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Patrick Dougherty, Editor

**THT JOURNAL: THE JOURNAL OF TEACHERS
HELPING TEACHERS**

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Teachers Helping Teachers (THT) is dedicated to the aid and assistance of fellow educators in the Asia Pacific region.

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DEDICATIONS



The *THT Journal* is dedicated to the memory of William “Bill” Balsamo (1943 – 2008) the founder of Teachers Helping Teachers.



Past Teachers Helping Teachers Coordinator, Treasurer, and Co-Coordinator of the THT-Bangladesh English Language Teachers Association Teacher Development Conferences.
Prof. Steve Cornwell (1956 – 2022) will be missed.

FOREWORD

Brent A Jones, Ed.D.
THT Coordinator

Greetings to all THTers and other readers. It is with great pride and no small amount of sadness that I offer these opening salutations. The pride comes from being able to mark the publication of our 10th volume of the Journal of Teachers Helping Teachers. The grief comes from having to say goodbye to another good friend and staunch supporter of THT, Steve Cornwell, who passed away earlier this year. Steve was deeply involved at numerous levels of our special interest group from very early on and continued contributing his time, energy and wisdom right up until the very end. Steve, we are forever indebted and will continue to honor your memory. As a first step, we offer the current volume in your name and that of THT founder Bill Balsamo. We hope the two of you are sharing a good laugh wherever you may be.

Starting with Volume 1 of the THT Journal in the Fall of 2013 and continuing right up to the present, THT has had the exceptional good fortune of having Dr. Patrick Dougherty at the helm. Through his hard work, dedication, attention to detail and exemplary humility, we have been able to consistently solicit a range of manuscripts from dedicated educators in a range of teaching contexts around the globe. I can honestly say there is something in these pages for almost anyone in our field. Dr. Pat, we salute you.

Finally, I wish to extend a hearty thanks to all contributors to this volume. We appreciate your effort and gracious sharing of your ideas and experiences. These pages would quite literally not be possible if it were not for you. We hope our reading audience enjoys and appreciates the fruits of your efforts as much as we do.

PREFACE

Patrick Dougherty
Editor, the *THT Journal*

It is with pleasure that I welcome our community to this, the 10th volume of the *THT Journal*. The *THT Journal* was begun as a proceedings publication to feature authors who had presented their research and teaching ideas at THT programs in Bangladesh, Laos, Vietnam, the Philippines, Kyrgyzstan, and, later, Nepal. Subsequently, the *THT Journal* expanded its scope and developed into an energetic experiment in collaboration and explication where researchers and teachers from the countries, institutions, organizations, and communities that help sponsor THT programs might also find a venue for their research, reports, explorations, and teaching strategies. Let me introduce you to the authors of the articles in this volume and issue:

Cherie Brown is a New Zealander working as an Assistant Professor at Akita International University, Japan where she teaches academic reading skills in English for Academic Purposes and Foundation Education Programs. As a keen THT member with close ties to Bangladesh through the BELTA organization, she has taught numerous THT teacher development workshops there, and initiated and manages the “Stories About Ourselves” project. Her research interests include EFL teacher development, EL materials development, collaborative teaching and learning, and vocabulary acquisition. She has been a THT member since 2009 and has conducted THT workshops in Kyrgyzstan, Vietnam, Nepal and Bangladesh.

Parsa Choudhury, former Fulbright scholar, received her PhD. from Indiana University-Bloomington, specializing in TESOL, Reading, Composition, Literature, and Teacher-Education. She has been teaching in Higher Education, USA.

She has taught at Indiana University, Western Michigan University, and Loyola University. Her multicultural teaching includes diverse groups. Currently Chicago based, she teaches at Columbia College, Chicago. She is a reviewer, presenter, and committee member affiliated with the National Council of Teachers of English, USA.

Shamsi Ara Huda, an alumnus of the U.S department of state, is a former Assistant Professor and Head in the Department of English at Daffodil International University. She served Bangladesh English Language Teachers Association (BELTA), as a Joint Secretary and as an Executive Committee member. She is one of the developers of the English language learning app “brimmEng”, available in google play store. She writes for “Stories About Ourselves”- a project to create culturally relevant English language graded reading materials. Her research interests include Computer Assisted Language Learning, literature in language classroom, materials design, and reflective teaching.

Michael Lin is a Californian native and has taught EFL in Japan since 2011. He is currently an adjunct EFL instructor at Konan University, Kwansai Gakuin University, and Kindai University. He enjoys helping students developing accuracy and fluency in their English communication. His research interests are communicative language teaching (CLT), task-based language teaching (TBLT), content-based instruction (CBI), computer assisted language learning (CALL), and intercultural communication competency (ICC).

Yuichi Tagane is a lecturer in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Program at Akita International University in Japan. He teaches undergraduate courses in academic writing, academic reading, and TOEFL preparation. His research interests include Second Language Writing and Applied Linguistics

Megumi Uemi grew up and lived most of her life outside Japan in places such as Bangkok, California, and Shanghai. She attained an MA in Second and Foreign Language Education with a concentration in TESOL in the U.S. and has taught English at a public high school in Thailand as well as one of the leading language schools for businesspersons in Tokyo. She is currently a lecturer at Kokusai Junior College. Her published works concern the role of critical thinking in TESOL, and her most recent project is developing interactive methods to teach CT to Japanese EFL students using a learning log.

Marian Wang is associate professor at the Center for Education in General Studies at Konan University in Japan. She has taught at Kobe University, Kwansei Gakuin University, and the International Trade Institute (Taiwan). She has experience working for international organizations such as Catholic Relief Services, Oxfam America, Partners for Democratic Change, the World Trade Organization, and UNICEF. She holds an Ed.D. from the University of Liverpool, an M.A. in TESOL from the Monterey Institute of International Studies, an M.A. in Law and Diplomacy from the Fletcher School at Tufts University, and a Certificate in International Studies in Economics and Politics from the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, Switzerland. Her research focuses on fostering global citizens and World Englishes.

USING LOCAL CULTURE-BASED LITERARY TEXTS TO ENHANCE CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS: A “READER RESPONSE” APPROACH

Shamsi Ara Huda and Cherie Brown

ABSTRACT

To remedy the scarcity of opportunities for practicing critical thinking skills in Bangladeshi EFL classrooms owing to the use of culturally unfamiliar target language materials combined with traditional grammar instruction pedagogy, an international online collaborative portal, “Stories About Ourselves” (SAO), was established by BELTA (Bangladesh English Language Teachers Association) and THT (Teachers Helping Teachers) in 2018. This study attempted to explore the perceived effectiveness of the new local culture-based literary texts of the SAO online portal in enhancing critical thinking skills of Bangladeshi EFL learners. To this end, 48 Bangladeshi undergraduate EFL students participated in the study during an online course. Based on Reader Response Theory (Rosenblatt, 1938), data obtained through a questionnaire survey, focus group discussion, students’ elicitation tasks and classroom observation indicated that the students discovered themselves as more active agents in the meaning-making process when using the culturally familiar SAO texts. This occurred while they were challenged to execute their higher order thinking skills during the follow-up activities to the SAO reading materials, and contrasted with their learning behaviors during exposure to the more traditional target language materials previously used. Factors influencing the effectiveness of the SAO project materials are also explained which may have pedagogical implications for EFL educators, policymakers and materials’ developers.

INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking competency is increasingly considered a crucial prerequisite for global citizenship in today's world, and critical thinking ability posits adult learners in a better position to deal with 'complex and dynamic challenges in moments of crisis' (Abida, 2016, p.11). Critical thinking skills encompass Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) that enable a person to make inferences, comprehend, analyze, evaluate, innovate creatively and synchronize sequences of incidents thus helping learners behave more appropriately in the varied contexts they encounter. However, the graduates of many south Asian countries, including Bangladesh, appear to lag behind in critical thinking skills development (Akhter, 2019). Obstacles to mastering critical thinking competencies on the part of Bangladeshi EFL learners in particular are identified as a) a lack of culture-inclusive reading materials, b) an instructional focus on grammar content rather than the deeper meaning of reading texts, c) the level of the material is inconsistent with that of the learners, d) cultural misconceptions, and e) materials containing unfamiliar cultural elements from the target language (Shanta, 2018; Akhter, 2019).

As English is a global lingua franca used by more non-native speakers than native speakers (Crystal, 2019), availability of multiple culture-based language teaching materials in English appears to be a natural demand to ameliorate learners' critical thinking skills. Culture-based reading materials in English, with its infused association with respective learners' personal experiences, serve as an effective stimulus in triggering learners' enthusiastic linguistic performance in EFL classrooms (Akhter, 2019). They create space for educators to engage learners in different critical thinking activities and thus to implement a language pedagogy which is "sensitive to a particular group of teachers, teaching a particular set of learners, pursuing a particular set of goals, within a particular institutional context,

[and] embedded in particular social cultural milieu” as prescribed by Kumaravedivelu (2016) cited in Shanta (2018; p.59).

To address the demand of EFL educators and learners in Bangladesh for culture-inclusive English language teaching materials, BELTA (Bangladesh English Language Teachers Association) and THT (Teachers Helping Teachers) established an international collaborative teacher/materials development project “Stories About Ourselves” (SAO), in late 2018. The project manager, Professor Cherie Brown (Writer 2 of this paper), a native English speaker, initiated the project with a training workshop during an annual THT Teacher development workshop programme organized by BELTA in Dhaka in 2018.

Initially, there were nine enthusiastic Bangladeshi educators who were trained in how to analyze an original Bangladeshi story using the online vocabulary analysis tool, Web VP Classic v.4 (Cobb, 2002). Professor Brown explained how teachers can adapt and grade this kind of material to different proficiency levels, and the participants then wrote short stories of their own with a Bangladeshi cultural content focus. These were then graded to different proficiency levels using the vocabulary analysis tool, and edited, and follow up language teaching activities were added based on Bloom’s revised taxonomy of cognitive skills (Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R., 2001).

In 2020, the SAO project further evolved with the introduction of an online portal: <https://www.stories.belta-bd.org/index.php> (Brown, 2020), which provides free access to learning and teaching materials for English teachers across Bangladesh. To date, material from 22 writers and three categories of writing contribute to the site (fiction, non-fiction and poetry). The materials cover five proficiency levels, from Elementary to Advanced, and include stories for learners of all

ages. Users can easily navigate their way to the desired materials according to their teaching and learning requirements. In addition, anyone with an interest in writing on Bangladeshi life or culture in English can submit their writing, irrespective of age, thus enabling the quantity of new culturally relevant materials to grow over time.

The research described here is a case study conducted in a renowned IT-based private university in Bangladesh. It was designed to elicit the responses to the “Stories About Ourselves” materials of 48 EFL learners in a Moodle-based online English language learning course. The learners were exposed to various culture-based graded reading materials from the SAO online portal, along with other, separate learning materials from the target language culture. The data obtained from the study were triangulated and analyzed, and were interpreted using Reader Response Theory (Rosenblatt, 1938).

Rosenblatt’s “*Literature as Exploration*” (Rosenblatt, 1938), marked a turning point in the teaching of literature with new recognition of readers as active agents in the meaning construction process. According to Rosenblatt (1995), the act of reading literature is similar to the act of exploring its inherent emotions and histories through which the readers intend to construct different meanings. Iser (1972a), cited in Mart (2019), explained that to Rosenblatt, “meaning is constructed through a transaction between the reader and the text and throughout the transaction, learners bridge the gaps in the text employing their previous knowledge and disposition” (p.79).

In Rosenblatt’s transactional view of reader response, the reader is “not seen as a separate entity, acting upon the environment, nor the environment acting upon the organism, but both parts [act] ... as a total event.” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p.98). Therefore, when engaging readers in the process of meaning

construction, Rosenblatt believed context is as crucial as the text itself.

Reader Response Theory postulates that the reader creates meaning from the text from either an aesthetic stance, or what is described as an efferent stance. From an aesthetic stance, readers try to perceive meaning through, “senses, feelings and intuitions” (Mart, 2019, p.81). They personally feel the tension and the conflicts taking place in the text. Conversely, from an efferent stance, readers try to identify an accurate message that explains the text itself. Their attention focuses predominantly on the exact information presented in the text. Therefore, from an aesthetic stance, when a literary text is used in a language classroom, because of its immediate attachment with life itself, readers are given room to verbalize their own experiences and opinions associated with textual content. However, an efferent stance requires the teacher to instruct the learners to perform more frequently and “more adequately in response to text” focusing on actual textual meaning, which, over time, is believed to accelerate their language awareness (Rosenblatt, 1974, p.353).

In this study, the students were approached in a one-to-one fashion, in a cooperative rather than a competitive classroom environment, so that cordial social relationships could be ensured. Preserving turn-taking opportunities in this context enabled students to develop their own diverse views, address individual mistakes in a way that aimed to develop learners’ language awareness as a whole, allowed learners sufficient time to articulate their opinions, motivated them to participate both emotionally and intellectually in the meaning-making process and challenged them to apply HOTS to resolve the problems posed by the follow-up activities. Thus, the pedagogical methods used in the present study appropriately applied Reader-Response Theory. (Here, the culture-based graded reading materials of the SAO online portal are considered as the literary

texts and the learners participating in the Moodle based online EFL course are considered as the readers.)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Positioning English as a global lingua franca, the study investigated how effective the culture-based graded reading materials of the SAO online portal may be in fulfilling the demand for multiple culture-based language teaching materials in English in the context of a Bangladeshi university EFL setting. The study also sought to identify the influence of different genres of literature and their follow-up language activities in the meaning construction process of the learners. To be specific, the study strove to critically explore students' perceptions and learning experiences in relation to the following research questions:

(i) How did the students rank different genres available on the portal?

(ii) To what extent were grammar classes perceived to be more effective through use of the portal materials instead of traditional grammar instructional materials?

(iii) To what extent were the portal materials engaging when compared with other materials that focused more on the target language culture?

(iv) How significant was the teacher's role in the process of meaning-making? And,

(v) To what extent did the activities of the portal promote learners' critical thinking skills?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Inclusion of Culture-based Reading Materials into ELT Classrooms

Incorporating relevant cultural material into reading materials in English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms has long been of interest to English language educators. However, what is undecided is which or whose culture should have preference in the process of target language learning. As context is an important factor in the learners' meaning making process, and likely impacts the development of critical thinking skills, scholars have provided different reasons for choosing different culture-based teaching materials for different teaching contexts. For instance, to acculturate English language learners with native speakers' models of English, Byram (1997) and Byram and Flemming (1998) proposed the target language culture as the preferred teaching content for the ELT classrooms.

Conversely, some scholars emphasize the importance of including a focus on local culture along with learning about the target language culture. In learner-centered classrooms, integration of local culture within language teaching materials and activities is becoming a more prominent concern (Swoden, 2007). According to Swoden, to shelter students from feeling alienated, teachers need to utilize teaching materials that contain local cultural content rather than that of the target language culture only. Moreover, when the language teacher is not a local person, Swoden (2007, p.307) suggests that teachers be vigilant about "not only... the culture of their students and their environment, but also ... the cultures that they themselves bring to the classroom."

When English is taught as a foreign language using content from the target language culture, what is considered authentic to native speakers, might not be considered authentic in the real-

life communications of the learners (Brown, 2022 - pending). For such situations, while still focusing on aspects of language authenticity, Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) also emphasize the need to find a more appropriate pedagogy accommodating both learners' global and local needs.

As mentioned, positioning English as a global lingua franca, spoken by more non-native speakers than native speakers, a fourth view, elaborated by Alptekin (2005) and Jenkins (2005), prescribes the use of culture-free teaching materials in ELT classrooms, and recommends materials inclusive of all cultural backgrounds of English language learners.

Finally, Phyak (2011) suggests utilizing both the target language culture and the local language culture as English language teaching materials, giving priority to the latter.

Empirical Studies on the Use of Culture-based ELT Materials

Although, there are divergent views regarding the inclusion of culture in English language classrooms, empirical studies on this topic are few. Most concentrate on the perceptions of students and teachers concerning the inclusion of local culture or target culture as language teaching materials in EFL contexts rather than being empirical investigations into the effects of the use of culture-based teaching materials in English on the English language proficiency levels of the learners.

For example, Çamlıbel (1998), in a study with four groups of EFL teachers, found a preference for integrating target language culture as an important sociological element for teaching English as a foreign language. However, Yilmaz (2006), investigating Turkish high school students' opinions regarding the incorporation of the target language culture in an EFL context, discovered three types of opinions. While a majority of the students voted for the integration of the target

culture along with learning English, a significant number were against, or partially against this. In another study with ninth-grade Turkish high school students, Danacı (2009) found that most students interviewed liked the cultural content of their textbooks, which included both target language culture and other international cultural material. However, most indicated a preference to change their textbook content further by adding topics relevant to their own local culture. Additionally, McKay (2009b), surveying teachers' opinions on the use of students' source culture or target culture in Korean English classes, found that both have a significant impact on the teaching-learning process, and concluded that it is up to teachers to decide the materials according to what they perceive to be most advantageous.

Rojab et al. (2014), in their study into Indonesian tertiary students' attitudes on the use of local culture or target culture reading materials, found that most students displayed a positive attitude to local and target culture reading materials, with the majority preferring the target culture materials because of its popular themes and linguistic styles, while local cultural materials were chosen for the way these demonstrated their own identity. Moreover, a considerable number of students found the use of international culture materials informative, owing to their positioning of English as a *lingua franca*.

In another empirical study, Pashangzadeh et al. (2016) researched 54 undergraduate EFL learners majoring in English translation in Iran. The experimental group, who were taught with narratives/stories, outperformed the control group of students, who were taught with non-narrative reading materials. The differences were found to occur in their proficiency in using critical thinking skills subscales, including "evaluation, analysis, inference, deductive reasoning and inductive reasoning", Facione (2013) as cited in Pashangzadeh, et al. (2016, p.100).

An experimental study with 36 university preparatory class students in an EFL context in Turkey by Harman (2015), found the experimental group outperformed the control group of students in their reading and writing proficiency in English. In this case, students in the former group were taught using materials containing both local and target language cultural content and the latter were instructed with materials using only the target language culture.

In addition, a presentation to the Greek Ministry of Education by Lontou (2014) demonstrated improvement in reading comprehension performance of Greek students when tested through the use of culturally familiar texts. Furthermore, students performed well in both objective and free written recall tests using materials that were culturally familiar (Floyd and Carell, 1987, p. 89) irrespective of syntactic complexity, while Sasaki found the change of culturally unfamiliar words to familiar ones had a significant impact on cloze test performance (Sasaki, 2000, p.103). Culture-based reading texts were also found to compensate students for a lack of prior topic knowledge (Erten and Razi, 2009, p.70).

METHODOLOGY

In partial response to the claim for the necessity of culture-based reading materials in ELT classrooms as a trigger of students' motivation to participate in English language proficiency building activities (Shanta, 2018), this study mainly attempted to analyze the perceived effectiveness of such materials in boosting students' critical thinking skills when they were exposed to different literary genres using the culturally-relevant materials provided in the SAO online portal. The study also tried to discover how the students ranked the different contents of the portal, how effective they found their grammar classes based around these materials in comparison with their previous more traditional grammar instructional materials, how

engaging they found the materials in comparison with the less culturally familiar target language materials and how significant the role of their teacher was in the meaning-making process of the reading materials.

Considering these objectives, the researchers applied a Mixed Method Research (MMR) design, or ‘a pragmatic research approach’ (Giddings 2006, p. 195) as cited in Riazi & Candlin, 2014, p.139). In this inclusive approach, by incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data, the potential strengths of each of the methodological approaches are utilized (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire survey via a Google form and qualitative data were collected through a student focus group discussion and written elicitation tasks. Finally, classroom observation was used to complement these data.

Participants

Forty-eight undergraduate students, majoring in Nutrition and Food Engineering, participated in the study during their regular English language course. The course was conducted online through Google Meet. All course materials were preserved in a Moodle repository managed by the university. The objectives of the course were to improve the students’ vocabulary, polish their grammatical knowledge and develop their speaking and writing skills in English. The majority of the students were located in rural areas outside the capital city Dhaka, and were learning online because of the COVID 19 pandemic.

To introduce herself to the students, the course teacher (Writer 1 of this paper) posted a welcome video message on the Moodle repository of the course, which also oriented the students to the course objectives and requirements, and provided the teacher’s contact information. To ensure greater mutual

rapport, the teacher also connected with them via CMC (Computer Mediated Communication) platforms such as WhatsApp and Messenger groups. The participants were informed about the research, and were asked to consent to participate in the focus group discussion and to share their elicitation tasks for the purpose of the study, while being assured of their privacy.

Questionnaire Survey

A questionnaire was administered consisting of eight items; three W/H questions and five opinion-based questions (these utilized an informal five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ‘Strongly Agree’ to 5 ‘Strongly Disagree’). The survey was created using Google Forms and the link was sent to the EFL student participants through Google Meet. The teacher encouraged the students at the beginning of the survey to be honest in expressing their opinions. She also clarified and defined ‘critical thinking skills’ by providing examples, and translated all the questions into the students’ mother-tongue - Bangla - to ensure proper understanding. The results of the questionnaire were then analyzed using Google’s inbuilt online survey response system that provided quantitative data results in the form of an automatic percentage.

Focus Group Discussion

In order to gain more concrete insight into the views of the student participants (in relation to the effectiveness of the prescribed culture-based graded reading materials in developing their critical thinking skills), a qualitative dimension of the study was also conducted. This consisted of a focus group discussion (with 16 students) via Google Meet. Eight follow-up questions, complementary to the questionnaire survey questions, were asked of the participants. The participants were encouraged to

answer in their own way and their answers were recorded utilizing the Google Meet recording function.

Elicitation Tasks

Culture-based graded reading materials of the SAO online portal were used in seven online classes of the course. The literary texts were of different genres, and included fiction, non-fiction and poetry. To address the mixed ability group of students, the literary texts were of different proficiency levels ranging from ‘Elementary to Pre-intermediate’, ‘Pre-intermediate to Intermediate’ and ‘Intermediate to Upper-intermediate’. In all of these classes, the learners were required to take part in written elicitation tasks which asked for both synchronous and asynchronous submissions. The elicitation task products generated further qualitative data for the study.

Classroom Observation

Twenty-one online classes were conducted and recorded utilizing Google Meet. The class recordings related to the present study were viewed and analyzed at the end of the course to better understand the role of the online class environment in the meaning-making process of the students, and for evidence of the use of critical thinking skills.

ANALYSIS

The data collected through questionnaire survey, focus group discussion and classroom observation were analyzed systematically (further details are provided below) to obtain an overall impression of the Reader Response Theory to the present study. With the resulting data, two tables were created to exhibit the questionnaire data and another table was used to summarize and present the information gathered from the elicitation tasks.

First, the questionnaire survey data were analyzed utilizing Google's inbuilt online survey system which transformed the information into quantitative data in the form of percentages. Then, the focus group discussion data and classroom observation data from the Google Meet recordings were analyzed and their information was collated and compared to the survey data. The learners' responses complemented the survey data on the ground of six important components (see the tables below): i) comparison with own life experience, ii) discovery of personal habits, iii) reflection on emotional stance, iv) examination of identity issues, v) presentation through technology and vi) class participation, which corresponded with the performance of the critical thinking skills (remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating) described in Anderson and Krathwohl's revised version of Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001).

Finally, the products created in the written elicitation tasks were analyzed for evidence of the SAO online portal materials' effectiveness in engaging the students' critical thinking skills. The criteria used to measure the students' enhancement of critical thinking skills were: their active engagement, personal attachment with the text, depth of comprehension of the topic, ability to challenge their previous ideology for the sake of their moral reasoning, quality of innovative presentations, frequency of response and evidence of language development in the process of responding.

Because of the quantity of data and space restrictions here, not all examples are given to support the points mentioned above. However, the following comments of the students from the Google Meet recordings and the elicitation tasks submitted in the course Moodle repository provide readers with typical examples that indicate the learners' enhancement of critical thinking skills through the follow-up activities of the SAO online portal materials operated by their teacher:

(i) “The stories were related to my life and I felt like answering the questions. But, at the beginning, I was too shy to write my response on the Google Meet chat box. I used to think I might make mistakes and my friends would laugh at me. When I discovered that my classmates were getting benefits by writing on the chat box, I started to write my answers on the chat box on the stories. When you [the teacher] mentioned my name, identified my grammatical mistakes and showed me and others how to correct it, I felt satisfied. What encouraged me most to show this bravery was your [the teacher’s] saying “From our mistakes we learn, so please respond. Without responding, our mistakes cannot be seen and thus cannot be repaired.”

(ii) “When you [the teacher] played us the audio on the sport commentary of the story *Bouchi* made by our classmate ‘X’ as a good sample, I could visualize exactly the moves of the players.” [This comment indicated the student’s familiarity with this Bangladeshi sport.]

(iii) “I found the SAO online stories more engaging than the [other] target language materials... For example, while doing the activities of the story, “A Sudden Discomfort”, I not only identified the significance of wearing different wedding jewelry in Bangladeshi culture but also could identify our extravagant natures as Bangladeshis.”

All comments indicated that learners perceived the literary texts and the follow-up activities of the SAO online portal to be effective in accelerating their critical thinking skills. In fact, two critical comments related to the manner of conducting the activities, (i) the requirement of uninterrupted internet connection along with a smartphone and, (ii) a phobia of creative writing, were mentioned. However, these were seen as

challenges to overcome rather than as disadvantageous to learning.

(iv) “Because of the network problems, I could not attend all the classes and could not participate in the class activities...My mobile phone is not smart enough to make and submit the sports commentary.”

(v) “I found it very difficult to write poems and short stories. If I was taught how to write those before the activities, I could also submit my poems and stories like my classmates.”

In response to the follow-up activity - Write a three-line poem of your own using one of the words or phrases from the poem “Sweetheart” (Sweetheart, / Thanks a lot for lending your ears, / hour after hour. /) - students’ new, creative way of thinking is evident in the poems they produced, as shown in the following example, where the student changes the focus of the poem to show how a beloved person is neglected because of the game addiction of the partner (Playing video games hour after hour, / Your sweetheart sighs in vain, / You don’t care. /).

In response to another follow-up activity - Use some of your ‘ing’ verbs and make a poem like, “A Rainy Day”. (It is raining. / Everybody is chatting. /The cat is eating. / Outside there is lightning. / The sun is hiding. / In every kitchen *khichuri* is cooking.) - students were found to create poems with a different mood, as the jovial tone of the given poem turned into a pessimistic one (It is raining / My dreams are flying / The Poor are crying / ‘Cause they are dying. /).

Another follow-up activity of “A Rainy Day”, required the students to practice a listening and speaking activity where they were asked to share a detailed recipe of *Khichuri*, or any other Bangladeshi dish, step by step, thus challenging them to use the

critical thinking skills of applying and creating, to produce a new form of text (in this case, a recipe).

The teacher noted that these examples illustrated the efficacy of the culturally familiar SOA portal materials to utilize learners’ critical thinking skills in ways that had not previously been demonstrated via the less culturally familiar materials.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 and Table 2 show the total number of participants (N = 48) who responded to each survey question. Percentages of the respondents’ answers are given in the explanation following the tables.

Table 1: Students’ ranking of literary genres of the SAO online portal materials, extension activities and the opportunities for practice of language skills

W/H questions and the options	Rankings and number of responses			
1.How do you rank different genres of the portal materials?	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
Fiction	34	11	3	
Non-fiction	10	27	11	
Poetry	4	10	34	
2. How do you rank the extension activities assigned to you?	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
Sport commentary after reading the fiction, "Bouchi"	17	16	14	
Reflective Note after reading the fiction "Pencil Heels"	20	17	10	
Short story based on the poem, "The	10	14	23	
3. Which of the language skills could you practice more?	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
Listening	14	10	14	10
Speaking	8	11	17	12
Reading	12	16	8	11
Writing	14	11	8	14

When ranking different literary genres of the portal, fiction was ranked in 1st, 2nd and 3rd positions by 70.83%, 22.91% and 6.25% of students respectively. For non-fiction, the percentages were 20.83%, 56.25% and 22.91% respectively, and the poetry section ranked in 1st, 2nd and 3rd position by 8.33%, 20.83% and 70.83% of students respectively.

When the students were asked about the effectiveness of the extensive activities assigned to them, submission of the sports' commentary as an audio-visual material was ranked in 1st, 2nd and 3rd position by 35.41%, 33.33% and 29.16% of students respectively, submission of a reflective note was ranked in 1st, 2nd and 3rd position by 41.66%, 35.41% and 20.83% of students respectively and submission of a short story based on a poem was ranked in 1st, 2nd and 3rd position by 20.83%, 29.16% and 47.91% respectively.

Finally, in responding to the 3rd W/H question: how they would like to rank different language skill practice opportunities created by the culture-based materials of the SAO online portal, 29.16% of students ranked writing and listening opportunities to the top position while for 25% and 16.66% of students, reading and speaking opportunities were of the top position respectively.

While discussing the variation of the students' percentage in ranking the fictional materials (70.83%), non-fiction (20.83%) and poetry (8.33%) in the 1st position, the students pointed out the matter of their personal attachment to such literary genres. A majority of the students indicated that they liked fiction the most because it presented the opportunity to associate their own life experiences with the stories they had read. The students who were fond of facts and figures preferred the non-fiction material, while the students with stronger habits of reading and writing poems chose poetry as the most attractive literary genre out of the portal materials.

In discussions on the effectiveness of the extension activities assigned to them, the group of students (41.66%) ranking submission of a reflective note after reading the fictional story '*Pencil Heels*' in the 1st position, clarified their estimation on the grounds of their personal emotions. The pathetic situation of the protagonist of the story, 'Himi' (who was of their own age, and fatherless) and her family touched the students profoundly. Their reflective notes demonstrated their personal resolutions to support people in need like 'Himi'. Using Bloom's revised taxonomy as a descriptive guide to critical thinking skills in the cognitive domain, this indicated a strong critical thinking response using the HOTS skills of 'evaluating and applying' (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001).

The group of students (35.41%) ranking 'submission of sport commentary as an audio-visual material after reading the fictional tale '*Bouchi*' in 1st position, explained their stance on the ground of their own identity issues. As 90% of students of the class were from different rural areas of Bangladesh, they were familiar with, and could easily identify themselves with the traditional Bangladeshi sport *Bouchi* and thus understood the events and tensions created in the narration of the story. The audio-visual submission of their sport commentary helped their responses to come alive, and also reflected their ability to use creative innovation and apply their fascination with technology to the task.

The group of students (20.83%) ranking 'submission of a short story based on the poem '*Storied Evening*' in 1st position, considered the activity as an opportunity to create and develop their own stories. Their short stories also opened up a new avenue of insight into the learners' psychology for their teacher. Observation of the online classroom recordings displayed the teacher's advantage of being the actual writer of some of the given literary texts in triggering the students' motivation in active classroom participation. In a detailed discussion about

how the students would like to rank different language skill practice opportunities created by the culture-based materials of the SAO online portal, it was found that the students ranked the opportunities based on the influence of their classroom experiences. The students (29.16%) who participated more in writing and listening activities ranked those at the top while the students who participated more in reading (25%) and speaking (16.66%) activities considered those as the top activities.

Observation of online classroom recordings showed that although the SAO online portal has materials that are attractive to students with different tastes and proficiency levels, the teacher could not involve all the students evenly in the reading, writing, speaking and listening activities as far as the synchronous responses or submissions on the Google Meet chat box was concerned. This is a circumstance that can be overcome when face-to-face classes resume.

Table 2: Students' response regarding the effectiveness of the literary texts of the SAO online portal and the significance of their teacher's role in developing their critical thinking skills

Item	1. I learned grammar through the materials of the portal more effectively than the traditional grammar classes.	2. The materials of the portal were more engaging than the materials of the target language culture.	3. My teacher played a significant role in inspiring me to do the activities.	4. My teacher played a significant role in the process of understanding.	5. The activities of the portal are well-planned to improve my critical thinking skills.
Strongly Agree	23	26	31	41	33
Agree	21	19	17	7	14
Neither agree nor disagree	4	2			1
Disagree					
Strongly disagree		1			
48	48	48	48	48	48

As for perceptions of whether the students learned grammar through the portal materials more effectively than the traditional grammar classes, 47.91% of students strongly agreed, 43.75% agreed and 8.33% neither agreed nor disagreed. When asked whether the materials of the portal were more engaging than the materials of the target language culture, 54.6% of students strongly agreed, 39.58% agreed, 4.16% neither agreed nor disagreed, while 2% of students indicated they did not find the portal materials engaging enough in comparison to other target language materials.

Regarding perceptions of their teacher's significance in inspiring them to do the activities, 64.58% of students strongly agreed and 35.41% of students agreed that the teacher's role was important. When asked whether or not their teacher played any significant role in the process of understanding, 85.41% of students strongly agreed and 14.58% of students agreed. The final question asked whether or not the activities of the portal are well-planned enough to improve their critical thinking skills. 68.75% of students strongly agreed, 29.16% agreed and 2% of students neither agreed nor disagreed.

In further discussions regarding the significant number of responses indicating students' agreement about the above-mentioned items of the Likert scale, the students of the focus group pointed out a number of opportunities created by their teacher and the SAO online portal. These were namely: provision of texts with content that described familiar experiences and familiar names, their teacher's continuous invitation to participate in the text discussions, their teacher's patience in receiving their response, their teacher's way of addressing each of the student's responses and the follow-up activities of the literary texts of the portal to promote their critical thinking skills.

Observation of online classroom recordings displayed the students' spontaneous participation and the teacher's effortful engagement in providing immediate feedback to the students' responses using Google Meet chat box and the Google Meet microphone function. Thus, in the present study, along with Snow's three components for engaging reading comprehension: the reader, the text and the activity (Snow, 2002), observation - Hickman (1981) - is also prevalent, as here a number of elements of the classroom setting controlled by the teacher are shown to have bearing upon the learners' responses. However, such enthusiastic interaction was noticeably absent in the former more traditional grammar classes that used other target language materials with unfamiliar cultural content, where the students gave limited responses and were found to repeatedly request their teacher for Bangla translation of the texts.

Table 3: Elicitation tasks requiring the respective learners to use Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) based on Bloom's Revised Taxonomy of Cognitive Objectives (2001)

Session	Text Title & Link	Literary Genre	Proficiency Level	Activity Type & Required HOTS
1	Bouchi https://www.stories.belta-bd.org/index.php?action=product&product_id=12	Fiction	Elementary - Pre-Intermediate	Synchronous: Remembering, Understanding, Applying & Evaluating Asynchronous: Creating
2	The Girl in the Street https://www.stories.belta-bd.org/index.php?action=product&product_id=10	Fiction	Pre-Intermediate- Intermediate	Synchronous: Analyzing, Applying & Evaluating Asynchronous: Creating
3	Pencil Heels https://www.stories.belta-bd.org/index.php?action=product&product_id=17	Fiction	Intermediate- Upper-intermediate	Synchronous: Recalling, Understanding, Analyzing, Applying & Evaluating Asynchronous: Evaluating & Applying
4	- A Rainy Day - Sweethart - A Starred Evening https://www.stories.belta-bd.org/index.php?action=product&product_id=25	Poetry	Pre-intermediate Intermediate & Upper-intermediate	Synchronous: Creating Asynchronous: Creating
5	A Moment of Success https://www.stories.belta-bd.org/index.php?action=product&product_id=11	Non-fiction	Pre-intermediate Intermediate	Synchronous: Recalling, Analyzing & Creating
6	A Sudden Discomfort https://www.stories.belta-bd.org/index.php?action=product&product_id=32	Fiction	Intermediate - Upper-intermediate	Synchronous: Recalling, Analyzing, Applying & Evaluating
7	A Forgotten Photograph https://www.stories.belta-bd.org/index.php?action=product&product_id=48	Fiction	Intermediate - Upper-intermediate	Synchronous: Recalling, Understanding & Analyzing

It is evident from Table 3 that the learners were given ample opportunities to respond to the texts from different points of view including both aesthetic stance and efferent stance. By exploring the respective links of the follow-up activities (Table 3), one can notice, from an aesthetic stance, how the learners were facilitated to explore diversified meanings, to pay attention to their feelings and to participate in the tensions, conflicts and resolutions created by the characters or the situations of the texts. In addition, considering the efferent stance, the learners were given abundant opportunities to demonstrate what kind of exact information they extracted from their reading. This supported Rosenblatt's claim that such instructional opportunities enable learners to perform 'more frequently and more adequately in response to texts' as an opportunity to accelerate not only learners' language awareness but also their literate thinking - Rosenblatt (1974, p.353) cited in Mart (2019, p.80).

CONCLUSION

The study described here was conducted to investigate the perceived effectiveness of local culture-based literary texts of the SAO online portal in enhancing Bangladeshi EFL students' critical thinking skills during an online university level English language course while the students were exposed to more conventional target language reading materials simultaneously. The outcomes of the study showed that by having ample opportunities to act as active agents in the meaning making process while engaged in reading the texts (Rosenblatt, 1938), the students not only expressed that they were able to overcome many of their linguistic shortcomings (now having the advantage of their schematic knowledge that could be activated by the local culture-based reading materials), but indicated that they could also identify and comprehend more easily how the target language operates.

The well-planned follow-up activities of the SAO project, demanding the use of critical thinking skills, and the congenial teaching-learning context created by their teacher also appeared to influence the students to respond as more active readers. The written elicitation tasks submitted by the students reflected how they more analytically recalled, analyzed, applied, evaluated and created new ways of thinking in dealing with the learning problems assigned to them. This was pleasing since building these skills is not only beneficial to language development, and in particular to growth in reading competency, but is also a prerequisite to survival in today's complex and rapidly changing world.

By way of study limitations, however, due to the COVID 19 pandemic, and being located in different rural areas, and being subjected to frequent electricity disruption and interrupted internet connectivity, a number of students could not fully experience the in-class discussions of their peers and their teacher when it actually took place. Therefore, it was not possible to fully confirm the nature of all the students' participation in the synchronous activities.

Although the English language teaching curriculum of the tertiary level of Bangladesh allows room for pragmatic research such as this study, in the existing primary and secondary curricula, and because of present curricular and institutional limitations, it is still not possible to integrate the SAO materials fully in all settings. However, the present study opens up an avenue to policy makers, curriculum experts and materials developers to ponder the benefits of the utilization of local culture-based English language teaching materials as a means to accelerate EFL learners' language and critical thinking skills, which is consistently and increasingly considered by educators and governing authorities to be desirable.

The study also implies that language educators can enjoy, and should consider becoming writers of their own language teaching materials, with a focus on culturally familiar content. Additionally, there remain further opportunities for researchers to explore other literary texts of the SAO online portal with a linguistically homogeneous group of students in an offline teaching context, which is missing in this study. This should be done with a view to establishing a fuller picture of the potential role of culturally familiar learning materials in the development of critical thinking skills of EFL learners generally, along with a thorough investigation into the efficacy of these materials in promoting measurable target language improvement, and with regard to potential application to other global EFL contexts.

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CLASSROOM EXPLORATIONS: CULTURE AS A TOOL FOR ENGAGEMENT IN AN ESL CLASSROOM

Parsa Choudhury

ABSTRACT

Research and teaching have shown that culture is intimately related to language development. Therefore, cultural awareness is one of the essential keys to learning a new language. Culture as a concept and culture focused materials can be used as powerful tools for engagement in an ESL classroom. Supplementary culture focused materials besides textbooks, such as pictures, short readings, stories, sets of questions have the potential to prompt students of diverse cultural backgrounds to become active and to explore their own questions. Teachers' classroom explorations can lead students to curriculum enrichment and language development. A simple lesson plan can be used and adapted to various levels, from basic to advanced. The primary goals for this lesson are to build cultural awareness in students, and to help them use language in powerful and unexpected ways, reflecting cultural diversity in an ESL multilevel class. This mini study shows that culture-focused units allow students to become active and engaged in their own learning, by using their own cultural knowledge, and overcoming lack of target language and L2 cultural knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Research and teaching have shown that culture is intimately related to language development. Therefore, cultural awareness is one of the essential keys to learning a language. Teachers are always in search of innovative ways of effective learning in their classrooms. There is no perfect strategy or method that is effective for introducing culture and culturally relevant materials in a language classroom. These can be as diverse as

the students in a language classroom. Problems of student passivity, lack of motivation, and attrition result from too little involvement in their own learning (Frederick, 1989). Culture as a concept and culturally relevant materials can be used as powerful tools for richer engagement and curriculum in a language classroom. Within the limited scope of this article, I will describe a mini study in an ESL classroom, which promotes active learning and use of culturally relevant materials with culture as a focus.

“Culture” defined in basic terms includes a set of beliefs, patterns, and customs of a group of people, in addition to language. Language is a vehicle of communication between groups and individuals. In learning and teaching a language, the close relationship between culture and language is illustrated by the fact that to learn a new language, one needs to learn about the new culture, because communication is indispensable. “Culturally relevant materials” can be defined as classroom materials that have potential topics with both universal L1 appeal and specific target language L2 appeal for students in an ESL class. Materials such as pictures, short texts, stories and sets of questions have the potential to prompt students of diverse cultural backgrounds to become active and to explore their own questions or inquiry.

The primary goals for this mini study are to explore how teachers can use supplementary materials in addition to textbook, as a basic lesson example to build cultural awareness in students, and to help them use language in powerful and unexpected ways, reflecting cultural differences in an ESL multilevel class. This classroom exploration leads to language development. A simple lesson plan can be used and adapted to various levels from basic to advanced. This article discusses two primary ways in which teachers can promote engagement leading to active learning. First, teachers can base their lessons on some fundamental principles of teaching and learning.

Second, teachers can use culturally relevant strategies and materials that lead to reflection and learning. The article also discusses the background and materials, procedures, principles or conditions of learning, and teacher reflections.

Background and Materials. Students in this class belong to an intensive English Academic Program, bound to prepare themselves for college readiness for studies in a Midwestern American university. The curriculum and lessons are targeted to improve their skills to the optimum level, so that they can perform well in a regular university course. These students are at the advanced level, but like any ESL classroom it has students at different ability levels. Most of the students have life experiences, but limited exposure to interactions in L2 settings. As a result, these students like many ESL students possess barriers to knowledge of language and culture. The table below shows the materials used for this curriculum unit:

Table 1: Materials & Assignments:
Material: An article on culture for reading assignment Follow up assignments: discussion in class, small group, whole group
Material: A set of questions: ranging from open ended to critical thinking Follow up assignments: discussion in class, writing, oral presentations
Material: A set of selected pictures: Follow up assignments: discussion based on questions/prompts, writing, oral presentations

Procedures. I set up the environment to promote students' initiative for their **learning by** providing easy access to culturally relevant materials. I took a culturally responsive

approach using multiple assignments which allows reflection and diversity of responses in student discussions, reading and written assignments. At the beginning of the lesson, I introduced an article on culture (Schartner, 2015). Following this I provided a few culturally relevant materials, including selected magazine pictures and sets of teacher created questions that match the picture topics. The materials drew students' interests and prompted their questions. They also allowed students to take responsibility for their own learning by providing them choices in materials and strategies. Every learning opportunity was planned by me. Students were not limited to one way of learning. This culture unit was supported by some fundamental conditions of learning.

PRINCIPLES OR CONDITIONS OF LEARNING

Brian Cambourne's Conditions of Learning; describes well a set of principles to explain the environment that fosters engagement and active learning as outlined below.

1. Immersion. Teachers need to immerse students in the content and context when they are learning something new. Content and context need to be relevant to the students' interests and levels and to be meaningful, so that they can make connections and respond and reflect.

2. Demonstration. Teachers need to show examples, which are doable and easy to understand with flexibility and options for different students. In this setting, teachers allow students choices to express themselves with multiple methods.

3. Engagement. Teachers can support students to become active learners who see themselves as potential readers and writers. A risk-free environment is set up, so that students can engage with reading and writing without fear. This type of

learning has a long-lasting effect on the learners. The learners are enabled to take ownership for their own learning. In my class, the only expectation from students, was that they would grow to their fullest ability levels as readers and writers.

4. Expectations. Teachers can consider setting up realistic expectations, becoming familiar with the developmental stages of emergent literacy, and supporting students in appropriate tasks. This type of environment allows students to practice independent learning.

5. Approximation. Teachers need to recognize approximations toward the stated learning expectations. They need to plan learning experiences that are slightly beyond students' current demonstrated abilities.

6. Practice. Teachers can provide students with multiple opportunities to practice with new knowledge, skills, and attitudes. They need to gradually change the variables of time, support, place, groupings, complexity, and context to move the new learning towards independent use. To allow practice I provided multiple opportunities.

7. Feedback, Support, Celebrations. Teachers can monitor student learning by providing timely feedback. They also need to celebrate successes, provide concrete and realistic feedback, help to set new goals, and plan the next steps. In this specific class, I provided a platform in which students provided feedback to their peers, in addition to receiving feedback from the instructor.

8. Responsibility (Choices). Teachers need to provide students with choices which enable students with motivation and responsibility for their own learning. This gives students a sense of agency for their own learning.

9. Inquiry. In addition to Brian Cambourne’s principles, I added culture and inquiry which guide the design of the curriculum and lesson. Inquiry approach is based on the idea of exploration and active student learning. It is driven by student questions and exploration. For this advanced level group of students, I chose readings, a collection of pictures from magazines, and a set of questions. The pictures were labelled with topics that have the potential for students to engage in them. For example, pictures that have “Smoking,” Big Cities, Working Women, Beauty and Healthy Choice’s for Eating, and Smart Phones prompted students and teachers in more complex discussions. The set of questions that were attached to these pictures ranged from open ended to specific. These questions were based on common critical thinking strategies including making connections, seeing the link between ideas or images, getting multiple perspectives, responses, and reflections.

TEACHER REFLECTIONS: LINKING THEORY TO PRACTICE

As a teacher, I observed how the concept of “culture” and “cultural materials” created active learning and engagement throughout the unit, over three lesson periods, within a curriculum. In order to foster the most effective learning environment the curriculum was set up, based on Brian Cambourne’s principles (Cambourne, 2001). First, following the principle of “immersion,” I introduced students to immersion, in an inquiry curriculum. This curriculum setting allowed students to follow their own questions and interests, within teacher’s guidelines. I provided students with culturally relevant readings and real-life materials in every phase of the curriculum unit. Second, following the principle of “demonstration,” I helped students start an activity by exhibiting the materials and how the activity will work, step by step.

Throughout the learning process, students had choices in materials, unique to each of them. I provided opportunities for

them to use reading, writing, and speaking to express themselves. Third, following the principle of “expectations” my expectations were based on setting a realistic goal for each student, based on personal knowledge and rate of literacy development. I designed and setup a risk-free environment. Fourth, following the principle of “approximation,” I set a slightly advanced level goal beyond students’ demonstrated ability level, as they progressed. Fifth, following the principle of “responsibility” in this curriculum unit, students were given the responsibility to pursue their own learning. They were expected to develop their learning to a different level, following the teacher’s instructions. Sixth, following the principle of “practice,” I allowed multiple opportunities for students to engage in different activities over a period of few days. Seventh, following the principle of “feedback” I provided students opportunities to share their work with peers, in addition to instructor feedback. Finally, the stated principles with curriculum materials enabled students to become active, engaged learners.

Students Engage with Visuals with Complexity. I observed that pictures or visuals I plan to use need to be carefully selected for specific purposes. Visuals must be included for important reasons that serve beyond the convenience and supplemental functions of images found in commercial publishers’ materials. “Images must be sufficiently complex to satisfy instructional intentions and to provide right kinds of student support” (Capello, 2017, p.734). Visuals or pictures need to have the potential complexity of topics, which are relevant to students’ lives and experiences in an ESL classroom. This allows them adequate choices to make connections between the topics in L1 and L2.

Students Develop Cultural Awareness and Engagement. As a teacher, I observed how some unexpected learning took place, as a result of engagement with cultural materials.

Although students from diverse cultures lacked adequate L2 vocabulary and interactions with the target culture, they felt empowered to speak, write, and discuss based on cultural knowledge of their own culture. I observed that the culturally relevant materials motivated them to bridge the gaps between their own cultures and the target culture language.

Students Follow Their Own Inquiry Questions. As a teacher, I set up the cultural unit, following an inquiry and engagement approach. Students were able to select questions from the sets and exchange ideas with each other by scaffolding their ideas (Quick, 2006). They also began to think of what they wanted to learn at their own levels. After a period of “scaffolding” or brainstorming their ideas, I asked students to reflect and respond, which helped them develop their literacy skills. “Scaffolding” in learning can be defined as teachers’ breaking up the learning process into chunks and providing students a structure, which aims to develop their language and literacy in a creative manner. The process includes students’ building on prior knowledge, sharing vocabulary, ideas from visuals, reading, writing, and discussing materials.

Students Develop as Readers and Writers: I took time to know the students’ emergent literacy, developing, and fluent literacies (Cambourne, 2006). I observed that students comprehended the difference between their own culture and the English Language culture. Although they had some language barrier, it did not seem to create a huge barrier to their speaking, reading or writing. The readings, pictures and the questions created a condition conducive for them to reflect. They were able to read, discuss, and share their ideas, following the teacher’s guidelines.

Students Develop Critical Thinking: They were able to reflect on the content of the lesson and assignment. I provided students with an extended response writing assignment

(Meador, 2019). This assignment allowed them to develop critical thinking and to read, write, and reflect on the content of the pictures. Some student observations ranged from simple to complex, on the big city. Student X commented, “It has skyscrapers. Student Y stated, “I do not like skyscrapers. She explained “How big cities can add to pollution” and to a decrease of quality of life. The class discussion went onto a different level prompting other students to make comments. Student Z commented making more connections to her own life experiences and stating, “Huntington is a nicer place to stay than a bigger city, because it has clean air.” Another student added her reflection, saying that bigger cities have art galleries and more places to visit. Gloria who was reviewing the picture on “Smoking” added her reflection stating that smoking was a dangerous habit for many people. She explained how it can affect the lungs and said, “One of my relatives died from cancer.” She added that her husband smoked and now he has quit.

This reflection prompted an advanced student Alex to introduce the topic of “secondhand smoking.” This idea generated some interest and extended discussion regarding what “secondhand smoking” means and how it can affect people directly and indirectly, affecting chains of people in the same family or group (Mohr & Mohr, 2007). Another picture showing a career woman generated an engaging discussion in which students were drawing reflections about their cultural experiences. These responses brought up the topic of working women in different cultures. A few students even began discussing the conditions of working women in target culture USA and their culture.

Students Become Reflective Learners: As a teacher, I learned that without these carefully selected readings, pictures, and sets of questions, which had the potential to invite

reflections, students would not be prompted to actively engage in the learning experience. In addition, the flexibly structured assignments allowed students to read, speak, write, and express themselves creatively from different levels.

Overall, the cultural unit sketched above illustrates that culture as a concept and cultural materials can be used as powerful tools to empower students in active learning. Traditionally students of multiple ability levels of varied cultural backgrounds are viewed as a deficit. However, as Nieto (1996) states, “Rather than being viewed as a burden, a problem, or even a challenge, cultural diversity will be approached as a key factor, which must be taken into account, if we are serious about providing all students with educational equity p.137.” From my experiences in teaching this unit, I recognized a curriculum that is enriched with culturally relevant materials, allows students to become active and engaged in their own learning. They are empowered by using their own cultural knowledge, overcoming lack of target language and L2 cultural knowledge. This simple lesson plan can be used and adapted to various levels, from basic to advanced. I rediscovered that the primary goals for culture-focused lessons are to build cultural awareness in students, and to help them use language in powerful and unexpected ways, reflecting cultural diversity in an ESL multilevel class.

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CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS OF BEGINNER-LEVEL JAPANESE EFL STUDENTS: A TEACHER'S ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO WARM-UP WRITING EXERCISES USING LEARNING LOGS

Megumi Uemi

This study examines using a learning log to introduce critical thinking (CT) to beginner-level Japanese EFL university students. It describes a part of a pilot study in which a teacher-guided learning log was implemented to help 13 English learners (CEFR A1 or A2 level) reflect upon lessons and express and share their viewpoints through interactive pair work. The present paper offers an analysis of the students' written responses to questions with a focus on the presentation of their CT skills. What the analysis offers is evidence that basic-level Japanese EFL students struggle with articulating their points of view by failing to elaborate their main ideas with clear and sound reasoning. It also discloses the learners' lack of awareness of the need to identify a subject in an English sentence, thus posing a greater challenge to present themselves as competent critical thinkers. The study includes some pedagogical implications for teachers who wish to use interactive methods to introduce CT to beginner-level Japanese EFL learners.

INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking skills (CT) have been increasingly recognized as one of the essential 21st-century skills required in becoming successful and responsible global citizens. The Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry proposed "Essential competencies for the 100-year life" and identified *shutaisei* (主体性) as one of the twelve vital traits individuals need to cultivate for life at work and in communities (METI, 2006). Since then, this concept embodies an attitude and mindset motivating individuals to think and act for themselves even

without their leaders' clear instructions (Watanabe, 2019). It appears in newspapers, job hunting magazines, and recruiting websites as the most sought-after characteristic in new graduates considered for recruitment. Needless to say, the Ministry of Education is in line with such societal efforts to nurture students' ability to "think, evaluate, and express" (「思考力・判断力・表現力」) and places great importance on CT as one of the key academic skills in the New Curriculum Guidelines of "active and dialogic learning" (MEXT, 2017).

No matter how pressing such societal needs for critical thinkers may sound, Japanese university teachers and researchers are faced with myriad challenges when it comes to promoting students' CT skills in practical terms. With "the era to accept all applicants to university" (全入時代: *zennyu jidai*, All-Entry-Era) approaching in 2023 or 2024, a higher number of universities may have to admit academically less qualified students to their undergraduate programs without much choice (Nikkei, 2021; Watanabe, 2008). It is common that teachers from English-speaking countries to observe Japanese EFL students as inexperienced in practicing CT skills or expressing ideas and opinions with confidence in university classrooms (Smith, 2017; Dunn, 2014; Dunn, 2015; Lasker, 2007). Some of these teachers make references to Atkinson (1996) or Ramanathan and Kaplan (1996) and attribute Japanese students' sociocultural background that heightens hierarchy and collectivism as the core values of their behaviors. Given that students' academic skills are expected to decline as a general trend in the *zennyu jidai* (Asahina, 2017), one may question that Japanese EFL students' seemingly tacit self-expressions and roundabout thinking processes are simply reflective of their socio-cultural upbringings. Perhaps the students seem untrained in thinking and expressing themselves clearly and logically. They may simply behave as such because they are not academically up to the task. The present study upholds an assumption that in one way or another, more Japanese university

teachers, regardless of their fields, may confront the need to accommodate their teachings to the level of those who are, by no means, ready to learn successfully at the college level. The present study attempts to illustrate one part of such challenges experienced in Japanese higher education via an analysis of Japanese students' CT skills observed in beginner-level EFL classrooms.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Pedagogy of Critical Thinking in Current Research

The pedagogy of critical thinking (CT) in current research emphasizes the development of students' higher-order thinking skills as the goal (Fujisaki, 2022; Rothman, 2017; Clark, 2019; Finn-Maeda, 2015; Nakagawa, 2015). Such research generally relies on Bloom's Taxonomy revised by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), which classifies the individual's learning process into six different categories: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Figure 1) as the foundation of CT. Without a doubt, these educational undertakings that highlight the practical solutions to nurture students' higher-order thinking abilities are insightful and deserving of our continuous attention. Nonetheless, the present paper makes an argument that opportunities to enhance lower-order thinking skills, on the other hand, have been relatively neglected (Case, 2013; Gay & Clark, 2019).

According to Case (2013), Bloom's Taxonomy (2001), which presents the six different learning processes in a hierarchy, can falsely give an impression that the higher-order items are more complex and essential analytical skills than the ones that belong to the lower stages. It may also suggest that higher-order thinking operates independently without interfering with lower-order thinking when in fact, "understanding of subject matter is not a 'lower task,'" because

the activity demands that "students think critically with and about the ideas" (Case, 2013, p. 6)—a clear indication of deep, logical thinking. While it is outside the scope of this paper to argue against the established concepts of Bloom's Taxonomy, the paper claims that the pedagogy of CT should address the needs of those who are deficient in basic academic and literacy skills that are essential for accessing higher-level thinking skills.

INTERPRETATIONS OF CRITICAL THINKING: A FOCUS ON LOWER-THINKING SKILLS

This section details the interpretations of CT adopted for the present paper. It uses Bloom's Taxonomy revised by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) with a focus on developing students' lower-order thinking skills described as understanding. Previous research demonstrates that basic-level EFL students have trouble in the lower aspects of thinking skills sufficiently, hindering them from accessing higher-order thinking skills (Uemi, 2020; Uemi, 2019; Uemi, 2018; Nakanishi, 2015). A content analysis of students' Japanese papers implies the insufficiency of learners in elementary-level EFL classes to demonstrate skills of understanding shown in Bloom's Taxonomy (Uemi, 2018). This category includes skills that allow learners to articulate what they have internalized from outside knowledge or information in the forms of summarizing, interpreting, categorizing, and paraphrasing (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). It has been pointed out that basic-level Japanese EFL learners—or even some intermediate or advanced level EFL learners for that matter—have not been given enough opportunities to develop verbalization skills (言語化能力 : *gengoka nouryoku*) during secondary education, and thus, struggle using language to express their thoughts and feelings clearly and logically (Lasker, 2007; Dunn, 2014; Dunn, 2015; Smith, 2017; Uemi, 2018). The present study highlights such linguistic aspects of lower-order thinking illustrated in Bloom's Taxonomy as the underlying interpretations of CT. The paper

argues that the strengthening of lower-order thinking skills, as much as it may sound rudimentary or seemingly contradictory to some popular ideals of CT pedagogy that embraces high-order thinking, is an essential skill for basic-level EFL learners to become competent and autonomous thinkers in a fuller term.

METHODS

The present paper examines the use of a teacher-guided learning log to introduce CT to low-proficiency Japanese EFL students. It describes a part of a pilot study conducted with 13 basic-level Japanese EFL students (CEFR Level A1 or A2) enrolled in a test preparation course at a junior college in Tokyo. The participants of the study used a learning log designed by the author (Uemi, 2018; Uemi, 2019) over 8 weeks in a 14-week semester. Each class was 60 minutes in length meeting twice a week that allowed for 15 treatment sessions.

Following the items in the learning log, the participants kept a record of their learning and shared their written work with a classmate through pair work. One of the items in the learning log, "Today's Question for You (TQFY)" was a warm-up exercise that asked students to respond to a given question in writing at the beginning of each class. The learners kept a record of their written responses in their learning logs and shared it with their partners in dialogue through pair work. They were also asked to record their partner's response in the designated section of their learning logs.

The present study closely examines the students' written texts in response to TQFY with a focus on the development of their ability to think and express ideas clearly and critically. It adopts Borg's teacher research approach (cited in Tanaka, et al, 2019) in which the practitioner examines her teaching practice through qualitative data collections from students' learning logs and the teacher's observations of her in-class interactions with

the students. A thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clark, 2006; Tanaka, et al, 2019) was used to identify certain patterns in the students' responses gathered from the students' learning logs and the teacher's observation notes. The qualitative data were coded and summarized into categories based on emerging themes noted from the analysis (Tanaka, et al, 2019). The students were informed that their participation was voluntary and assured that all their data would be kept anonymous and used for research purposes only.

Today's question for you (tqfy): a warm-up exercise

The participants of the study used a teacher-guided learning log (Appendix A) to record the lesson content and share their input with a partner in dialogue through pair work. At the beginning of each class, students were required to do a warm-up exercise called Today's Question for You (TQFY) in which they responded to a question provided by the teacher to document their ideas or viewpoints about themselves and social issues that have relevance to their life as university students in their learning logs. There were two phases in the deployment of TQFY in the current study: the first phase mainly asked learners to describe various aspects of their personality or events that happened in their everyday life, and the second phase was pertinent to the learners' perspectives on social issues relevant to their lives as college students. The following is the list of questions asked in the present study:

Phase 1:

1. Who is a famous person you admire the most? Why do you admire him/her?
2. How would you describe yourself in one word?
3. What's one thing you are proud of?
4. What is one thing you were surprised about the most recently?

5. What do you look forward to doing the most recently?
6. What do you think you should do to improve your English skills? What do you think you could start now?
7. What are you going to do after you graduate from college?

Phase 2:

1. Do you think high school students should wear uniforms?
2. What part of Japanese culture are you proud of?
3. Do you think more foreigners will visit Japan in the future?
4. What do you think is the best age for children to have a smartphone?
5. Do you think teenagers should avoid using Social Networking Services?
6. Which do you think is better for students, studying at home or school?
7. Do you think it is better for people to eat at restaurants or at home?
8. Do you think studying in groups is better than studying alone?

For each question, example answers were provided by the teacher via PowerPoint slides highlighting some useful words and expressions students could use in their responses (Appendix 2). Based on the sample answers, the learners were given about 5 to 8 minutes to compose their answers in writing. After completing their response, students were asked to share what they have written with a partner in dialogue and engage in a brief discussion over the topic. They were also expected to record the partner's answer in the designated section of their learning log as a record. While the students worked on their writing, the teacher went around the classroom to provide individual assistance. When the students engaged in pair work, the teacher

took part in some of the pair's discussions, answered questions, and provided explanations as the teacher found relevant and necessary.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Weakness with Answering Questions with Why and How

One of the salient themes that emerged from the analysis was that beginner-level Japanese EFL students struggled to answer questions related to *why* or *how* they came up with the main ideas in their responses. Some students used important keywords or expressions from the example sentences effectively to produce their original sentences. Other students were challenged in applying the examples in their contexts and showed no hesitation in using the ideas of the samples entirely without changing them. The following section details the tendencies seen in the learners' writings according to two different phases of the warm-up writing exercise.

Phase 1: Self-Expression

In phase 1, students were getting accustomed to the idea of language as a means to express their thoughts and feelings by answering different questions in their learning logs at the beginning of each class. They used this warm-up exercise to reflect upon themselves critically and describe their perspectives in the foreign language they have no habit of using daily.

As one would expect, the students' written responses in phase 1 demonstrated their awkwardness or unfamiliarity with the practice of self-expression using English. For example, for a simple question such as asking students to describe a famous person whom they admire the most with a reason, only two students were able to produce original sentences that made

logical sense as a response, and seven students largely relied on the sample answer, only partially changing words to reflect their originality. Three students, despite using their own words, failed to make sensible sentences due to their limited language skills. Table 1 shows Question 1, its sample answer, and students' written responses classified on their level of originality, rationality, and clarity of the language in three different groups.

TABLE 1: *Students' Responses to Question 1 in Phase 1*

Question 1: Who is a famous person you admire the most? Why do you admire him/her?

Sample answer: I admire BTS because they are cool and great entertainers.

A: Students' responses that were original and made logical sense (N=2)

- I admire Leonardo DiCaprio because I like his hair style.
 - I admire GENERATIONS because their dance makes me happy.
-

B: Students' responses that relied largely on the sample answer (N=7)

- I admire Justin Bieber because he is rich and cool.
 - I admire Yokota Mayu because she is cute and fashionable.
 - I admire Ariana Grande because she is so cute and [a] great singer.
 - I admire IVE because they are cute and beautiful.
 - I admire Shohei Ohtani because he is [a] cool and great entertainer. (1)
 - I admire AAA because they are cool and great entertainers.
-

- I admire BTS because they are cool and great entertainers. (2)

C: Students' responses that made no logical sense (N=3)

- I admire supermarket staff because I think she is very kind. (3)
- I admire Haiey Bieber because they are cool. (4)
- I admire Maeda Nozomi because she is looking good visual. (5)

*Underlined and numberings are added for explanation purposes.

One can observe that the student who wrote sentence (1) may not even have taken the time to check what "entertainer" meant and used the word from the sample answer without thinking, as *Shohei Ohtani* is not an "entertainer" but should be described as an "athlete." The student who wrote sentence (2) did not make her original sentence but copied it entirely from the sample answer. In sentence (3), the student might not have understood the question properly, as she strangely refers to one of the supermarket staff members as someone who was "famous" and she "admires." Sentences (4) and (5) are both grammatically incorrect, and thus do not convey the students' ideas.

Another tendency that depicts students' unfamiliarity with expressing themselves sensibly in English is their lack of attention to providing a reason or details to explain their main ideas in response to the given question. For example, in Question 2, students were asked to simply describe their personality in one word. The sample answer shows two sentences, one indicating the main idea and the other providing a reason to elaborate on the main assertion. Five students successfully gave two sentences displaying originality and rationality, but another group of five students gave up crafting reasons and insufficiently provided their main ideas only. Two students' responses made

no logical sense, and one student copied the sample answer entirely. TABLE 2 shows students' responses in three different categories to Question 2.

TABLE 2: *Students' Responses to Question 2 in Phase 1*

Question 2: How do you describe your personality in one word?

Sample answer: I would describe my personality as friendly.

I feel comfortable talking to people and making friends with them quickly.

A: Students' responses that were original and made logical sense (N=5)

- I would describe my personality as active. In my free time, I go out.
 - I would describe my personality as friendly. I can help friends with everything.
 - I would describe my personality as cheerful. I can make friends with [people] quickly.
 - I would describe my personality as friendly. Because people tell me I'm friendly.
-

B: Students' responses that provided no reason (N=5)

- I would describe myself as easygoing.
 - I would describe myself as very cheerful.
 - I would describe myself as easygoing.
 - I would describe myself as easygoing.
 - I would describe my personality as cheerful.
-

C: Students' responses that made no logical sense or copied the sample answer (N=3)

- I would describe my personality as easygoing. Because my pace.
 - I would describe calm. I can relax.
 - I would describe my personality as friendly. I feel comfortable talking to people and making friends with them quickly.
-

Teacher's Observations in Phase 1

While students shared their written works with their partners during in-class activities, the teacher went around the classroom and helped with the discussion of each pair. According to the teacher's observation notes, for Question 2, the teacher noticed some students left their answers without a reason and gave no details to elaborate on their main ideas (see Section B for examples). *Why would you describe yourself as easygoing? In what situations, would you realize that you are easygoing?* When the teacher asked one of the students, a response from the student was “I have never thought of it. (*kangaeta koto nai.*)” A similar conversation took place with other students who gave no follow-up sentence to give a legitimate reason to support their main ideas as a response.

What the conversations in the classroom reiterate is some students' unfamiliarity with the practice of using language to *reflect* upon their perceptions and *verbalize* them in ways that are comprehensible to other people. One would assume that describing how someone might be *easygoing* or *cheerful* by giving examples from his/her habitual routines or behaviors should be an uncomplicated practice because it concerns the person's own life. This practice may posit a challenge, however, when the act of self-expression or critical reflections via language is not so embedded in the sociocultural milieu of the country as seen in Japan (Clancy, 1986, as cited in Atkinson, 1997; Nisbett, 2004). As Atkinson (1997) claims, displays of

individuality via language may not be so welcome in a society like Japan in which communication is used to express group solidarity and shared social purpose rather than as a means of individual expression. Unlike those English-speaking counterparts who grew up with the sociocultural practice of using language for self-expression and critical reflections, Japanese EFL students who are unaccustomed to such norms may need intensive and explicit training to articulate their understanding of themselves and the world around them critically and clearly through language instruction.

Phase 2: Expressing Opinions

Given the need to train students' ability to use language for self-expression and critical reflections, phase 2 takes students to a higher level of exercising CT in the process of writing their response to a given question. As shown earlier, the questions asked in phase 2 related to social issues that were relevant to university students. The learners were required to express their opinions with sound reasoning and clear examples. Although it is assumed that students have developed some level of comfort in employing English to describe themselves in phase 1, quite naturally, their responses at the beginning of phase 2 still show awkwardness and discomfort in using English to articulate their viewpoints with proper rationality. For example, for the question asking students to state their stance regarding high school uniforms, while four students showed relatively sensible responses with clarity and logic, the other four students' reasoning appeared to be insufficient and ambiguous. Table 3 illustrates the students' responses based on the level of clarity and soundness of their reasoning in two categories:

TABLE 3: *Students' Responses to Question 1 in Phase 2*

Question 2: Do you think high school students should wear uniforms?

Affirmative sample answer: I think high school students should wear uniforms. Uniforms make them less distracted about fashion and focus on study.

Negative sample answer: I don't think high school students should wear uniforms. Uniforms do not allow them to express their individuality.

A: Students' responses with sound reasoning (N=4)

- I think high school students should wear uniforms. Because it's a special thing that you can only wear when you're a student.
- I think high school students should wear uniforms. Because they don't have the time to think about what they wear.
- I think high school students should wear uniforms. Uniforms can create a sense of unity.
- I don't think high school students should wear uniforms. Because they can't handle cold or hot weather in uniforms. If you don't wear uniforms, you can wear it according to the weather.

B: Students' responses with insufficient reasoning (N=4)

- I think high school students should wear uniforms. Uniforms make us pay attention to our appearance. (1)
- I think high school students should wear uniforms. Uniform seems to be a high school student. (2)
- I don't think high school students should wear uniforms. It's too cold in winter. (3)
- I think high school students should wear uniforms. The uniform make looks good. (4)

*Underlined and numberings are added for explanation purposes.

Teacher's Observation in Phase 2: Part 1

When learners engaged in the warm-up exercise during class, the teacher observed that for sentence 1, the student had originally written "Uniforms can care our looks" as an advantage of having high school students wear uniforms. The teacher asked the student to clarify what he meant by the sentence. He explained in Japanese that if students wear uniforms, they care more about how they look. Given this explanation, the teacher still felt unsure about the student's reasoning. *Why would students care more about how they look if they wear uniforms?* The teacher wondered. There needed to be one more step or a different angle spelled out in the process of his logic for it to make sense. As time was limited in class, the teacher made a quick decision to help him with the language for the moment and corrected the sentence to "Uniforms make us pay attention to our appearance" to reflect what the student wanted to say literally.

As for sentence 2, upon the teacher's request to clarify the intent of the sentence, the student explained that uniforms are "*koukousei rashii*," which in translation means uniforms "suit high school students" or uniforms are "like high school students." The teacher interpreted her reasoning as logically insufficient as it is obvious that uniforms make students look like they belong to high school because it's the exact purpose of making students wear uniforms, to identify them as high school students. Sentence 3 mentions being "too cold" as a disadvantage of having to wear school uniforms and could use more concrete examples of how wearing uniforms makes students experience the cold winter. Sentence 4 also needs a clearer account of how exactly wearing uniforms makes students look good.

Lack of Awareness Toward the Need for Subjects in English

In Phase 2, one of the elements that made students successful in expressing their opinions in English appeared to be whether they could identify an appropriate subject to describe their assertion in a sentence or not. It is common knowledge that Japanese is a topic-prominent language, and Japanese speakers construct sentences in a way that they *comment on a topic* rather than putting words in correct order like as in a subject-prominent language such as English (Ohtaki, 2020; Shirahata, 2015; Kurihara, 2004; Li and Thompson, 1976). A closer look at the students' responses to question 5 asking for their opinions regarding the use of SNS by teenagers (Table 4), for example, reveal that those students, who demonstrated sound reasoning classified as in A, succeeded in identifying the correct subject and formed their sentences around the subject. In contrast, one can understand that the underlined sentences in B that supposedly depict reasons for students' ideas do not make sense due to the lack of appropriate subjects.

TABLE 4: *Students' Responses to Question 5 in Phase 2*

Question 5: Do you think teenagers should avoid using Social Networking Services?

Sample answer: I agree with the idea that teenagers should avoid using SNS. I think SNS can take away too much of their time and distracts them from important work.

A: Students' responses with sound reasoning (N=4)

- I disagree with the idea. I think we can get a lot of information from SNS but we have to be careful.
- I agree with the idea that teenagers should avoid using SNS. I think there is a risk of being involved in a crime.

- I disagree with the idea that teenagers should avoid using SNS. I think you can talk to your friends and family even if you are away from each other through SNS.
- I agree with the idea that teenagers should avoid using SNS. Because there are a lot of problems with SNS and it's hard to tell right from wrong.
- I agree with the idea that teenagers should avoid using SNS. I think SNS can take away too much of their time.

B: Students' responses with insufficient reasoning (N=4)

- I disagree with the idea that teenagers should avoid using SNS. I think get a lot of information. (1)
- I disagree with the idea that teenagers should avoid it. Because SNS can learn the situation of the world. (2)
- I disagree with the idea that teenagers should avoid using SNS. Because SNS can share a lot of information. (3)
- I agree with the idea that teenagers should avoid using SNS. I think even though I have a lot of things to do as a student, I can't avoid neglecting it.
- I agree. I think it can't study.

*Underlined and numberings are added for explanation purposes.

Teacher's Observations in Phase 2: Part 2

For sentence (1), the teacher engaged with the student in clarifying her thoughts during class. The student disagrees with the idea that teenagers should avoid using SNS. In her reasoning sentence, she writes, "I think get a lot of information." The student does not realize that before the verb "get," she needs a subject that describes the doer of "getting a lot of information." During the in-class warm-up exercise, the teacher asked the student who she considered got a lot of information by using SNS. The student looked confused for a moment and gave the

teacher a few off-the-point replies such as "I" or "You." This exchange led the teacher to speculate that it had never occurred to the student that identifying the doer of "getting a lot of information" in the sentence was ever necessary or important.

In Japanese, we often omit to specify a subject in sentences when interlocutors understand what is being referred to as the subject in a conversation. It took several exchanges with the teacher in class, however, for the student to reach the word *teenagers* as the correct subject in the sentence. This conversation appeared to have allowed the student to reflect on her thoughts and realize that identification of a subject was essential in making oneself understood in English. Finally, the teacher helped her correct the sentence to "I think *teenagers* can get a lot of information using SNS." The student seemed to be content with the changes saying "*naruhodo* (I see)."

A similar conversation took place with another student who wrote sentence (2). The student disagreed that teenagers should avoid using SNS because "SNS can learn the situation of the world." SNS is such an iconic word, so the teacher observed that it was easier for the student to recognize SNS as the main topic and place it as the subject in her reasoning sentence. In Japanese, speakers state the topic at the beginning of a sentence and introduce their ideas in a predicate following the topic (Otaki, 2020; Shirahata 2015; Kuribara 2004; Li and Thompson, 1976). This process, often referred to as *topicalization*, allows "SNS can learn the situation of the world" to make sense in the student's mind. It translates as "*SNS wa sekaino jyoukyou wo manaberu,*" which in English means "By SNS, **we** can learn about the situation of the world." However, the word, "we," does not appear anywhere in the Japanese sentence, because speakers would assume it is implied as the subject without the word being specified so apparently.

The teacher guided the student to identify the correct subject in the sentence by asking her to mull over her ideas again. Like

the student mentioned earlier, this student was also puzzled by the question and was unable to detect an accurate subject for a while. After a few exchanges with the teacher, nevertheless, she concluded that the appropriate subject was "teenagers" and corrected the sentences to "Because teenagers can learn the situation of the world through SNS." The student seemed to be convinced that the new sentence reflected her reasoning more accurately. Again, the interaction appeared to be an important chance for the student to gain new awareness of the need for a clear subject in an English sentence.

CONCLUSIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The current paper described an attempt to introduce CT to beginner-level EFL students through a warm-up writing exercise, Today's Question for You, using a teacher-guided learning log. It offered an analysis of students' writing records as a response to given questions in the exercise and detailed the practitioner's relevant in-class observations using a thematic analysis approach. There were two important themes recognized in the students' writings: (1) failure to answer questions that required them to think *why* and *how* in explaining their main ideas and (2) lack of awareness of the need for subjects in English sentences.

The students underwent two different phases throughout the given warm-up writing exercise: (1) to become accustomed to the idea of using language as a means of self-expression, and (2) to develop their competence in describing their opinions with clear, sound reasoning. In both phases, about 50% of the learners displayed discomfort in elaborating their viewpoints with sufficient details or logically sound reasons.

During the in-class warm-up writing activity, the teacher engaged in conversations with some of the students to help clarify their thoughts in Japanese. There were cases in which

having students explain themselves even in their native language, Japanese, could not clear up some of the ambiguities the teacher observed in the students' reasoning. As time was limited in classes, the teacher was unable to provide the students with thorough assistance in making themselves understood clearly and logically in English. These interactions with the students support previous research that beginner-level Japanese EFL learners are challenged in using language, even their mother tongue, to express their perceptions about themselves and the world effectively (Uemi, 2018; Uemi, 2019; Nakanishi, 2015). Important pedagogical implications for teachers who wish to improve the CT skills of elementary Japanese EFL students can be, once again, made to attend to the lower-order thinking abilities shown in Bloom's Taxonomy (2001). In particular, basic-level EFL students struggle with articulating reasons to elaborate their arguments. They show difficulty in answering questions that make them think *about why* and *how* to explicate themselves. Suggestions are made for teachers to work closely with students in reviewing their reasons through dialogue. It is assumed that the improvement of students' thinking skills will be apparent through such an interactive teaching process, allowing students to verbalize *why* and *how* they think or do what they claim with the presence of the teacher or another student in pair work as the audience (Roen and Willy, 1998; McAlexander, 1996).

A Tendency to *Topicalize* English Sentences

An examination of the students' writings also revealed their lack of awareness of the need for subjects in English sentences. The analysis illustrated students' tendency to place what they acknowledged as the topic, instead of a grammatically correct word, as the subject in their sentences. This tendency can be explained by the linguistic feature of the Japanese language as a topic-prominent language, and how English learners' understanding of L1 affects the construct of their L2 (Li and

Thompson, 1976; Kuribara, 2004; Otaki, 2020). For example, in Question 5 which asked students to state their opinions regarding the use of SNS by teenagers, 50% of the students wrote their reasoning sentences with the recognition that SNS was the subject when the correct subject was “teenagers” in their sentences. The following shows the teacher’s understanding of students A, B, and C in terms of (1) what the students produced as their reasoning sentences, (2) what they *thought* they wrote in Japanese, and (3) the accurate translations of what they meant.

Student A:

(1) SNS can get a lot of information.

(2) SNSは多くの情報が得られる。(SNS wa ookuno jyouhou ga erareru).

(3) *You can get a lot of information through SNS.*

Student B:

(1) SNS can learn the situation of the world.

(2) SNSは世界の状況を学べる。(SNS wa sekaino jyoukyou wo manaberu).

(3) *You can learn the situation of the world through SNS.*

Student C:

(1) SNS can share a lot of information.

(2) SNSはたくさんの情報を共有できる。(SNS wa takusan no jyouhouwo kyouyuu dekiru.)

(3) *You can share a lot of information through SNS.*

As shown in the teacher’s interpretations above, the sentences students wrote in English made clear sense in their minds. The Japanese language, a topic-prominent language, allows users to put a topic at the front of the sentence followed by a binding particle *wa* and describe their comment about the topic after the word. This process called *topicalization* explains why a famous sentence such as “I am an eel (*bokuwa unagi da*)”

makes sense in Japanese as a request to order a meal at a restaurant whereas in English, a subject-prominent language that makes communication possible only through the correct grammatical word order, the sentence should be “I would like an eel” (Shirahata, 2015).

This feature of topicalization poses a problem for Japanese EFL students when they erroneously recognize that the topic in Japanese sentences translates as the subject in their English sentences. In Japanese sentences, a determiner phrase (DP) placed at the front could be the subject, but in many cases, it is a topicalized phrase followed by the particle *wa* (Shirahata, 2015). Studies explain that such linguistic differences related to the notion of a subject is difficult for Japanese English learners to comprehend fully, and thus explicit grammatical instruction should be given to intermediate or advanced level learners who are cognitively ready to interpret the complexities of the rules (Shirahata, 2015). Given the results shown in the present study, it is speculated that the notion of the subject is a definite challenge for beginner-level Japanese EFL students to grasp, however explicit the grammar instruction may be.

Not identifying the subject correctly in sentences, however, makes it even harder for elementary EFL learners to present themselves as adequate critical thinkers. Using the sentences written by students A, B, and C, the teacher created a PowerPoint slide to show students that in English, we need to use the subject differently than we recognize the topic of a sentence in Japanese. Judging that the detailed grammatical input would only confuse the students, the teacher made the thought process much simpler and stressed that they think of “*who* does / did *what* first” to make the subject and the verb clear in a sentence. For beginner-level EFL university students, even to think of who does/did what takes practice, given that they are not accustomed to using language to express their understanding of themselves and the world as part of their daily, social life.

Therefore, it is suggested that teachers who use interactive methods to introduce CT skills to beginner-level EFL Japanese students, guide our learners with a deep level of patience and understanding towards the limitations of their academic and linguistic capacities, constantly reflecting on our practices with critical thinking.

Lastly, this study served only as the first phase of a research project that aims to develop an instructional approach to introduce CT to beginner-level Japanese EFL undergraduate students. Future research will employ more in-depth qualitative data collections from a wider group of students' records of learning logs, classroom observations, and questionnaires to reflect the perspectives of students and teachers more comprehensively. It is hoped that the present study offered evidence of the educational challenges experienced in Japanese higher education and will act as an important reminder that we teachers must continue to strive as critical thinkers and practitioners to give our students the best opportunities to develop thinking skills through language instruction.

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APPENDIX A

A sample sheet of a Learning Log used for the test preparation course

ラーニングログ サンプル 実用英語技能検定I

Lesson No.	Lesson Topic	Date	Name & Student ID	Partner's Name
2	単語力をつける	4/13	Hanako Kokutan 123456	Taro Kokutan
Today's question for you		Who is a famous person you admire the most? Why do you admire him/her? 有名人であなたが憧れている人は誰ですか？なぜ彼・彼女に憧れていますか？		
Your Answer		I admire BTS because they are cool and great entertainers.		
Your partner's answer		She admires Raul in Snowman because she thinks he's a cool and great dancer!		
Today's Key Lesson Points!				
<p>1. 同義語・反意語</p> <p>同義語=同じ or 近い意味を持つ言葉 Synonyms</p> <p>動詞: admire=praise 称える 名詞: illness=disease 病気 save=rescue ~を救う opportunity=chance 機会</p> <p>形容詞・副詞: rude=impolite 失礼 almost-nearly ほとんど frequently=often よく</p> <p>反意語=反対の意味を持つ言葉 対になる言葉 antonyms</p> <p>動詞: accept (受ける) ⇔ refuse (拒否する) 名詞: cause (原因) ⇔ effect (結果) sink (沈む) ⇔ float (浮く) quality (質) ⇔ quantity (量)</p> <p>形容詞・副詞: ancient (古代の) ⇔ modern (近代の) full (いっぱい) ⇔ empty (空)</p> <p>2. 派生語</p> <p>接頭語・接尾語=別の品詞に変える、特定の意味を持つ語に変える接辞</p> <p>品詞を変える働き</p> <p>explain 説明する → explanation 説明 (動→名) agree 同意する → agreement 同意 (動→名) popular 人気のある → popularity 人気 (形→名) able 可能 → enable ~を可能にする (形→動) strength 強さ → strengthen ~を強くする (名→動)</p>				

ラーニングログ サンプル 実用英語技能検定I

特定の意味を付け加える

comfortable 快適な → uncomfortable 不快な **un**=否定

polite 礼儀正しい → impolite 無礼な **im**=否定

appear 現れる → disappear ~姿を消す **dis**=反対・否定

operate 働く → cooperate 協力する **co**=ともに

suit 合う → suitable 適している **able**=~できる

hope 希望 → hopeless 絶望的な **less**=ない

↓

類義語=似ている意味の言葉

客	貸借
audience = (劇・映画などの) 観客、聴衆	borrow = (物) を借りる。
customer = (商店などの) 客、得意先	lend = (物) を貸す。
guest = 訪問客、(ホテルなどの) 宿泊客	rent = (家や土地) を賃貸する。
passenger = (乗り物の) 客、乗客	

↓

Today's Key Vocabulary!

↓

意外な意味を持つ二語

1. on ~ = ~のおごりで

Lunch is **on** me today. (今日の昼食は私のおごりよ)

2. run = ~を経営する

Mr. Tanaka **runs** a small stationary shop. (タナカさんは小さな文具店を経営している)

3. stand = ~を耐える

I cannot **stand** your bad behavior any longer.

4. treat = (人) におごる

I'd like to **treat** you to lunch to thank you for all your help.

Do you have any questions for today's lesson?

↓

Your partner's signature	Teacher's signature

2

APPENDIX B

Example answers

Phase 1:

1. Who is a famous person you admire the most? Why do you admire him/her?
I admire BTS because they are cool and great entertainers.
2. How would you describe yourself in one word?
I would describe my personality as friendly. I feel comfortable talking to people and making friends with them quickly.
3. What's one thing you are proud of?
I am proud of my part-time work experience. I work at a coffee shop now, and my boss tells me that my communication skills have improved a lot.
4. What is one thing you were surprised about the most recently?
I was surprised by the news that the two popular Korean actor and actress from the Netflix drama series ("Crash Landing on You") got married in real life!
5. What do you look forward to doing the most recently?
I look forward to going to a café and eating some sweets the most recently. Whenever I have free time, I like to go find a new café and enjoy some sweets. I take photos of delicious food and post them on Instagram.
6. What do you think you should do to improve your English skills? What do you think you could start now?
I think I should increase vocabulary more and practice speaking in English. I could start speaking English

more with Jamie in English Lounge.

7. What are you going to do after you graduate from college?

I am going to work for an airline company after I graduate from college. It has been my dream to work at an airport since I was a child.

Phase 2:

1. Do you think high school students should wear uniforms?

-I think high school students should wear uniforms. Uniforms make them less distracted about fashion and focus on study.

-I don't think high school students should wear uniforms. Uniforms do not allow them to express their individuality.

2. What part of Japanese culture are you proud of?

-I am proud of Japanese anime and manga culture. It has become popular worldwide, and I think the contents are high-quality.

-I am proud of Japanese people's good manners. I think people in Japan are respectable to each other and have good manners in public places.

3. Do you think more foreigners will visit Japan in the future?

-I think that more foreigners will visit Japan in the future. I heard that Japan was ranked a number one country that people would like to visit once COVID-19 is controlled. I believe Japan can still offer a lot of attractive places and cultures to people around the world.

4. What do you think is the best age for children to have a smartphone?
-I think the best age for children to have a smartphone is when they are about 10 years old. I think it's better that children use a smartphone from the early age for security reasons.

5. Do you think teenagers should avoid using Social Networking Services?
-I agree with the idea that teenagers should avoid using SNS. I think SNS can take away too much of their time and distracts them from important work.

6. Which do you think is better for students, studying at home or school?
-I think it's better for students to study at school. In school, you can study with your friends and learn from your teacher. I think learning is more effective when you do it with other people.
-I think it's better for students to study at home. At home, you can focus on your study without being distracted from your friends. Now the internet is very helpful and you can learn a lot online as well.

7. Do you think it is better for people to eat at restaurants or at home?
-I think it is better for people to eat at restaurants. The reason is that people can enjoy the food more with restaurants' good service and nice atmosphere.
-I think it is better for people to eat home. The reason is that people can enjoy eating their food more in a relaxing setting at home.

8. Do you think studying in groups is better than studying alone?
-I think studying in groups is better than studying alone.

The reason is that it is more fun and you can cooperate with your friends to work on the same problem.

-I don't think studying in groups is better than studying alone. The reason is that we can't concentrate and may stop studying and start chatting if we study in groups.

THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF ASIAN AMERICAN AND ASIAN AUSTRALIAN EFL TEACHERS AT JAPANESE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Marian Wang and Michael Lin

ABSTRACT

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) professionals are attracted to teaching English for various reasons such as having work-life balance, earning a competitive salary, and teaching a language they love (Shih, 2016). In this qualitative study, three Asian American EFL teachers and an Asian Australian EFL teacher were interviewed about their experience working at Japanese higher education institutions (HEIs). Their stories were situated within Wenger's (1998) three modes of belonging to a community of practice (CoP)—engagement, imagination, and alignment. The teachers in this study discovered that in order to be engaged in the EFL field as active professionals, they needed to build on their background not only as a teacher but also as a researcher (Burns & Westmacott, 2018), while negotiating their Professional Identity (PI) (Mannes, 2020; Tsui, 2007). They reflected on their PI and critical incidents (Lengeling & Mora Pablo, 2016), which helped mold their imagined identities as minority stakeholders in the EFL field. Their reflections showed that despite not fulfilling the phenotypical requirement of the White native EFL teacher (Kusaka, 2014), they brought in their unique lived experiences (Mapp, 2008) into the classroom. They also aligned themselves with global EFL practitioners by embedding World Englishes, migration, and diversity issues into their teaching and hiring practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Securing tenured English as a Foreign Language (EFL) positions in Japanese higher education institutions (HEIs) has become increasingly competitive over the last two decades. There is growing pressure on newly-hired teachers to obtain a doctorate from abroad (Hada, 2005; Kellem, 2020), have peer-reviewed academic publications (Nagatomo, 2014), get external funding for research, attain Japanese language proficiency, and teach content courses in English and Japanese. If EFL teachers invest significant effort, money, and time into their professional development, they may eventually be able to obtain some of these qualifications such as a doctorate from a non-Japanese university. However, meeting the less quantifiable qualifications of being a White native speaker of English from inner circle English-speaking countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Kusaka, 2014; Rivers & Ross, 2013; Ruecker & Ives; 2015; Simon-Maeda, 2004) may not be feasible, irrespective of the amount of effort, money, or time spent by EFL teachers who are neither White nor native speakers of inner circle English-speaking countries.

When race and country of origin are established benchmarks that determine the most desirable traits of an EFL professional (Rivers & Ross, 2013), World English speakers from outer circle English-speaking countries such as India or Singapore and non-White native English speakers are disadvantaged as employable members in the EFL community of practice (CoP). A CoP is situational learning as a lifelong social endeavor for members in a professional community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). CoP members have a vested interest in sharing information and developing relationships around things that matter most to them (Lave & Wenger, 1991). World English speakers and non-White native English speakers who are peripheral members of the community are marginalized due to

hiring practices that privilege White native speakers of English and their lived experiences (Mapp, 2008). Consequently, their stories have been left untold and unexamined until recently. Kusaka's (2014) study of Japanese American EFL teachers and Nagatomo's (2014) research on female EFL teachers in Japan have brought to the forefront the challenges their interviewees face regarding their identity and attempts at re-positioning themselves as integral members of the EFL CoP. These studies offer insight into how EFL CoPs can and should be more inclusive of World English speakers, non-White English teachers, and female teachers so that EFL teaching in Japan reflects the reality that English is a lingua franca shared by individuals with diverse lived experiences (Kachru, 1976) who can empower learners to become integral members of a World English community.

Kusaka (2014) interviewed six Japanese American EFL professionals in Japan and documented their challenges using narrative inquiry. Her qualitative study underscores the fact that although her Japanese American participants could blend in phenotypically within the local Japanese population, their inability to speak Japanese fluently and lack of resemblance to what their Japanese EFL learners and university administrators labeled as the stereotypical EFL teacher resulted in them having to constantly negotiate their identities and re-position themselves in their personal and professional lives. A Japanese American EFL teacher in her study mentioned that she saw herself as a stepping-stone for Japanese people to come into contact with the blond-hair, blue-eyed native speaker. In other words, she was a second-class substitute for the native speaker that her students found more desirable to interact with outside of the language classroom. Kusaka's (2014) study illustrates how the idealized White native EFL teacher image is detrimental to teachers who share the genealogical roots of their Japanese counterparts, yet do not match the phenotypical requirements of what a native speaker from an inner circle country should look

like. Categorized as second-rate EFL teachers and looking Japanese without having the fluency in Japanese, the Japanese American EFL teachers struggled to find their place in Japan and build their identities in their personal and their professional lives.

In addition to being White and from inner-circle English-speaking countries, being male is considered advantageous for EFL teachers (Rivers & Ross, 2013). Nagatomo's (2014) study of female EFL teachers in various educational settings highlights the obstacles that foreign female EFL teachers face in a male CoP. The extensive and expansive "old boy's network" facilitates socializing for men, thereby giving them greater access to employment opportunities than women. The women in her study found it difficult to join the old boy's network; they were not privy to the referrals to jobs in the exclusive male network. The female teachers also felt that the underlying power structures in place where men hold prestigious and powerful positions in educational institutions in Japan meant that men were given more opportunities to rise to the top, whereas women were expected to do the same amount of work without having any decision-making roles. Sexual and power harassment were issues that the women had to cope with regularly, along with the underlying expectation in Japanese society that women should be caregivers and housewives, not fully-fledged career women. Nagatomo's (2014) study shows that the privileges awarded to men do not trickle down to women who must try to establish themselves within a predominantly male workplace. Similar to Kusaka's (2014) study of Japanese American EFL teachers, the foreign women who participated in Nagatomo's (2014) research struggled to find their place and negotiate their identities in workplaces that were not always inviting of their presence.

Building a professional identity (PI) (Mannes, 2020; Tsui, 2007) within the confines of a White male native speaker model can be taxing for marginalized teachers who do not resemble the

ideal native speaker. Their PI is constantly being challenged by expectations beyond their control, as they try to resolve tensions between their personal and professional identities. These teachers must prove to others that they are authentic teachers of English (Kusaka, 2014). For some, this may mean not speaking Japanese at all in the classroom, whereas for others it can result in them exaggerating some of the native speaker habits and traits that would clearly distinguish them from the local culture. Not being awarded the privileges of being seen as a native English speaker by default means that many non-stereotypical teachers must find their own way to prove that they are worthy of teaching English in institutions that are not always prepared to embrace World English standards.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This is a qualitative study (Jansen, 2010) using the methodology of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2006) of gathering stories from individuals about their lived experiences as non-stereotypical EFL teachers at Japanese HEIs. According to Clandinin (2006), “these lived and told stories and talk about those stories are ways we create meaning in our lives as well as ways we enlist each other’s help in building our lives and communities” (p. 44). Members of a CoP often relay stories to each other in order to unearth their lived experiences (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Wenger’s (1998) three modes of belonging to a CoP—engagement, imagination, and alignment—is frequently referred to when examining lived experiences through in-depth interviews. Engagement is based on interaction and participation of members in sharing their expertise to contribute to the ongoing professional development among members in a CoP. Imagination focuses on individual members who reflect on their growth and imagined possibilities of expanding their identities to new realms that will facilitate their personal growth. Finally, alignment is transforming their identities beyond the local to more global practices of the CoP. Alignment requires that

members have input as key stakeholders when effecting change in global practices. Without alignment, there may not be a cohesive CoP that can instigate changes that go beyond local practices (Goodnough, 2010).

Two Asian American female teachers, one Asian American male teacher, and one Asian Australian male teacher participated in Zoom interviews in April or May 2022. Two teachers in this study were chosen based on a nonrandom method of data collection called snowball or chain sampling where referrals and networks are accessed (Noy, 2008). The other two teachers, who interviewed each other, are the researchers of this study. Prior to being interviewed, the teachers reviewed the consent form and interview questions (see Appendix 1). At the beginning of the interview, the consent statement was reiterated, and the interviewees were told that the Zoom interview, which lasted between 60 to 90 minutes, would be recorded. The teachers did not answer all the interview questions on the list as the one-on-one interviews were intended to be semi-structured. Adams (2015) claims that in semi-structured interviews “the dialogue can meander around the topics on the agenda—rather than adhering slavishly to verbatim questions as in a standardized survey—and may delve into totally unforeseen issues” (p. 493). Approximately one or two days after the interview, notes from the interviews were emailed to the interviewees, who confirmed the accuracy and validity of the content. All of the teachers replied and offered corrections or clarification as needed.

The objective of this study was to investigate the PIs (Mannes, 2020; Tsui, 2007) and study the lived experiences (Clandinin, 2006; Mapp, 2008) of non-stereotypical university EFL teachers in Japan.

The research questions were as follows:

(1) Why did they choose to be an EFL teacher?

- (2) What challenges did they face as a non-stereotypical EFL teacher?
- (3) How did they overcome these challenges?

FINDINGS

The findings from this study were placed within Wenger's (1998) three modes of belonging to a CoP—engagement, imagination, and alignment. As individuals spend more time in a CoP and try to find meaning as a member of the community, their identities may change (Goodnough, 2010). In this study, we analyzed how the four teachers evolved in their engagement in their CoPs, their negotiation of imagined identities, and their practice of aligning themselves with global goals that extended beyond the confines of foreign language teaching in a university classroom.

Engagement

Engagement provides a means for community members to define, maintain, and negotiate their activities and practices and creates space for recreating identities (Clarke, 2008). The teachers in this study recreated their PIs by finding their niche within a CoP that reflected how they taught in the classroom and conducted research. Finding a niche was not deliberately pursued by the teachers, as they did not intend to become academics. In fact, for three out of four of the “accidental teachers” (Yoshihara, 2018), the EFL career chose them, when they happened to find themselves teaching abroad in Japan for personal reasons—to live with their Japanese spouse. With time though, their identities developed from being a teacher of English language skills (e.g., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) to a researcher who could use the most advanced technological tools for teaching and learning, brought his migrant experience into the classroom, raised awareness about diversity issues in the workplace, and ensured that students

possessed critical thinking skills that would help them become future global human resources (Yonezawa, 2014). As they honed their niche, they presented at academic conferences, wrote academic papers, and became active members of CoPs that shared their passion in EFL teaching and research.

The professional growth from teacher to researcher is not surprising, given that being hired at HEIs in Japan has become increasingly competitive over time (Nagatomo, 2014). Out of necessity and/or interest, the teachers in this study decided that they needed to become researchers who reflected on how they taught in the classroom, their role as teachers of a dominant language around the world, and their purpose in encouraging students to become global citizens who can critically examine their own culture while interacting with people from other cultures in inclusive ways (Godwin-Jones, 2015) and solve real-world problems (Živkovic, 2016).

Conducting research in their niche inspired two teachers to pursue doctoral degrees. Getting a doctorate has become a prerequisite in being hired as a tenured professor at Japanese universities (Hada, 2005; Kellem, 2020). An Asian American teacher decided to enroll in an online education doctoral program with an institution in the U.K. because she wanted to continue teaching in Japan while conducting research in areas that might positively influence her teaching practices. Moreover, she realized that to be promoted from a limited contract to tenured professor, a doctorate would be advantageous. Incidentally, upon completion of her doctorate degree, she was awarded a tenured position at a private university in the Kansai region of Japan. The tenured Asian Australian teacher said that he would like to enroll in a doctoral program in political science because he wanted to have expertise in politics and study about economic partnerships for Australia and its Asian neighbors like China and Japan. Although he has a secure EFL teaching position at a Japanese private university, he wanted to become a

researcher who could impact global change in politics and economics. Thus, getting a tenured job at a Japanese HEI was not seen as the terminal point of his career. He envisioned a future where he would go back to Australia with his family and use his life experience in Japan and doctoral research in political science to foster political and economic ties between his country and Asian countries.

Imagination

All of the teachers reflected on their personal growth in social and professional settings. The teachers had critical incidents (Lengeling & Mora Pablo, 2016) that sparked change in their views. The spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was the most recent critical incident that prompted teachers to change to online teaching and accept the reality that education may move towards online and decentralized learning for the long term. One Asian American teacher, however, had been weaving technology into his teaching since 2015 because he believed that having mastery over various skills including technology gave him the freedom to select what worked best for him when teaching his students. Consequently, all of the teachers learned new online learning tools that helped them grow as EFL teachers and researchers during the pandemic. This trend of language teachers becoming more technological savvy will become even more pronounced with time as “they will need to be able to follow new developments in technology and be able to understand their potential use in second language instruction” (Godwin-Jones, 2015, p. 10).

Another critical incident for the teachers was realizing that they were not perceived by others in ways that fit their self-perception. For example, an Asian American teacher thought that she was not asked to share some responsibilities like correcting English documents and tests that her White coworker was assigned because some people thought that her English did

not match the ability of her stereotypically White coworker. She felt that the message they were conveying to her was that based on her appearance, English was not a language that she owned. The Asian American male teacher also felt that his native speaker status was questioned by others, especially when students asked where he was from more than once. To highlight that he qualifies as a native speaker, he does not use any Japanese in class and tells his students that he likes pizza, soft drinks, hamburger, and fries. In contrast, an Asian American female teacher, who is bilingual in Japanese and English, uses Japanese in class when needed and says that her favorite food is sushi and burritos. She has accepted the reality that regardless of what she does or says in Japan, her status will always remain foreigner to most Japanese people and to others as native English speaker or *hafu* (half Japanese and half another ethnicity). She does not underscore her native speaker status despite feeling uncomfortable with the native and non-native speaker labels assigned to EFL teachers. Although she speaks Japanese and adopts Japanese traits in her professional and private life, she does not force herself to become Japanese or act Japanese because she realizes that doing so does not reap any benefits in a culture where being Japanese has a narrow definition (Tsuda, 2003). The Asian Australian teacher sees himself as a migrant who has lived in various countries and has matured because of the challenges he overcame when living in those countries. He is comfortable with being labeled as a migrant rather than a native speaker and accepts that cultural differences and tensions must be reconciled within himself instead of expecting others to adjust their perceptions of who he is and what he can offer in the workplace.

The third critical incident for two teachers was learning to accept the limited role of English and other foreign languages in Japanese society. An Asian American teacher admitted that her Japanese students viewed English as a tool that was not important for them to live in Japan. Another Asian American

teacher felt that for others in Japan, particularly for wealthy housewives who she had taught for many years, English was considered a status symbol that could assist them when they go on trips abroad while accompanying their husbands. Therefore, for Japanese people who do not have the luxury of going overseas to English-speaking countries, learning English appears to lack a real purpose or value. However, over the last few decades, the Japanese government has been insisting on Japanese students to learn English and other foreign languages so that they can study abroad and return to Japan as global citizens (Yonezawa, 2014). Unfortunately, with the spread of COVID-19, the possibility for Japanese students to study abroad has diminished considerably, and to make matters worse, the depreciating Japanese yen and worldwide inflation are rapidly raising the costs of living abroad. Two Asian American teachers felt that change was needed to make English play a larger role in Japanese society than for passing entrance exams or for going overseas—English must be seen as more than a necessary evil to study or for the affluent or privileged in Japan who can go abroad and use English.

Alignment

Stakeholders expand their PIs from local to global practices when they try to pursue alignment (Goodnough, 2010). In addition to being citizens of Australia and the United States, the teachers in this study had ethnic ties to Japan, Philippines, Singapore, and Taiwan. Moreover, some had lived in China, France, Macedonia, the Philippines, Singapore, Switzerland, and Taiwan before residing in Japan. Their experiences abroad and their diverse cultural background helped them fulfill Wenger's (1998) third mode of belonging to a CoP—alignment—when designing content courses such as Peace Studies, Global Topics, and Intercultural Understanding. Teaching globally-oriented courses inspired teachers such as the Asian Australian teacher to talk about “his unique migrant

experience in various countries and interject himself in the materials he teaches.” He said that normally he was not comfortable with talking about himself because he felt that the individual experience should not be generalized. However, in his Peace Studies class, he embedded intercultural issues so that his students would have opportunities to learn about communication in settings beyond interacting with the stereotypical native English speaker. An Asian American teacher, who also taught global courses, identified her strength in teaching as being based on her multicultural background and experiences abroad. Living abroad made her realize that each country had something to be proud of and ashamed of regarding its culture and history. In her global courses, she encouraged students to unearth prejudices and assumptions, reflect on them, and discuss them with other Japanese students and international students who were invited to visit her class. She felt similar to the Asian Australian teacher, who implied that he did not have the right to impose his ideas on his students, as students should be given as many opportunities as possible to learn about diverse views and decide on their own—what, who, and how to believe about global issues. Therefore, the Australian Asian teacher and an Asian American teacher realized that they could offer chances for dialogue and discussion for the students on global issues in content classes without unilaterally imposing their global perspectives on them.

Two Asian American teachers mentioned that sharing their unique stories facilitated their students’ understanding of their lived experiences and fostered their critical thinking skills. A teacher said that “his students saw themselves in him, even though he was not Japanese.” When they heard about his life story of being raised as a Taiwanese American in the United States, he hoped that it would help them recognize “the idiosyncrasies present in life and accept that life is very special and unique, and their life story would be very special and unique as well.” Although he was not particularly fond of divulging his personal information, he believed that by sharing his

background, his students would have a greater understanding of the challenges of living as a migrant in another country and as a child of immigrant parents in the United States. Another Asian American teacher with ethnic ties to the Philippines also included issues about the Philippines and the immigrant experience in the United States in her curriculum. She felt that by using English and learning about global issues, her students could raise their critical thinking skills and find their own purpose and value in learning English that would assist in their lifelong learning of English as *their* foreign language.

Two Asian American teachers made efforts to hire adjunct, contract, and tenured teachers who had diverse backgrounds and represented countries from outer circle English countries (Kachru, 1976) to counterbalance the underlying hiring practices that privileged the White male native speaker. However, an Asian American teacher confessed that hiring teachers who had ethnically-diverse backgrounds did not always equate to changes in the hiring preference of White male native teachers. In fact, sometimes hiring multicultural teachers would backfire when they showed little interest in exploring diversity issues or were comfortable with reinforcing the status quo when recruiting new teachers. Another Asian American teacher said that although she and her colleagues tried to hire non-stereotypical EFL teachers, the actual pool of applicants was limited in diversity because White men tend to find it comfortable to stay in countries such as Japan that gave them privileges that exceeded what was offered in their home countries (Kobayashi, 2014). Therefore, hiring non-stereotypical EFL teachers was not always feasible in a predominantly White male native speaker market.

All four teachers confirmed that although they may not have experienced overt racism at their Japanese HEIs, they recognized that there were biases in the pre-screening stages of hiring when job offerings specifically mentioned native speaker

status (Kiczkowiak, 2020) and schools continued to hire young White male teachers as EFL teachers (Kobayashi, 2014). The Asian Australian teacher who had taught in China noticed a preference for people who looked stereotypically White despite them being non-native speakers of English (e.g., teacher from Sweden). Therefore, the tendency to prefer White teachers is not necessarily unique to Japan, as hiring practices in many Asian countries revolve around the assumption that native speakers who look White and speak English are the most qualified teachers, irrespective of their teaching experience, personal characteristics, and motivations for teaching English abroad (Kobayashi, 2014).

CONCLUSION

This qualitative narrative inquiry study illustrated how four non-stereotypical EFL teachers evolved in their engagement in their CoPs, their negotiation of imagined identities, and their practice of aligning themselves with global goals. All of the teachers became researchers as well as teachers and became more invested in teaching about global issues so that their learners would become critical global thinkers who can effectively solve real-world problems (Živkovic, 2016) and critically examine their own culture while interacting with people from other cultures in inclusive ways (Godwin-Jones, 2015). Their multicultural background and experiences living in other countries gave them personal insight into issues such as migration, World Englishes, and diversity. Some teachers admitted that living in Japan where English had a limited role in their students' daily lives posed challenges to teaching EFL in Japanese HEIs, especially if English was only needed for passing college entrance exams or going abroad. When hiring new teachers, some teachers made deliberate efforts to employ non-stereotypical EFL teachers despite the underlying tendency to recruit White native speakers of English. By analyzing the PIs (Mannes, 2020; Tsui, 2007) and studying the lived experiences

(Clandinin, 2006; Mapp, 2008) of non-stereotypical EFL teachers, the authors hope that the stories of English teachers with Asian roots, which are rarely shared (Ramanathan, 2006), will facilitate changes in hiring and teaching practices at Japanese HEIs that advocate global standards of teaching, learning, and research.

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APPENDIX 1: Consent Form and Interview Questions

I give permission to (authors) to collect data for this research project and write articles based on the data they collect. I understand that my real name will not be revealed in any way and that I have the right to refuse that any of my data be distributed.

(signed and dated)

1. Why did you choose this career?
2. What is it like to teach EFL as an Asian American female (in Japan/Taiwan)? Advantages? Disadvantages?
3. What is it like to teach EFL as an Asian American or Australian male (in Japan/Taiwan)? Advantages? Disadvantages?
4. What does the future look like for our careers as Asian Americans/Australians teaching EFL at Japanese universities?
5. What were some of the lessons you learned earlier in your career teaching EFL?
6. What was one moment (in your early teaching career) that was particularly impactful for you?
7. What are things about your work that you enjoy that most people do not know about?
8. What are the harder aspects of being a professor that many people do not know about?
9. Have you ever experienced racial discrimination?
10. What has been some of the best feedback you received from students?
11. What is it like to live in another culture for an extended period?
12. How has teaching English in Asia impacted you as a person?
13. What would you say to someone who is thinking about teaching abroad? What advice would you give to someone

who is thinking about teaching abroad?

14. What do you think the future of English language education will be like in Japan? Asia?

ONLINE CHAT WRITING TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' WRITING INTERACTION AND ENGAGEMENT

Yuichi Tagane

ABSTRACT

Online Chat Writing is a synchronous online collaborative writing activity which promotes instant, real-time interaction with peers through web collaboration tools such as Google Docs and Google Slides. Students type their thoughts and opinions about a given topic by the instructor with randomly assigned pairs or group members within a limited time frame. Unlike a natural conversation, which often demands both speakers to have instant responses, while one student is typing, the other student can have sufficient time before they respond to his or her peer(s). Since the COVID-19 crisis, our reliance on online educational technologies has accelerated and become indispensable for many academic institutions in the world. Teaching writing is not an exception. The purpose of this paper is to describe how Online Chat Writing with the use of a web collaboration tool, particularly Google Slides, can be introduced into a writing course in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program at Akita International University in Japan with the step-by-step practical procedure. After that, the potential pedagogical benefits from this activity will be discussed.

INTRODUCTION

In early 2020, the global COVID crisis forced many academic institutions to suspend face-to-face classes and replaced it with viable online teaching and learning. Many universities and other higher education institutions across the world started to adopt the e-learning modality which could hopefully offer the same level of learning opportunities as learning in person. This online

teaching approach has been still employed either partially or entirely in the post-COVID pandemic era. Akita International University (AIU) was one of the first academic institutions in Japan to switch all courses taught to online formats, starting from the 2020 academic year. Zoom, one of the most globally popular cloud-based web conferencing tools, was adopted for teaching and learning. This abrupt shift to online teaching within a short period of time, however, caused both instructors and students to confront a plethora of challenges. For instance, for some instructors especially who were used to delivering conventional teaching, online class preparation by using online learning technology was totally new and therefore cast an enormous workload. Likewise, with recurrent technical issues before or during class time, some students became easily demotivated or experienced stress. When the COVID pandemic eased in the spring of 2021, the campus buildings were reopened. Accordingly, some courses have since started to be delivered either partially online or fully face-to-face.

To put it broadly, online learning can be grouped into four formats: synchronous, asynchronous, blended learning, and bichronous online learning. Synchronous online classes allow both the instructor and students to meet from different locations through web conferencing platforms including Google Classroom and Zoom (Fadde & Vu, 2014; Krishnan et al., 2019; Na-Young, 2018; Singh & Thurman, 2019; Yeh, 2021). The biggest advantage of synchronous online learning is that it gives students an opportunity to interact with the instructor and peers on the computer screen in real-time from anywhere in the world. Asynchronous online learning, on the other hand, takes place when the instructor and students do not meet or interact in real-time (Fadde & Vu, 2014; Na-Young, 2018; Singh & Thurman, 2019). This type of learning allows students to complete provided class materials such as assigned reading materials, video-recorded lectures, online quizzes, uploaded media, etc. within an allotted time frame. The biggest advantage of

asynchronous learning is that it gives students more flexibility to study course work in a self-paced environment. Blended learning is a mixture of online and offline learning with the use of a learning management system (LMS) (Alzahrani, 2019; Fadde & Vu, 2014). Students complete assigned tasks provided by the instructor who creates and uploads online learning materials, including instructional videos or reading materials on LMS. Moodle, an open source learning management tool, is the most popularly employed at many academic institutions. It allows the instructor to create course materials that students can download and activities including online quizzes and attendance sheets so that s/he can monitor, manage, and track students' learning progress. The instructor also meets and teaches students in a physical classroom. The last type of online learning is Bichronous online learning, a combination of synchronous and asynchronous online learning (Martin et al., 2020). This online learning modality allows students to enjoy both the asynchronous component, such as accessing and learning via online materials at their own pace remotely over any Internet connected device, and the synchronous component, such as participating in class discussions online to deepen a sense of belonging to their peers and instructor (Martin et al., 2020).

Each modality has both benefits and drawbacks; however, the development of students' interaction and engagement appears to be the key element to help online classes run smoothly and successfully (Anderson, 2003; Blasco-Arcas et al., 2013; Martin & Bolliger, 2018). There is a study conducted by Lear et al. (2010), who supported the importance of students' interaction and engagement in online learning. Their findings indicated that by facilitating student interaction in the online learning environment, they could feel a sense of belonging and become more engaged in class. Muzammil et al. (2020) also stated that interaction among students can be a strong indicator of an important, successful component of students' engagement in online learning.

Despite this, however, there seem to be some pedagogical challenges which hinder students' engagement and interaction. One of the major concerns is that the instructor would find it difficult to find out whether students are equally engaged and interacted with one another in assigned class activities in online class. If there is a situation where the instructor permits students to turn their camera off during class, they can easily develop a habit of procrastination, pretending to listen to the instructor. In other words, the instructor cannot necessarily find out what students are doing on the other side of the computer screen. The Breakout Rooms, one of the unique features of Zoom, can split a large group of students into smaller meetings, enabling them to have small peer-to-peer discussions, collaborations, and other assigned activities. This function might prevent some students' tardiness. It, however, would be time consuming for the instructor to visit each breakout room and ask each group member to check whether there were unequal contributions to the assigned tasks. To have all participants to equally engage in any classroom activity and maximize student interaction, educators should execute sound teaching techniques that foster meaningful interaction.

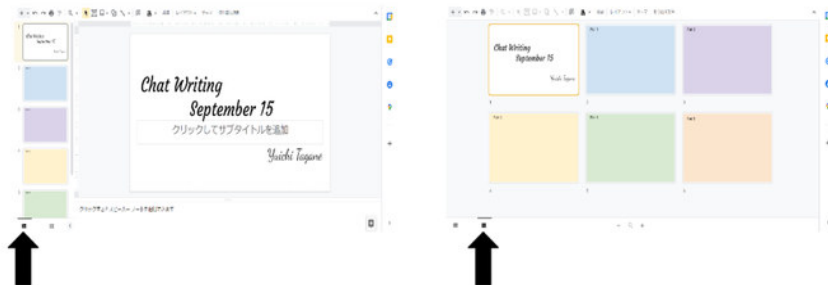
What Is Online Chat Writing?

Online Chat Writing is a writing activity which promotes instant, real-time interaction with peers through synchronous online learning tools such as Google Docs and Google Slides. Students type their thoughts and opinions about a given topic by the instructor with randomly assigned pairs or group members within a limited time frame. There are several noticeable benefits of using synchronous online learning tools. For instance, it allows users for real-time collaboration from anywhere in the world, without using a computer facility to access. Once a user shares a document through a link or Google Drive with others, they are allowed to create, edit, and delete text with each other simultaneously. Another benefit is that these synchronous learning tools provide users with free individual

access. This means that as long as having a Google account, they can enjoy the use of such a service. In particular, Google Slides is a more suitable medium for this activity than Google Docs in that it has the synchronous grid view function, located in the bottom left corner. By clicking the 2 by 3 grid icon, the instructor can monitor all of the slides on one page to check students' progress, as shown in Figure 1. In addition, this function enables the instructor to view students collaborating in real time. This means that once any student adds some words in one of the slides that they are assigned to use, those words will immediately appear on the slide in the grid view.

The next section of this paper is to demonstrate how the author implemented the Online Chat Writing activity in his writing course in the context of the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program at Akita International University.

Figure 1. *Google Slides in the film strip view (left) and the grid view (right)*



THE EXPLANATION OF ONLINE CHAT WRITING

The purpose and goal of the activity

Prior to the onset of this activity, clear explanations or practice sessions need to be given to students, as some of them have previously had little or no experience in writing in English via synchronous online learning tools. Since this is a synchronous online collaborative writing activity, they need to

be informed that they will type and share their thoughts with their classmates on a given topic within a limited time. After that, the instructor is required to explain the purpose and goal of this activity. In a foreign language environment, it is the fact that the opportunity to use a target foreign language both inside and outside the classroom is limited. Teaching writing is not an exception. It is, therefore, inevitable for the instructor to explain to students that this activity would provide them with opportunities to utilize and practice the language that they have recently learned through peer interaction.

Evaluation

Students also need to be informed what percentage of the overall grade is made up from this activity. Without evaluation, some students would become unmotivated, and therefore display laziness and procrastination. The author explains that such misbehavior can lead to negative academic outcomes. The evaluation can change, depending on various factors such as (1) other assessments including essay assignments, weekly quizzes, homework, midterms, and final exams; (2) the frequency of the activity; and (3) the timing of the activity.

Policy and Etiquette

It is significant that each student needs to have equal amounts of participation and interaction. Some students may have more preference for writing than others, thereby possibly dominating the activity. To avoid any trouble, it is better for the instructor to emphasize each student's equal participation. Because of this, the instructor's interventions and involvement in this activity sometimes becomes crucial. In addition, it is important to make students aware that the purpose of this activity is not to criticize or embarrass their peers, but elicit and share their own thoughts and opinions with respect. For instance, in lieu of showing direct expressions of disagreement (e.g. "You are wrong!"; "I totally disagree with you!"), by which some students may take offense, it is desirable for the instructor to

present more polite and gentle expressions of disagreement beforehand (e.g. “I see what you mean, but I believe...”; “That’s true, but...”; “I see your point, but...”), or expressions of offering an alternative solution to soften the disagreement (e.g. “What do you think about...instead?”; “I would recommend that you...”).

Topics

Topic selection should not be underestimated. As explained above, the main goal of this activity is to provide students with ample opportunities to practice and apply what they have learned previously in class by interaction in the form of writing. If academic writing prompts (e.g. “What is the difference between socialism and capitalism?”) are given, students will spend much time resorting to dictionaries, thereby their writing becoming extremely slow. Therefore, non-threatening and fun writing prompts (e.g. “What are you going to do this weekend?”; “What is something that you like about your hometown?”) are desirable to be used.

The Procedure of Online Chat Writing

Akita International University is the only university where all classes are offered in English in Japan. The author teaches the Intermediate Writing course in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program to introduce fundamental writing skills and strategies that can be applied in interdisciplinary studies at the university level. The class meets twice a week, each of which lasts for 110 minutes. This is an activity done at the beginning of each class designed to warm up the students. In addition, to have students experience continuous writing practice by interaction, this activity is given all semester long. Following is the procedure of how the author implemented the online chat writing activity.

1. Before the activity starts, it is desirable that students be randomly paired or grouped to work together, which can help students to become acquainted with one another. Once logging into the Google Slides, each student needs to find and stay in the designated slide such as “Pair 1”, “Pair 2”, etc.
2. Once the topic is given, students are given time for brainstorming. Before the activity, students need to learn prewriting strategies in advance such as listing, outlining, and clustering, which can help them develop and narrow the focus of the writing topic. Since this is the brainstorming phrase, students need to be informed that they are not allowed to do this in a complete sentence, but in a note form. It is up to students’ English level as to how long they have for brainstorming, but ideally 3-5 minutes can be devoted, as class time is limited. Students can use their own laptop, notebook, or loose-leaf paper to take notes.
3. When the brainstorming is done, students will decide the order of the chat among themselves. The author employs *janken* (rock-scissors-paper), which is one of the most common methods to determine the order of doing something in Japan.
4. Students start the online chat writing in a given order and within a given time. The instructor can decide the duration of the activity, as appropriate for students’ English level; however, since the class time is limited, 10-15 minutes are preferable if it is not the overall goal for the lesson. To promise each

student to have equal contemplation and participation, the author has the students use a circle as a signal expression to let their peers know that his/her turn is over, as shown in Figure 2.

5. For those who do not know what to start or how to respond to their peers, the author shows a list of sentence patterns to make the chatting run smoothly (e.g. “In my opinion,...”; “Do you have anything to add to this?”; “No doubt about it.”; “You can say that again.”; “When did it happen?”; “What do you think?”). Unlike natural conversations, each student can wait for their peer to finish typing, which allows him or her to look up unknown words in the dictionary. However, too much reliance upon a dictionary can slow the chatting, so the instructor may need to limit the number of words to check with a dictionary. In addition, the instructor’s involvement should be minimal; otherwise, it may negatively affect students’ engagement or they may become overdependent on the instructor.
6. Once the time is up, each student needs to record how many words s/he typed by using a record sheet, as shown in Appendix A. The purpose of this sheet is to keep track of the quantity of writing that students are producing. The recording sheet allows them to monitor their writing progress.
7. After that, students spend a few minutes with the paired or grouped students explaining what went well and what did not. In addition, if there are any details that were not conveyed to their peers well in

the activity, they need to provide supplementary explanations during this reflection time.

Figure 2. *A circle as a signal expression to let the pair know that his or her turn is over*

Pair 1

A: My happiest memory is an ensemble contest when I was in the 2nd grade of high school. ○

Y: That's nice! Why did you feel happiest in the contest?○

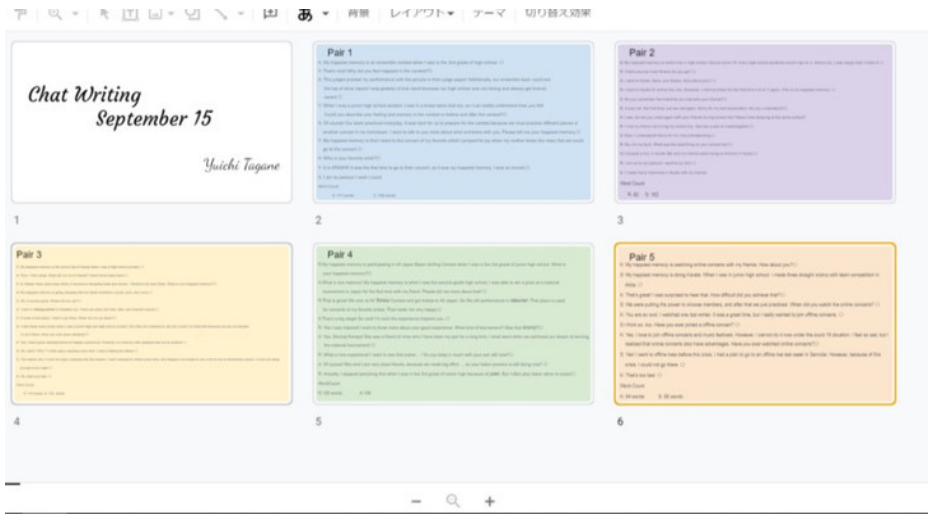
A: The judges praised my performance with the piccolo in their judge paper! Additionally, our ensemble team could win the top of silver award I was grateful of that result because our high school was not strong and always get bronze award.○

Benefits

The benefits of Online Chat Writing are manifold. Students can learn the target language used in writing through peer interaction, and therefore all of them can be attentive during this activity. Before this, it was nearly impossible for the instructor to monitor each student's progress especially in a large class size. However, by employing Google Slides, it becomes easier to see their progress clearly as well as find out who lacks the involvement in the activity, as shown in Figure 3. Another benefit of this activity is to enhance students' long-term retention of their learning. One of the issues of teaching writing is that students often forget what they have learned by the end of class or before the next class. This activity gives them an opportunity to review the indispensable writing components—grammar, vocabulary, writing process, modes, and genres—without having the instructor explain over and over. Not only can such retrieval writing practice consolidate students' retention ability, it may help students to find out what they do not fully understand. From the instructor's perspective, this activity can help track student attendance. Rather than using a physical pen and paper attendance marking sheet or

distributing attendance cards, for instance, the synchronous online tool can monitor student attendance digitally. This is especially instrumental in teaching a large-size class, where the instructor used to invest energy and time to take attendance.

Figure 3. An example of Online Chat Writing



CONCLUSION

This paper examined the practical introduction of Online Chat Writing via an online synchronous learning tool: Google Slides. This is practically feasible and a good option for the language instructors to maximize students' writing interaction and engagement opportunities. The aim of this paper is not to oblige all language instructors to do exactly what the author did. Each instructor needs to have flexibility to plan in their own way. For instance, determining what is a reasonable amount for students to type is not an easy task, due to numerous factors, such as students' writing skills, typing skills, etc. In other words, the instructor needs to diagnose their English skills and make

necessary adjustments before implementing the activity. The instructor could also give a minimum number of words as a quota if the students start to rely too much on dictionaries. This might give students too much pressure, but if the number matches the students' levels, it might be good encouragement. No matter what variations there exist, the instructor needs to understand what works best in his or her particular class and specify what the activity must be done for.

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