). More specifically, Iijima et al. (2021) note that to enhance the effectiveness of teaching EAP curricula in Japan, it is necessary to use objective lists because they build a common understanding of educational goals among all involved.

How were the objectives developed? First, an examination of literature was conducted to identify skills that are common to EGAP courses. Skills included academic listening and reading, note-taking, participating in discussions, summarizing, academic vocabulary acquisition, and writing essays. The CEFR(-J) framework was employed as a reference point to determine level-appropriate descriptors. These were then adjusted to the academic needs of the

students. In addition, a comprehensive analysis of students' needs revealed a need to: 1) prepare students to study at university, 2) cover the academic skills necessary for both first- and second-year classes and beyond, and 3) develop an understanding of globalization and build cultural awareness.

More specifically, teacher feedback highlighted the need to systematically target fundamental skills as illustrated in the following comments:

I think it would be great if all the first years could learn to write a basic paragraph in English, with a clear topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence. It would also be helpful if they understood paragraph formatting, including indenting, double spacing, and not starting a new line for each new sentence. (Teacher A)

Writing basics so I don't have to start from the very beginning in the second-year English class. (Teacher B)

Based on the literature study and needs analysis, a list of objectives for the first-year program were finalized. These covered a range of basic generic academic skills that provide a base for further study at university and for use within the workforce. These skills are intended for use with basic academic content and are achievable by the entire first-year student body, regardless of their level.

The grading was aligned with the class objectives (Figure 4). All teachers were required to use the same grading criteria and rubrics which were developed by course coordinators in consultation with teaching staff. In addition, quizzes and tests were standardized between classes of the same level.

2) The Materials

The course teaching materials needed to align with the EGAP approach and objectives. Therefore, a new textbook series (National Geographic, *Pathways*) was selected for the first-year courses based on the range of levels, academic content, multimodal approach, critical thinking and basic academic skills focus. The *Reading and Writing* and *Listening and Speaking* series were employed to provide students with exposure to academic skills and content that could be transferred to courses at the second-year level and beyond.

CLASS OBJECTIVES:
The student can:

Listening

1. understand the main point(s) and details of level-appropriate listening content.
2. answer comprehension questions.
3. use key listening skills and strategies.
4. use note-taking skills and strategies.
5. write summaries of listening content.

Speaking (Discussions and Conversations)

1. use English to perform classroom activities in pairs and groups.
2. actively engage in social conversations on topics covered in class.
3. actively engage in class discussions on textbook materials.
4. actively connect the textbook ideas and language to class activities.

Speaking (Presentation)

1. give a poster presentation following a presentation template after adequate preparation.
2. give a formal group presentation with visuals following a presentation template after research and preparation.

Other

1. increase academic vocabulary.
2. increase grammar for communication.
3. build awareness and knowledge of intercultural communication.
4. apply critical thinking skills covered in the 1st-year program:
 - **Analyze** text in order to identify key points, similarities, and differences
 - **Apply** knowledge to a different context
 - **Evaluate** evidence
 - **Gather** information and apply to a task
 - **Reflect** on information to form your own point of view

Figure 4. An Example of Course Objectives.

3) Student Self-evaluation Questionnaires

Self-autonomous learning is a key component of the EAP approach and is linked to student motivation. Hence, the students are given self-evaluation questionnaires on the course objectives at the beginning, middle, and the end of the semester. Both the teachers and students can observe progress throughout the year (Figure 5).

Future Challenges

When transitioning to an EGAP program, a common problem universities face is the absence of adequately trained or qualified teachers, and the absence of established training programs (Iijima et al., 2021). To deal with this problem, EPUU holds regular faculty development and is in the process of designing a comprehensive EGAP teacher training program that acts as a bridge between

I can understand the main points and most details of textbook listening exercises. 教科書のリスニング問題の要点及び大部分の詳細について理解することができる。	
Very Confident	Not Confident
大変自信がある	全く自身がない
7	6
5	4
3	2
1	
I can take notes of listening content and summarize the information. リスニングの問題を聞きながらメモを取ることができ、情報を要約することができる。	
Very Confident	Not Confident
大変自信がある	全く自身がない
7	6
5	4
3	2
1	
I can give a poster presentation in English. 英語でポスターを用いたプレゼンテーションができる。	
Very Confident	Not Confident
大変自信がある	全く自身がない
7	6
5	4
3	2
1	
I can give a presentation with visuals using presentation software, and take questions about the topic after presenting. パワーポイント等を使用し、視覚情報を活用したプレゼンを英語で行うことができる。また、プレゼン後にトピックについての質問に英語で答えることができる。	
Very Confident	Not Confident

Figure 4. Example of Self-evaluation Questionnaire Questions.

pedagogical theory and practical application in the classroom.

And finally, there is a need to strengthen the EGAP approach, and further align and standardize the second-year Advanced English courses with the first, third and fourth-year courses. This represents a significant challenge as EPUU has 36 classes taught by 21 teachers both from the program and the different faculties. The objective is to ensure consistency, enabling students to use the content and skills they acquire as a foundation for progressing to the next level.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the transformative journey of EPUU reflects a response to the dynamic landscape of tertiary education in Japan. The paradigm shift towards an English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) framework, reflects a commitment to equipping students with the skills needed for success in higher

education and the global workforce. The curriculum development, from defining the objectives as Can-Do lists and using them as a base to integrate and standardize the English curriculum, demonstrates a strategic effort to enhance efficacy, transparency, and coordination across all levels. While challenges such as the need for an EGAP teacher training program and ongoing curriculum alignment exist, they exemplify the type of continuous improvement that every language program needs to keep up with the changing landscape. Ultimately, this article describes the process EPUU has undertaken to support the evolving needs of students in an increasingly interconnected world and facilitating the development of global-minded individuals equipped for academic and professional success.

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Opinion and Perspective

Beyond Screens: Reflecting on the Pedagogical Benefits of Paper in the Language Classroom

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The emerging trend in the areas of education, technology, and wider society is the growing use of electronic records and applications to replace paper. Instructors and universities are moving away from physical paper to embrace technological advances in administering courses to learners. In many universities in Japan and around the world, Learning Management Systems are used not only to coordinate courses, but also to facilitate testing and track student grades. This development is certainly beneficial and when used effectively, offers convenience and efficiency for internal and external stakeholders. However, while online applications are encouraged as they support student engagement and participation and assist them in preparing for the world of work, activities in the language classroom such as role-playing, note-taking, idea organisation, flashcards, and posters are best done with physical paper. This paper explores the advantages of using physical paper in English language classes at a university in Japan.

“The faintest ink is stronger than the greatest memory” – Confucius

Before going into the debate about paper versus electronic applications, it is important to highlight the current environment in which this reflection is situated. My current university has a very diverse community of both international and domestic students. As part of their admissions, students are required to take a test to place them into appropriate language course levels. The Ritsumeikan APU 2025 Handbook highlights that there is a Standard and Advanced Track used for English language subjects and placement. The Standard Track requires students to take 24 credits of English language courses and depending on their

placement results, they may start at different levels in the program. The courses range from Elementary English A and Elementary English B which, using the widely recognized standard test International English Language Testing System (IELTS), would be 4.0, while at the far end of the scale is Upper Intermediate English A and Upper Intermediate English B, which is the equivalent to IELTS 5.5. On the other hand, the Advanced Track requires students to take 12 credits of language course beginning at the Advanced English 1A and Advanced English 1B, which is equivalent to IELTS 6.0. A last point to note is that while A courses focus on grammar, vocabulary, writing, and speaking, B courses tend to focus on building reading skills and vocabulary. This context sets the stage for examining how paper-based and electronic applications support students across the different language learning tracks.

Research on physical paper versus electronic mediums has produced varied results. Studies have shown that students read more when books are in electronic form versus paper versions (Amirtharaj et al., 2023) and that note-taking on personal computers may be more beneficial and efficient for learners than note-taking on physical paper (Mueller & Oppenheimer, 2014). However, similar research suggests that students who take notes on physical paper achieve better test results and demonstrate higher levels of retention and focus (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2013). While online applications promote interaction, their excessive use can overstimulate students and have adverse effects, particularly regarding time management and the number of applications used concurrently (Dontre, 2020). In this paper, I will explain my own experiences and insights into using a folder system for language learners which involves using physical paper alongside a Learning Management System (LMS) to create an environment where students remain organized and engaged with learning materials.

The 2020 global COVID-19 pandemic led to a rapid shift to online learning, and instructors and students became heavily reliant on technology to conduct classes and administrative tasks (Figueroa et al., 2022). For almost two years, it remained the only option available to many institutions as people adjusted to the new normal. During that time, instructors across Japan learned a lot about what works and what does not in the digital classroom. There were challenges

in managing attention, engagement, interaction, and communication (Kaur & Rothinam, 2024). My own experience with the shift to online classes was filled with a mixture of successes and challenging moments. While technology has undeniably brought convenience and flexibility to the classroom, it has not been a one-size-fits-all solution. As institutions and instructors continue to explore new methods of teaching and engaging with students, the debate about whether digital or more traditional approaches to teaching and learning are more effective is still ongoing (Al-Madani, 2021; Kymaz & Kis, 2020). Research on this is mixed, with proponents of both approaches highlighting their distinct advantages.

There has been tremendous growth in the availability and usage of applications in the classroom since the start of the pandemic. Students and educators alike are constantly adapting to these new platforms and evaluating each for their suitability for classrooms. Each semester, I have spent time to evaluate the applications that support student needs and reflect on their suitability for students at different levels. For example, when reviewing vocabulary is it best to use Padlet, Quizlet, or Kahoot? All of these applications are very interactive, and they enhance user experience, but I wonder if there is some benefit to printing the entire vocabulary list of 1000 words and giving it to students at the start of the semester. There is no denying that technology has brought about remarkable changes in how we learn and teach. However, I believe we have reached a point where it is important to pause and consider the benefits of returning to something more traditional: using paper in the classroom. While using paper may have economic and ecological drawbacks, as well as cause some inconvenience, it can reduce distractions and enhance learner outcomes.

Challenges of Physical Paper

For the past two semesters, I have used a folder system in my Standard A classes. This involves printing all the materials required for lessons and periodically reviewing each student's folder to check organization, handwritten worksheets, and class activities. While students take their midterm and final tests using the LMS, the folder system has highlighted three major problems. Firstly, there are

practical factors to consider, as using physical paper may be more costly and less convenient compared to other methods. The use of printed materials in classes not only includes the cost of paper but also the cost of printers, ink, and electricity. Environmental factors must also be considered when choosing to use paper in the classroom, given that producing paper requires cutting down trees, which destroys forests and contributes to carbon emissions (Environmental Paper Network, 2007). To mitigate these adverse consequences, institutions are often encouraged to recycle and reuse paper. I wonder if most teachers actively consider environmental factors in deciding to use paper or if there is a sizable population of tertiary language learners who place high priority on the environmental costs of producing their grammar handout.

The second challenge of using a folder system in my classes is that some students reported feeling burdened by being required to carry an additional book for classes. There are also risks associated with damage or loss, as I have witnessed students accidentally spilling coffee on their folders and materials. Furthermore, during the Fall 2025 semester I taught two Standard A-Track courses with an average of 20 students in each, and two students reported that they left their folders in their hometown when they went to visit during the quarter break. At the same time, research on the use of physical textbooks versus e-textbooks has revealed that there is no clear difference in the learning outcomes of the two groups and further concluded that electronic textbooks are just as effective as traditional textbooks (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013). This strengthens arguments questioning the necessity of physical materials in certain classroom contexts.

The final major challenge of using the folder system is that it does not accommodate all learning styles equally, particularly across different generations. The world is moving forward, and the way people interact with technology is changing. There may be differences and similarities with the way different generations of learners interact with digital and physical learning resources and applications. Generation Alpha (2010–2025) and Beta (2025 onwards) may not interact with physical material the same way Gen X (1965–1980), Millennials (1981–1996), and Gen Z (1997–2012) do or did. This is an area that should be explored to better understand generational attitudes toward using technology

in classrooms and learning outcomes. Furthermore, research by Amirtharaj et al. (2023) suggested that students spend more time reading ebooks due to their portability and added convenience versus physical books. Perhaps a detailed study on how different generations of language learners interact and perform with tools geared towards language learning is required.

Benefits of Using Paper

Given the issues highlighted, why should teachers still use printed materials in 2025? Paper-based learning can promote greater focus among learners by limiting on-screen distractions. The design of browsers on laptops encourages students to multitask by having numerous tabs open and receiving pop-up messages from social media sites (Dontre, 2020). By reducing the time students spend on personal computers and instead using physical sheets, they can limit the distractions posed by devices. Using paper, therefore, may promote greater focus in the classroom. In my classes, students are not allowed to use smartphones unless there are some special circumstances; however, they are encouraged to use their laptops and tablets for research.

Some students have downloaded social media applications to their personal computers and have resorted to using these on their laptops in classes. Printing materials on paper is one way to curb the distractions mentioned above. For example, students are given a worksheet with explanations of a particular grammar point. The students are then required to complete some gap-fill exercise followed by some activities which encourage them to showcase their learning. They are then placed in groups and must interact with each other without devices to showcase their understanding of the particular topic. After this is completed, students are then directed to go their online platform to complete other activities on the LMS or a prescribed application. However, the bulk of the work is done in class using pen and paper. While technology can certainly be a helpful tool, it also comes with its own set of challenges. When students are working with paper, there is less temptation to check social media or respond to messages, leading to a more focused and productive classroom environment.

Even though technology offers convenience and flexibility, students'

preferences for traditional materials highlight certain limitations of using web-based resources. Digital educational materials appear to be an inadequate replacement for printed materials (Gupta, 2011). For example, in their study, students perceived printed materials as more useful for studying and retaining information more effectively. Students often appreciate having a physical copy of their materials, as it offers a tangible reference that can be easily accessed. In my own classrooms, I have embraced the use of paper in ways that have helped my students and me stay organized. At the beginning of the semester, each student is given a folder with the first two weeks of materials. This folder becomes an integral part of their learning toolkit, helping them stay structure and remain engaged. In my case all class materials including the syllabus, course overview, worksheets, and assignments are printed out and stored in these folders as part of a structured system. When students need to refer to a handout from a previous lesson, they do not have to navigate through digital files or remember which app they used to access the material. They have a class folder with them, and they know exactly where to find what they need.

In previous semesters, I had printed the materials, but students often misplaced them. By including a folder, students have a place to put the material so they can access them easily. These folders are periodically reviewed by the instructor, and students are encouraged to keep them in good order. Using a physical folder promotes structured learning practices, especially when students are juggling multiple assignments or projects. Furthermore, the act of having physical copies of materials helps students stay on top of their work by allowing them to track their progress and make notations in their folders. But, it is not just about keeping things organized; it is about creating a tangible connection to the learning process. Research by Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., (2013) highlights the benefits of physical materials for retention and engagement. The study compared students who read academic texts on e-readers to those who read physical texts. The findings revealed that students who read printed materials showed a slightly higher rate of comprehension and retention and perceived printed materials as easier to navigate and review than digital texts. Furthermore, the study also found that print reading supported active learning and critical thinking. These

data align with my use of printed materials for teaching grammar, as it may promote deeper cognitive processing in language learning. The materials are also made available for students in a OneDrive folder which contains all the relevant materials. Those who miss classes often print their own sheets and add them to their folders.

Research by Amirtharaj et al. (2023) on the use of printed books versus e-books indicated that each format offers distinct benefits depending on the context. This suggests that the optimal choice depends on the specific activity and individual preferences. This is what has led me to choosing the current format for my classes. As mentioned previously, at my current university there are Standard and Advanced Track A and B courses for students of different levels. Standard Track A classes are focused on speaking, writing, grammar, and listening, and as such I have encouraged the use of physical paper. However, for Standard B Track courses, I encourage the use of online tools for reading but still use paper to explain key concepts and highlight particular reading skills.

The proliferation of educational applications in the classroom, such as Quizlet for vocabulary and Xreading for extensive reading practice, has led to less integrated learning. Each week there are new and improved applications developed geared towards language learning in different forms such as Padlet, Miro, ThingLink, etc. This can create a challenge for educators who need to learn how to use and apply these tools in order to make them useable for students. A more ideal situation would be to have a single LMS tool that integrates all necessary functionalities required in language learning. To streamline the teaching process and foster a cohesive learning experience, I employ a physical folder system in class, focusing on face-to-face, paper-based instruction. Meanwhile, I encourage students to use electronic tools as supplementary resources for homework, thereby reducing cognitive overload and creating a balanced, effective educational environment.

Conclusion

The debate between paper-based and online tools in the classroom remains unresolved. There are benefits to using electronic tools and applications, such as

promoting engagement among students and encouraging autonomous learning. In addition, there are the benefits of convenience and efficiency in the language learning process. However, what is clear from the literature is that one size does not fit all, as different groups of students require tailored approaches to learning. Using physical paper promotes retention and reduces distractions. In today's classrooms, distractions abound, often hindering effective learning. One practical approach to managing these distractions is the use of physical pen and paper. This method not only fosters greater focus among students but also allows teachers to manage and control the flow of information more easily. By reducing reliance on digital tools, educators can create a more structured and engaging learning environment free from the myriad distractions.

Educators must evaluate their classes to identify the best approach for each case. To teach reading and vocabulary, we may find it more beneficial to use online tools. However, to teach grammar and for note-taking and recall, it may be beneficial to utilize physical paper. In my case, my students are often distracted by social media or text messages. Using paper has helped to create a more focused environment with fewer distractions. Overall, since the implementation of the folder system, I strongly believe that my classroom management has noticeably improved by creating greater structure and efficiency. I am not staunchly opposed to the use of technology in the classroom. My position is that the integration of an excessive number of educational tools, applications, and software may result in cognitive overload, leading to distractions and ultimately diminishing educational outcomes.

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Book Review

Communities of Practice Within and Across Organizations: A Guidebook (2nd edition).

Etienne Wenger-Trayner, Beverly Wenger-Trayner, Phil Reid, & Claude Bruderlein, Social Learning Lab (2023) (253 pages). ISBN: 978-989-53290-5-2 (downloadable PDF), ISBN: 978-989-53290-6-9 (printed version) Printed version: \$34.26 (7,170 yen) Downloadable PDF: Free

Reviewed by Julia Kimura

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While conducting my doctoral research on non-Japanese women in a professional organization in western Japan, an instructor in the program suggested that I consider applying communities of practice (CoP). The framework was well-suited for my goal of using a qualitative approach to explore these women's participation in the organization and identify factors that encouraged it. It helped me to trace members' participation as it moved from the periphery to more central leadership roles and allowed me to identify factors that fostered and prevented women from participating in the solidarity movement. Since the days of its initial inception, Wenger and Snyder (2020) have refined the concept and described CoP as a social theory of learning in which the community comprises a group of people bound by shared expertise working together on a joint enterprise. In the new edition of their guidebook *Communities of Practice Within and Across*

Organizations, the authors now simply describe a CoP as a group of “people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor” (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023, p. 11).

The authors have organized the guidebook into eight chapters. The first chapter provides a clear and simple explanation of CoPs. Chapter 2 considers the organization, whether it is feasible to develop a CoP, and if so, how to go about doing so. Chapter 3 gets to the heart of the matter and explains how to cultivate a CoP. Chapters 4 and 5 explain how to facilitate the activities of a CoP and how to incorporate technology. Chapter 6 describes how to evaluate the CoP, particularly the value it generates, which manifests outside the community, according to the authors. Chapters 7 and 8 comprise the epilogue and references, as well as a reading list. The guidebook was written by interweaving what the authors described as three separate stories. Still, it can probably be more accurately described as three threads: both Wenger-Trayners describe CoPs broadly, Reid describes the evolution of a CoP in a large American bank, and Bruderlein describes the birth and subsequent growth of a CoP in a humanitarian organization that deals with negotiations. According to the authors, the guidebook can be read in a number of different ways. Naturally, the reader can enjoy the guidebook by reading it cover to cover. Alternatively, the reader can focus on following the story of the CoP in the bank or in the humanitarian organization. The reader can easily enjoy these two stories in an easy-to-follow manner because the stories are demarcated by colored boxes, separate from the main thread of the story by the Wenger-Trayners.

Chapter 4, “Facilitating Meetings and Activities,” will be of particular interest to readers who conduct research. This chapter is interesting because, though it is a part of the guidebook on cultivating CoPs, it is easy to follow as the discussion moves from abstract theory to concrete examples. Specifically, before starting a discussion on facilitating, the authors begin by locating facilitation in the context of tacit learning theories, specifically, social learning design and learning theory. Similarly, in *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge—Seven Principles for Cultivating Communities of Practice* (Wenger et al., 2002), the authors addressed the use of technology for communication

among members in a community spread across time zones. This new edition of *Communities of Practice Within and Across Organizations* naturally adds an updated post-COVID discussion of the benefits and drawbacks of technologies such as online chats, online meetings, and hybrid meetings.

Following the vein of incorporating technology, Chapter 5: “Technology” will also be of particular interest to readers who have been adapting to post-pandemic life. The authors begin the chapter with a caveat that merely leveraging only online tools in order to foster a CoP is not enough. Online tools might sometimes create a distraction from doing the work of growing a CoP or working on the CoP’s enterprise. One example that the authors cite is that leaders of the community might complain that members do not interact with each other between meetings. People are busy and might see asynchronous interactions between meetings as mere busywork. In addition, excess online interaction might create “noise” and draw community members’ attention from priority tasks necessary for the enterprise.

The guidebook is contemporary enough, though it addresses more obvious but less relevant issues that do not significantly affect instructors and students in the same time zone, such as in the EFL context here in Japan. However, the authors adequately address asynchronous interactions and online and hybrid meetings, which educators may have participated in at one time or another since the 2020 academic year. Specifically, as many readers have learned, it is important to consider lighting and audio quality, which the authors remind us is particularly important when communicating in a second language. Secondly, though hybrid meetings have drawbacks, the authors suggest that one way to mitigate a lack of participation by online participants is to invite them to take the lead from time to time.

The guidebook is appealing for three main reasons. First, tables and color illustrations make concepts easier to understand. For example, an illustration shows how a CoP is an ongoing learning loop, fostering a virtuous cycle. In addition, Figure 1.1 on p. 12 illustrates what the three elements of a CoP are and how they fit together. A second appeal is that the authors compare a CoP to other similar structures, such as a team or task force. One key characteristic of a

CoP is that its members tend to have a broad and long-term view. A third appeal is that the vignettes weaved throughout the book serve as real-world examples of CoP, which makes the framework easier to understand and relatable.

This guidebook can benefit teachers and researchers in the following three ways. First, teachers could use this book with a class of highly proficient English users as a coursebook on CoPs and qualitative research methodologies, probably in a graduate program. In addition, the book is also of interest to researchers because the book explains how learning in a CoP occurs in an easy-to-understand manner thanks to real-world examples. Finally, while technology is playing an even more prominent role in foreign language education, the authors remind the reader that an online space does not create the community, but rather, that community building is social—technology alone is not the answer. Therefore, the discussion of technology provides a reality check and encourages the reader to consider carefully what exactly technology can and cannot do for the CoP.

Although there are noticeable improvements from the first edition, such as the addition of an appendix that includes additional stories illustrating the numerous ways in which a CoP can be cultivated, a few problems remain unaddressed. Like several other books I have read recently, there is no index. The lack of an index serves no problem to those who read the PDF version of the book because it is easy to use software to search for specific terms; however, searching for terms and concepts is burdensome for those who prefer to read the hard copy. Furthermore, just as in Wenger's foray into the business world with *A Guide to Managing Knowledge: Cultivating Communities of Practice* (2002), the authors describe fostering a CoP in an organizational context, particularly in a business, which feels contrived. Ideally, a CoP will grow on its own organically, rather than be imposed by management on a group of workers.

Different readers will have various motives for reading this guidebook. Readers looking for an interesting read on the theory of learning and want to enjoy the book cover to cover will find the PDF version easy to use. However, the reader who simply wants to understand the key related concepts might be satisfied with the free PDF version, which can be downloaded from the authors' website and searched quickly with commonly used PDF viewing

software. Alternatively, if the reader prefers reading hard copies of books, they can purchase it from the same website. Considering the vast difference in price between the PDF version and the hard copy, however, it is difficult to justify spending 7,170 yen. Overall, the Wenger-Trayners' latest book is engaging and, thanks to the real-life vignettes, easy to understand because of the wide range of contexts to which they apply CoP. The manual is also easy to understand, thanks to the straightforward structure and helpful visual aids. This accessibility makes this an essential resource book for educators and researchers interested in understanding how people learn together through shared interests.

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Book Review

Expertise in Second Language Writing Instruction: Conceptual and Empirical Understandings

Alan Hirvela & Diane D. Belcher (Eds.). Routledge (2024).
(270 pages). ISBN: 9781032607719 Price: \$126 (27,183 yen)

Reviewed by Chie Ogawa

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As a teacher, I have often aspired to become an “expert.” Yet over time, I have simply grown more experienced, which raises the question: Are accumulated experiences enough to qualify one as an expert? *Expertise in Second Language Writing Instruction: Conceptual and Empirical Understandings* addresses this question directly. Edited by Alan Hirvela and Diane Belcher, the volume is the first comprehensive publication devoted specifically to L2 writing teacher expertise. Bringing together 18 contributors across 11 chapters, it offers conceptual, empirical, and classroom-based perspectives. Hirvela and Belcher (2022) previously called for collective efforts to clarify what constitutes expertise in L2 writing instruction; this volume is a response to that call. The book will interest scholars of L2 writing, teacher educators, and postgraduate students in applied linguistics and related fields. By exploring both theoretical understandings and lived teaching practices, it provides readers with a timely contribution to ongoing debates about what it means to be an “expert” teacher of L2 writing.

In the opening chapter, Hirvela and Belcher underscore a major research gap concerning L2 writing teacher expertise. They argue defining expertise is inherently difficult because teaching contexts are complex and resist simple

binaries such as novice versus experienced. Rather than being measured by years of teaching or a fixed set of skills, expertise is better understood through the lens of adaptive expertise. Adaptive experts are those who reflect on their instructions, re-examine teaching practices, and make developmental transitions across diverse teaching contexts. In contrast, routine experts rely on repeated practices and familiar tasks. Crucially, adaptive expertise incorporates routine elements, since effective teachers must also manage everyday instructional demands. The use of the adaptive expertise model situates the volume as an important contribution to current L2 writing scholarship.

The book is divided into two main parts. Part I, “Accounts of L2 Writing Teacher Expertise Learning Experiences”, examines how teachers’ experiences shape the growth of their expertise. The chapters address varied contexts, including pre-service and in-service teacher education, ESL and EFL classrooms, teacher-researcher collaborations, and doctoral supervision. The contributions employ both empirical and conceptual approaches.

Part II, “Classroom-Based Studies of Teacher Expertise Learning”, shifts the focus to classroom instruction in specific contexts. These chapters investigate writing teachers’ expertise in lesson planning, teaching methods, reference to source use, and teaching synthesis writing. Using qualitative data such as interviews, case studies, classroom observations, and focus group interviews, authors highlight how writing teachers develop expertise in teaching elements that are essential to L2 writing. The teaching contexts include EFL writing classes in a Japanese university, digital multimodal composing (DMC) in Hong Kong, ESL Composition Program in the U.S., and an EAP Program in the U.S.

A particularly relevant chapter for *OnCUE Journal* readers is Chapter 8, “From Routine Expertise to Adaptive Expertise in L2 Writing Instruction: A Case Study of an EFL Teacher at a Japanese University.” In this case study, Asaba examines a Japanese female writing teacher with over 30 years of experience and illustrates how she adapted her knowledge and practices to meet students’ needs. For instance, while she initially relied heavily on translation methods in her writing class, her study abroad experience in the U.S. inspired her to adopt new approaches that better supported student learning goals. The adaptive expertise

framework proved useful for examining how her career trajectory enabled her to move beyond routine practices toward greater instructional flexibility.

The central aim of the volume is to conceptualize and empirically examine what constitutes expertise in L2 writing instruction. By addressing both theoretical perspectives and classroom-based practices, the book provides a comprehensive understanding of how teachers develop expertise and how such expertise can be recognized, nurtured, and sustained. Most chapters draw on qualitative approaches, in part because the development of adaptive expertise cannot be reduced to numbers or measured quantitatively. This is because researchers view expertise as a process of development on a continuum, not a state, therefore, qualitative analysis might be more suitable to explore the adaptive expertise.

Studies in applied linguistics and related fields have traditionally concentrated on English teaching in higher education contexts. While this volume includes contributors working in diverse settings such as Hong Kong, Japan, Turkey, and the United States, all of the chapters explore expertise in English-language teaching. Perspectives from teachers of Languages Other Than English (LOTE) would have broadened its relevance. Moreover, in today's rapidly changing educational landscape—including the growing influence of generative AI—language teachers are encountering new challenges in how expertise is enacted in multimodal and technology-mediated writing. In the Afterword of the volume, Lee underscores the need for writing teachers to continually update their professional knowledge and skills in response to these shifts. While the volume touches on such concerns, these emerging issues are only indirectly addressed, leaving valuable opportunities for further exploration in future research.

Overall, *Expertise in Second Language Writing Instruction* is a significant and timely contribution to L2 writing scholarship. It will be of particular benefit to language teachers engaged in writing instruction, as well as teachers interested in professional development. For practitioners, the case studies and classroom-based analyses provide concrete insights into how expertise can be cultivated through reflection, adaptation, and responsiveness to teaching contexts and students' needs. For researchers, the conceptual framing of adaptive expertise

offers a productive lens for examining teacher development.

I found the book both instructive and inspiring. As a pre-service teacher educator working in a teacher license course, I found this volume a reminder that expertise is not a destination but an ongoing process of growth, reflection and adaptation. The teaching of L2 writing encompasses a wide range of skills—from producing accurate sentences to organizing coherent argumentative essays, producing research papers, and guiding students in composing dissertations. Developing the expertise to teach these elements requires significant time, effort, and sustained professional engagement, extending beyond writing itself to broader aspects of teaching based on learning objectives and proficiency levels. I recommend the book as a valuable resource for courses on teacher education, professional development workshops, and as a reference for researchers exploring expertise in applied linguistics. Despite some limitations in scope, it convincingly advances the ongoing conversation on what it means to be, and to become, an expert in L2 writing instruction.

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Book Review

CLIL Seeing the World Through Maps [Revised]

Shigeru Sasajima, Miyako Nakaya, Miyuki Yukita, Yoko Yamato, Michele Joel. Sanshusha (2024) (94 pages). ISBN: 978-4-384-33522-4 Price: \$14.30. (2,100 yen)

Reviewed by Jennifer Stewart
University of Hyogo

It can be challenging to find a geography textbook that is engaging for both English language students and teachers. *CLIL Seeing the World Through Maps [Revised]* is both illustrative and thought provoking for English language learners. While the textbook has a few drawbacks, overall it is an enjoyable way for students to explore the globe, as it contains detailed maps and fascinating images from regions around the world, and it approaches English language learning through cultural, historical, and geographic lenses.

CLIL Seeing the World Through Maps [Revised] was written for intermediate level Japanese learners of English in a university context. It was published in 2023 and revised in 2024 with easier to read maps and colour photos. This textbook uses a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach to language learning that involves using a combination of language and content with the goal of improving thinking and communication skills as well as promoting intercultural awareness (Sasajima, 2025), which is valuable for Japanese university students who want to broaden their horizons and participate more actively in the global society. In addition to the textbook, there is a teacher's manual that provides answers, scripts, translations, discussion questions, and optional tests. It

is available for download on the Sanshusha website (CLIL, n.d.) with a login and password, or a physical copy can be obtained upon request. Listening materials are available online and can be downloaded or streamed from the Sanshusha website.

This textbook is divided into 12 units called Areas, each focusing on a geographic region, such as “The Middle East,” “Europe,” and “Africa.” The layout is well-structured, as you virtually travel around the world learning about each region. Each Area includes a large map with clearly marked national borders and cities as well as bodies of water, mountain ranges, and deserts. The range of countries and features—many unfamiliar to students—engages curiosity and promotes peer learning through meaningful classroom discussion. The full-colour maps are great because they allow students to more clearly see the relief of mountain ranges and distinguish rivers from borders.

Each Area begins with a short listening exercise, for example, minimal pair exercises such as this one: “(Pilots / Pirates) once controlled the Caribbean.” Though simple, these tasks refocus attention on listening while introducing regional facts. Learners then discuss six colour photos, including images of architecture, natural sights, and cultural items (e.g., the Area on Russia features Saint Basil’s Cathedral, Matryoshka dolls, and Piroshki). The variety motivates visual learners and connects content to real places, though the short model dialogues often feel mismatched with the photos.

Two reading passages per Area cover a range of historical, cultural, or social topics. Examples of reading-based discussion questions include, “If you visited Rio de Janeiro, what would you do?” and “What are favelas?” Unfortunately, the readings do not provide warm-up vocabulary. For example, reading comprehension could be improved if words like *reincarnation*, *sacred*, and *purify* are learned prior to reading about the importance of the River Ganges for Hindus. Readings often contain difficult-to-read numbers and measurements (e.g., “13 million km², 37 times the size of Japan”), often requiring extra teacher support.

Each Area has an information table about a country with a short passage for students to fill in the blanks, followed by a similar blank table for students

to complete based on their own research of another country in this area. There is also a history table that students complete using the words provided. This was somewhat challenging for students as it describes events of which students may have little background knowledge. Fortunately, there is Japanese language support next to each blank, making it easier for students to deal with challenging terms like *fear and terror* and *arms race*.

CLIL Seeing the World Through Maps [Revised] is a visually attractive textbook and is appealing to teachers and students who are curious about the world and want to combine English language learning with global content. There is a heavy focus on reading in this textbook, which is why I chose it for a class focused on reading. However, it is possible to employ all four language skills, as students must read texts and check their comprehension, listen to passages and fill in the blanks, and write about another country.

A challenge of this book is the lack of examples, especially dialogues that can be easily adapted and model answers to discussion questions. *CLIL Seeing the World Through Maps [Revised]* is an immersive textbook with specialised vocabulary in each Area, meaning students are exposed to content-specific language as they explore regions of the world. While there are two reading passages in each unit, I found this to be excessive for one lesson. Moreover, there is a lack of scaffolding in this textbook regarding dialogues. While visual aids were great and provided images for students to reference, I felt that more sentence starters and word banks would have been helpful for discussion questions and reading passages.

Content-based learning is stimulating for language learners and helps students see a practical use of the language (Marcu, 2022). *CLIL Seeing the World Through Maps [Revised]* is ideal for students and teachers who are interested in world geography, history, or culture. Overall, this book is unique in that it delivers a new venture for learning and practicing English with a global focus. I believe it is appropriate for university students because it is structured, provides a variety of activities, and offers a unique foundation for learning about the world through English.

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Conference Reviews

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The Nagoya University of Foreign Studies (NUFS) 2025 Teacher Development Symposium was held online on Saturday, January 18, 2025, under the tagline “Teachers Helping Teachers.” The conference has grown from small beginnings to a broader scope, featuring speakers from several countries and covering a range of educational contexts. This expansion has made the event increasingly appealing to a wider audience. I am currently employed at NUFS and attended with the aim of improving learning outcomes for my students. The symposium featured three online rooms: a main room for the two keynote speakers and two additional rooms for concurrent presentations. It was therefore not possible to attend all the presentations, but what follows is an overview of the sessions that I was able to attend.

The first keynote speaker, Becky Alp, delivered a talk titled “Shifting the Focus: Cognitive Neuroscience in Learning and Teaching”, in which she emphasized the importance of understanding how the brain prepares for and adapts to learning. Drawing on the works of Dehaene (2020), she highlighted the need to consider both emotional and cognitive factors in education, as these are often overlooked. She discussed the brain’s predictive capability, which helps learners filter relevant information, and stressed the role of emotions in memory retention and motivation. One of several suggestions made was to incorporate storytelling into lessons, as it helps learners to form emotional connections, thereby making learning more meaningful. Her talk prompted me to reflect on my teaching by highlighting the impact of emotions and brain function on

learning.

Given my growing interest in student goal-setting and self-directed learning, I was interested in Daniel Hooper's presentation on building educational partnerships between students and teachers using action logs (Hooper, 2020) and near-peer role modeling (Hooper et al., 2025). He explained how recognizing students' perspectives and emotions can enhance their autonomy, competence, and sense of belonging. He discussed how the use of action logs, where students track their learning and reflect on their efforts, allows for a dialogue between teacher and student, thus enhancing co-constructed learning. Near-peer role modeling, where slightly more advanced learners serve as relatable examples, was discussed with practical activities to support collaboration, such as peer teaching, group newsletters, and the sharing of learning histories. Having used both action logging and near-peer role modeling in my own teaching, I was reassured that these strategies are effective, and I plan to continue refining them.

Marjorie Resuello's presentation focused on integrating Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into English language learning at NUFS. She provided a historical background on ESD, linking it to environmental movements and global action plans such as Agenda 21 (United Nations, 1992). Her research indicated that while many NUFS students had encountered sustainable development goals (SDGs) in high school, few had done so at university. To address this, she had introduced Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), an inquiry-based approach developed by Housen and Yenawine (2000), where students analyze images and discuss social issues related to SDGs. In one activity, students had examined campus sustainability issues, such as waste and had proposed solutions. The speaker explained that this activity supports language learning by encouraging students to practice English communication skills related to issues that directly affect them. As I am always seeking ways to help my students think more critically and deeply, I could see how these VTS techniques could be beneficial in my own classroom.

As a university instructor, understanding the Japanese school curriculum helps gauge students' prior knowledge and abilities. As such, I was interested to attend Etienne Marceau's presentation which examined the Ministry of

Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's 2020 English Education Reform Plan and its impact on English teaching. He described how the reform plan had precipitated a shift in junior high schools from grammar-based to more communication-focused curricula, with higher vocabulary expectations, a greater amount of classroom English, and an improved skills balance. Despite such changes, continued poor test results suggest systemic issues, including overloaded curricula, lack of teacher training, and the dominant influence of university entrance exams. He noted that while steps toward communication and autonomy have been made, ongoing instability in reforms hampers progress. I found his presentation valuable, as early educational changes directly influence students' abilities at the tertiary level, thereby impacting on the approaches I need to take in my own classroom.

I have taught debate classes at the university level before and find them challenging for Japanese students due to the high language demands and need for spontaneous rebuttals. This led me to attend Brianna Cosenza's presentation, "Using Debate in the Critical Thinking Classroom", wherein she outlined a scaffolded approach that gradually introduced key debate skills over two semesters. In the first semester, students focused on critical thinking through moral dilemmas, learned to support their positions with clear supporting reasons, and participated in pair discussions. The second semester built on this foundation, introducing key debate terms such as opening statements and refutations, culminating in a full debate. I saw considerable value in this sequenced learning strategy and believe it could help address some of the challenges I had previously faced teaching debate classes in Japan.

The second keynote speaker, Helen Spencer-Oatey, Emeritus Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Warwick, gave a presentation on achieving mutual understanding across languages and cultures. She contrasted two models of communication: the message model, in which meaning is simply encoded and decoded in language, and the contextual model, which highlights how interpretation depends on both linguistic knowledge and cultural background. She argued that meaning is co-constructed, making misunderstandings likely. To analyze such misunderstandings, she introduced

the TRIPS framework, which examines Triggers, Reactions, Interactions, People, and Settings (Spencer-Oatey & Lazidou, 2024). She stressed the importance of managing emotions, checking interpretations, and considering factors such as communication styles, hierarchy, and cultural expectations. I found her talk insightful, as it highlighted the complexities of intercultural communication and offered teachers practical strategies for dealing with such challenges.

I teach in a university department where students, though not English majors, engage in significant English study. Many aim to study abroad, and TOEFL scores are required to receive university funding for these programmes. Although Nick Boyes' presentation primarily focused on TOEIC, I was keen to gain insights into free vocabulary tests that could help my students improve their TOEFL scores. He highlighted the direct correlation between vocabulary knowledge and test performance, emphasizing that teaching and testing students on high-frequency words allows for measurable gains in both vocabulary and fluency. Boyes stressed the importance of first diagnosing students' vocabulary knowledge before exposing them to high-frequency words at an appropriate level of challenge. To this end, he introduced three vocabulary tests: The Vocabulary Size Test (VST), The Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT), and The New General Service List Test (NGSLT). He discussed the strengths and weaknesses of each and recommended the NGSLT as the most effective, noting that it is quick to complete, easy to score, and straightforward to interpret. His presentation helped me to understand how using such tests could help measure learners' vocabulary levels and help them towards reaching their testing goals.

The final talk I attended was by Camilo Villanueva from NUFFS, who examined students' perceptions of using short stories in a creative writing class. For his course, he selected eleven short stories from various cultures and styles, employing a language-based approach to explore fiction genre elements. He focused on craft elements, such as character description, with students practicing these techniques in their own writing. To illustrate his process, he shared examples of student work that demonstrated their improved ability to describe characters. His research aimed to assess whether studying short stories enhanced learners' language skills, cultural awareness, and enjoyment of literature in both

English and Japanese. The results described how the study of literature had helped improve speaking, writing, reading, and listening skills while increasing awareness of other cultures. Villanueva concluded that literature may play a key role in second-language learning and that students' attitudes toward literature can become more positive through exposure to short stories. His talk helped me better understand how engaging with short stories can be both motivational and beneficial for language learners at the tertiary level.

In conclusion, the NUFSS 2025 Teacher Development Symposium was a valuable event, offering diverse perspectives on language education and practical strategies for improving student learning. The variety of topics, from cognitive neuroscience to intercultural communication and debate strategies, provided me with innovative ideas to enhance my teaching. I particularly appreciated the opportunity to reflect on my own methods and consider novel approaches, such as integrating neuroscience-informed strategies and vocabulary testing tools. I would like to extend my gratitude to the organizers for hosting such a well-structured and engaging symposium, and I look forward to applying what I have learnt in my future classes.

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Author bio

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Conference Reviews

JALT 2025 International Conference Review

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The 51st JALT International Conference on Language Teaching and Learning and Educational Materials Exhibition took place at National Youth Olympic Center, Yoyogi, Tokyo, Japan between Friday, October 31, 2025 and Sunday, November 2, 2025. This year's theme, "Learning, Teaching, Assessing, JALT 50 years - Challenges and Perspectives" highlighted the evolution and future directions of language education. I attended the conference on Saturday and Sunday, during which I had the opportunity to participate in numerous presentations, plenaries, and workshops. In this review, I will share some of the key highlights from the weekend's events and insights gained from the sessions.

I have been attending the JALT International Conference since 2022; however, this was the first occasion on which I was able to truly engage with the diverse range of presentations by attending multiple workshops, plenaries, and research sessions. As always, participants were provided with a detailed schedule which aided in navigating the various buildings and rooms at the venue. The conference was held in a spacious venue situated in Yoyogi Park, Tokyo, which attracted a large and enthusiastic attendance.

The first presentation I attended was the plenary held on Saturday morning. The speaker was Naoko Taguchi, who discussed intercultural competence in language learning. She elaborated on various methods and metrics used to assess intercultural competence, highlighting the challenges in selecting an appropriate measure. One case study that I found insightful, examined the differences among Japanese, German, and American students in the context of a study-

abroad experience, where participants were required to work collaboratively in groups. The study revealed that German students tend to be active participants in group discussions, Japanese students often exhibit shyness, and American students generally prefer working independently. Taguchi's longitudinal study of intercultural competence concluded that such competence can develop naturally over time and can be actively promoted within campus settings, and that an English Medium of Instruction environment can provide meaningful opportunities for intercultural communication and negotiation.

Following that stimulating presentation, I took the opportunity to coordinate the CUE forum alongside officers Nadiia Zaitseva and Fred Bacala. Our panelists included Mehrasa Alizadeh and Julia Kimura, both experienced researchers in the field of linguistics, representing different facets of research. Julia emphasized how the "publish or perish culture" prevalent in academia impacts researchers, and she shared insights from her study on female participants. She discussed how both individual and institutional factors can influence the experiences of female researchers in Japan. On the individual level, factors such as age, ethnicity, family situation, life events, achievement factors, efficiency, and autonomy were highlighted. Conversely, institutional factors including policies and culture, collaborative opportunities or the lack thereof, IRB protocols involving student participants, and employment status such as being an adjunct also significantly impact research productivity. I found this discussion particularly valuable, as I am a young female academic and an emerging researcher, making these insights highly relevant to my own career development. Mehrasa Alizadeh offered a valuable perspective for early-career academics on how to start a research career. She traced her own starting point to her PhD research work on technology-enhanced language learning, which led her to study the use of virtual reality in her classroom and later to found the MAVR SIG. She also addressed the issue of predatory journals, highlighting their implications for research integrity, scholarly credibility, and publication practices.

Following the CUE forum, I attended Kinsella Vallies' workshop on collaborative research, because I am exploring such projects at my workplace. The session was highly valuable, especially the discussions with other teachers

about common challenges in collaborative research. I left with practical strategies for building sustainable routines and productivity habits: brief daily 15-minute writing sessions, rituals and reminders to prompt writing, and mechanisms for seeking and integrating critical feedback. Overall, the workshop gave me clear ideas for improving my habits to better advance my research goals.

The second plenary addressed the design of tasks for meaningful L2 teaching and assessment. Dr. Shoko Sasayama articulated the urgent need for foreign language proficiency among Japanese learners and outlined pedagogical responses within classroom practice. She emphasized the use of communicative, meaning-focused tasks, the principled implementation of task-based instruction, and structured practice in asking and answering questions as strategies to enhance learner motivation. Dr. Sasayama concluded by reaffirming that language education should be grounded in real-world needs and centered on communication.

On Sunday, I attended a plenary on building culturally inclusive schools. The speaker, Masato Kaneko of Yokohama City Minami Yoshida Elementary School, works with a student body largely composed of foreign nationals who require substantial Japanese language support. Delivered primarily in Japanese, the talk highlighted key strategies for accommodating multilingual learners and ensuring adequate classroom support. The discussion focused on a Yokohama high school context with a significant Chinese student population, underscoring the need for responsive, linguistically inclusive practices.

Following that stimulating plenary, I attended Yoshi Grote's talk on language learning, openness, and well-being, framed within positive psychology. Grote noted that many Japanese learners report generally positive social relationships, reflecting cultural norms of modesty, continuity, and restrained disapproval. An activity using images of varied emotional valence illustrated the well-documented negativity bias: participants predominantly identified negative emotions, suggesting that adverse stimuli are more salient to cognitive processing. The pedagogical implication was to deliberately "scan for the positive" and cultivate a "good-weather brain." The session concluded with classroom-ready positive emotion interventions, including brief "three good things" reflections each

lesson, structured gratitude journaling, and documenting an unexpected positive event (e.g., a photo) for in-class sharing. These practices aim to enhance learner well-being and, by extension, engagement in language learning.

I was appreciative that the conference was scheduled during a long weekend, allowing me to remain until the conclusion of the event on Sunday, November 2nd, to attend the closing ceremony. Participating in the conference greatly contributed to my professional development, as it provided valuable opportunities to connect with potential collaborators and colleagues in our shared teaching endeavors. I am grateful to KIT (my university) for supporting my attendance this year. This was my first time attending the closing ceremony of JALT International, and it was inspiring to hear from the conference organizers about the successes of this year's event, and their vision for the future, including the upcoming JALT 2026 conference, which will be held in Nagoya.

Author bio

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