

Culturally informed oral participation and corrective feedback practices for Japanese EFL students – Research perspectives

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This article explores the research perspectives and methods behind an action research project in an intermediate Conversation class of Japanese EFL students. The project examines corrective feedback methods and U.S. classroom norms within oral participation, including (1) the benefits of explicit correction for language learners, (2) which types of corrective feedback are most effective, and (3) the role of silence in the classroom. The viability of an activity, “Small Talk”, to engage Japanese EFL students in extensive conversations is examined from both the perspective of teacher and student. In a subsequent article, the results of this project, including an hour-long instructor interview, 15 weeks of classroom observations, and a 26-question student survey, will be examined.

Introduction

Statement of the problem

In English language classrooms, students are often classified by their primary languages and countries of origin. When starting with a new class, these groupings allow teachers to make basic assumptions about each student, including their culture, learning preferences, previous educational experiences, and potential language transfer. While these assumptions can be a valuable starting point from which teachers can implement student-focused support, if teachers do not move past these initial generalizations and take the time to get to know their students on a more individualized level, they are vulnerable to making sweeping statements about their students. This is neither productive nor sensitive.

Student-centered classrooms, which adapt instructional strategies and activities to individual student needs and preferences, are widely viewed as a progressive and current method in the U.S. educational field. While some teachers might pursue this teaching style with genuine intentions, if adaptations are based off stereotypes, the effort is likely to be unsuccessful. Instead, a student-centered classroom must be co-constructed between the teacher and students, requiring a deeper understanding of the previous educational experiences shaping – not just the students’ but also the teacher’s – expectations and behavior.

Significant differences between U.S. and Japanese language classrooms make miscommunication between teachers and students likely. Japanese students represent a significant portion of the international students in U.S. university classes. While the number of Japanese exchange students has been decreasing since the 2000s, in 2019 Japan was still the 8th most common country of origin (Bustamente, 2020). However,

despite the considerable number of Japanese international students attending U.S. schools, they are still frequently subjected to stereotyping. A quick Google search demonstrates the common labels assigned to Japanese students: shy, quiet, hard-working, highly organized, polite, and unable to express their opinions (Nao, 2020). However, a list of adjectives like this is more likely to reveal subjective interpretations of American teachers rather than a true understanding of Japanese students; without the cultural knowledge necessary to understand the norms motivating student behavior, teachers tend to assign their own cultural values to student actions. Teachers must challenge this human tendency to interpret and assign meaning to behavior through their own belief systems, and instead start by noting observable behavior in order to avoid misunderstandings.

This paper explores linguistically and culturally informed practices that teachers can adopt when working with a Japanese English as a foreign language (EFL) student population, specifically within corrective feedback (CF).

Definitions

For the purposes of this paper, terms to discuss CF will follow the definitions created in Lyster & Ranta's (1997) original analysis. "Corrective feedback" describes a teacher's direct or indirect response to an erroneous student utterance. "Feedback" can be further broken down into six categories: explicit correction, recasts, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and repetition. "Student uptake" is any verbal response a student makes after receiving CF. "Negotiation of form" describes an error treatment sequence that requires the student to actively participate in repairing the error (compared to explicit correction where the teacher provides the correct form), and it can result in "student-generated repair", uptake that includes self-correction of the original error (Lyster & Ranta, 1997).

"Frequent grammatical errors" refers to L2 mistakes often made by speakers within an L1 language community. "L1" and "L2" describe languages learned in a first language acquisition environment and languages learned later in a second language acquisition environment; it is not to say these languages were sequentially the first and second languages this person learned or are the only languages in their idiolect. "Culturally sensitive" defines practices that do not assign value to behavior, aim to raise awareness of cultural differences, and adapt methodology to learning preferences expressed by students. A "student-centered classroom" focuses on practices that support active learning and differentiation when adjusting general methods and content to individual students. In this approach, teachers take a more facilitative than directive role, and students are required to take leadership positions and collaborate with all members of the classroom.

Research Perspectives

Previous investigations on CF

Eliminating correction within a classroom might make students less self-conscious, but it would be detrimental to their language acquisition. Across all language backgrounds, an important element of gaining control in an L2 is discovering which utterances are standard and which are not. While comprehensible

input helps, it is unlikely to be sufficient for language acquisition; students benefit from receiving CF in order to notice the gap between their constructions and their teachers', restructure their ideas in the L2 grammar, and enhance metalinguistic awareness (Panova & Lyster, 2002).

However, when CF should be received is still debated. During these discussions, different learning activities are often described as building "accuracy", "fluency", or "complexity". Accuracy-focused activities build skills in producing standard forms. Fluency-focused activities foster communicative competence and automaticity. Complexity-focused activities encourage students to reach for structures they do not yet fully control.

Some linguists, including Krashen (1982), believe CF should be avoided because it will influence students to prioritize accuracy over complexity. Some believe that the development of accuracy can inhibit fluency, and vice versa, so activities should be directed towards one at a time. For example, Harmer (1983) argues that CF should only occur during accuracy-building activities and that teachers should not intervene during fluency-focused ones. On the other hand, interactionists like Mackey (2007) ignore this distinction and argue that CF is more effective when it occurs in context (Ellis, 2009).

CF is categorized as direct and indirect. Direct feedback includes explicit corrections (e.g. *"I eated dinner." "No. The past tense of 'eat' is 'ate'.") while indirect feedback includes more subtle methods like recasts (e.g. "Right, you *ate* dinner."). In general, while teachers are often advised on the pedagogical benefits of direct feedback (e.g. Hedge, 2000), many studies have revealed a preference for implicit reformulations, like recasts, when teaching (e.g. Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Teachers reportedly use recasts because they are faster and avoid student embarrassment (Yoshida, 2010).

Panova & Lyster's (2002) analysis of Lyster & Ranta's (1997) study of an adult ESL class found that teachers used recasts most commonly. Unfortunately, they also found that recasts were the least likely to lead to uptake; instead, elicitation had the highest uptake rate when followed by metalinguistic feedback and student-generated repair. The indirect nature of recasts seems to explain these findings. First, recasts can be too subtle; students are likely to interpret teacher responses to their answer as content-related, rather than form-corrective. Furthermore, recasts can go largely unnoticed by students if they do not hear the difference between their utterance and the teacher recast; moreover, there is a danger that they rather view the recast as positive reinforcement of what is acceptable in the L2 (Panova & Lyster, 2002).

This is not to say recasts are useless. Recasts are efficient, help avoid student embarrassment, and allow for the class to stay focused on content when the grammar is beyond the student's current language control. However, CF that prompts negotiation of meaning, such as elicitation and clarification requests, promote student participation and problem-solving (Panova & Lyster, 2002). Studies like Lyster (2004) and Ferris (2006) suggest student-generated repair is effective for language acquisition (Ellis, 2009).

Another topic debated within CF is timing. Written CF will always be delayed, but with oral CF, teachers must choose to use immediate or delayed methods. With accuracy activities, there is consensus that CF should be immediate. However, CF in the context of fluency activities is disagreed upon. For example, Doughty (2001) argues that CF must occur quickly in order to affect a student's interlanguage. However, besides teacher opinion, there is little evidence from studies to prove whether immediate or

delayed CF is most effective (Ellis, 2009).

Within the context of Japanese students

While research shows CF facilitates language acquisition, teachers must ensure their CF does not produce debilitating anxiety in their students, and teachers should adapt their CF to the language needs and learning styles of each class. In addition, an awareness of L1 language transfer can help teachers contextualize their learners' errors.

In the beginning of adult language acquisition, an L1 is often relied on as an intermediary as L1 syntax and semantics are transferred into L2 lexicon (Yamashita, Junko, & Jiang, 2010); until the student can gain effective control of an L2, errors will be recurrent. Teachers can make this transfer transparent to students; as Collins (2004) writes, "there has been renewed interest in the potentially facilitative effects of providing classroom learners with explicit information about and practice in contrasting L1/L2 differences" (p. 252). In addition to helping students, knowing when and how an L1 influences an L2 can help teachers address grammatical construction errors in the classroom (Collins, 2004).

In a study by Green (2006) with Japanese learners of English in an ESL context, samples of student language were collected over a semester. Within the samples, the five most commonly occurring errors were identified as: articles, wrong word choice, prepositions, verb tense, missing verbs (Green, 2006). By studying Japanese grammar, L1 and L2 differences that likely lead to these errors can be discovered. For example, the missing verb error can be contextualized by knowing that Japanese has different rules for verbs such as the copula "to be" can be dropped in Japanese (but not in English). Another example is the error with articles. Japanese does not recognize a difference between count and noncount nouns, so the article system in English, which relies on this distinction, is challenging to control (Thompson, 2001).

In a study by Yamashita, Junko, & Jiang (2010) on an L1's influence on L2 collocation acquisition, participants completed acceptability judgement tasks with English collocations. The researchers hypothesized that participants would more accurately judge acceptability with collocations congruent between Japanese and English than incongruent ones. For example, Japanese and English both express "hot tea" with translatable equivalents, so a Japanese speaker should be more likely to read "hot tea" in English and judge it as correct. By comparison, "strong tea" in English is expressed as "dark tea" in Japanese, so the speaker would be more likely to use an inappropriate collocation, or translate incorrectly, this idea. The findings supported the hypothesis; L1 congruency was found to positively affect acquisition of L2 collocations and that while L2 exposure helped, students struggled to acquire incongruent collocations even with considerable exposure (Yamashita, Junko, & Jiang, 2010).

To meet students' learning needs, it is not enough for teachers to simply know potentially difficult L1/L2 collocations. When choosing pedagogical methods, teachers must also take student differentiation into account since differing cultural views of teacher-student roles and classroom expectations make a conflict between Japanese students and U.S. teachers likely. By being aware of this variance, teachers can foster a healthy, student-centered classroom by explaining the reasoning behind their methods, slowly acclimating students to their expectations, and selecting methods that are more comfortable. Before a

teacher can do this, however, they must investigate their students' previous learning experiences and the values embedded within them.

For example, Japan places high value on harmony. This principle manifests in group conformity and an aversion to open competition between students (Saito & Ebsworth, 2004) or showing off their skills. Also, Japanese classes are often highly teacher centered. Students play a mostly passive role (Green, 2006) while teachers cover content through direct instruction and students practice with listening comprehension, reading, and writing activities (Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017). The teacher is an authority figure (Green, 2006). Students remain mostly silent in class to avoid interrupting the flow of the lecture or peers' learning and because expressing opinions is not expected – it can even be viewed as impolite (Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017).

In fact, the role of silence in the classroom is a common point of contention between Japanese students and English teachers. Silence was explored by Sasaki & Ortlieb (2017) in a study with Japanese participants studying in an Australian university; the researchers investigated to what extent the students wanted to adapt or maintain their silent behavior and to what extent cultural identities influenced student learning styles. Through interviews, the study found that students were accustomed to learning through direct instruction based on listening comprehension, reading, and writing activities and were uncomfortable with the discrepancy between Japanese and Australian teacher expectations. Students were faced with a difficult choice: meet their teacher's demands and participate verbally or maintain their cultural learning style and remain silent. However, cultural adaptation is not simple and requires high self-efficacy (Wadsworth, Hetch & Jung, 2008, as cited in Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017).

Furthermore, the study found that "...perceptions towards the effectiveness of silence as a communicative strategy in the classroom differ remarkably between Japan and Australia." (p. 86).

The Japanese students interviewed described silence as respectful, desirable, cooperative, and harmonious. However, silence is often viewed as showing dependency, low-confidence, and limited understanding in Western cultures. Instead, verbal participation is paramount; it is seen as signaling engagement, and since teachers want to hear students' ideas, they allocate a significant portion of class time to it. The Japanese participants in the study indicated an awareness of the contrast in oral participation expectations; while younger students (around 30) expressed a willingness to try and participate, older students (50+) were less inclined or found it more challenging. Overall, many students tried to orally participate when required to, although not always voluntarily. There was a discrepancy between student-reported participation rates and classroom observations, with some students believing themselves to participate more than they did. Students that experienced the most successful adaptation to Australian verbal participation requirements expressed viewing their learning identity as pluralistic; they did not abandon Japanese norms, but rather added Australian ones while studying abroad (Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017).

In addition to age and identity, learning environment was influential in Japanese students' participatory behavior. In interviews, they expressed that their silence was motivated by previous learning experiences, including former teachers that were intolerant of errors and maintained distance from their students. Moreover, students expressed concern about making mistakes in front of their Australian peers, preferring to ask questions before or after class. Finally, students also preferred to study in smaller classrooms

composed of native and non-native English speakers (Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017).

A study by Saito & Ebsworth (2004) interviewed university students in both ESL and EFL academic settings and found similar trends in student interviews regarding cultural strain due to differing expectations. “The gap between culturally influenced teacher-held expectations and student participation patterns” (Saito & Ebsworth, 2004, p. 111) led to judgement on both sides; students were criticized as passive, lacking initiative, and rarely volunteering answers, while teachers were criticized as imposing uncomfortable practices such as soliciting original ideas and requiring active oral participation. While the ESL students reported being more comfortable with oral sharing, EFL students preferred methods that avoided asking questions received as challenging, unexpected, and with the potential to cause a loss in face. Overall, the student interviews showed a positive response to teachers perceived as open minded, available to answer questions outside of class, showing respect for other cultures, joking in class, and admitting to making mistakes themselves (Saito & Ebsworth, 2004).

The gaps in ESL expectations and Japanese preferences shown in these studies can lead to serious tensions within a classroom. The results indicate it is imperative that teachers take their students’ feelings into account when structuring activities if they want to avoid frustrating themselves and alienating their students.

“Small Talk”

Considering that many Japanese students resist oral participation in ESL/EFL classes, due to concerns such as teacher intolerance to mistakes or potential loss of face with peers, it can be difficult for Japanese students to develop their speaking skills to the same proficiency level as their reading, writing, and listening skills. However, as explained before, teachers cannot simply remove speaking and CF from their classrooms; Japanese students must be required to speak and be offered CF but in a way that does not push them too far out of their comfort zones. “Small Talk” is an extensive speaking activity that might be able to achieve this compromise.

“Small Talk” sequences fluency and accuracy practice and provides delayed CF. Since most discussion occurs in a small group setting and CF can be anonymous, this activity addresses preferences expressed in the studies above. Created by Ron Harris, and further developed by the English Language Center teachers at Gonzaga University, “Small Talk” is a student-directed conversation activity. The activity requires several steps, from preparation to discussion to CF worksheets. On Day 1, a group of students pick a short video, create a visual aid, and give a presentation in class on main ideas, useful vocabulary or phrases, and themes in the video. Then, they provide three to five thoughtful WH- discussion questions for their classmates. For homework, their classmates organize their answers to the discussion questions in a mind map. This allows for students to formulate their opinions, look up the vocabulary words necessary to express them, and write three follow-up questions to extend conversation during the discussion, before coming to the next class.

On Day 2, the same group facilitates a discussion between students. In the activity, students are placed in small groups to discuss the questions provided in the presentation and the ones they wrote as homework.

However, the students use no notes or dictionaries during this process. If students struggle to express their ideas, they have been previously instructed to talk around it. Furthermore, the teacher does not interrupt or assist – the conversation is focused on fluency and complexity, not accuracy – but they do note sentences with student errors. After 15 to 20-minutes, the facilitating students bring the other students back together to share the highlights of their conversations as a whole class. Students self-evaluate the quality of their English, ideas, and participation.

After class, the teacher compiles the errors collected during the discussion into a worksheet on Comsem.net. Comsem, which stands for “Communications Seminar”, is a website built to host these CF worksheets. It allows teachers to provide written and audio CF, students to complete CF worksheets, and researchers to access authentic language samples.

Each “Small Talk” CF worksheet includes sentences identified by the teacher during the class conversations as containing level-appropriate errors. The teacher provides the written erroneous sentences with an audio recording of themselves reading the sentences correctly; they may also include metalinguistic guidance about the error type. For homework, students must read the original sentences, listen to the teacher’s audio reformulations, and read the notes. Students must then use the audio and teacher feedback about the error present to rewrite the original sentences. In addition, they must record themselves pronouncing the reformulations intelligibly.

For example, the first worksheet in our class contained the sentence, “He is older than five years than me”. As shown in Figure 1, my lead teacher wrote “word order” as metalinguistic feedback. Then, this student reformulated the sentence as “He is five years older than me” and recorded themselves saying the sentence.

The screenshot displays a web interface titled "SUBMITTED EXPRESSIONS". On the left, there is a vertical list of ten items labeled "Expression 1" through "Expression 10". The first item, "Expression 1", is highlighted with a dark grey background. To the right of this list, the following information is displayed:

- All-Do:** x
- Original Expression:** He is older than five years than me.
- Reformulation:**
- Context / Vocabulary:** word order
- Pronunciation:** None
- Student Reformulation:** He is five years older than me.

Below the "Student Reformulation" text, there is a small audio player interface showing a play button, a progress bar at 0:00 / 0:03, and volume and settings icons. At the bottom of the feedback section, there are two assessment sections:

- Assessment Text:** with radio buttons for Correct and Incorrect.
- Assessment Audio:** with radio buttons for Correct and Incorrect.

Figure 1: Sample Comsem.net CF worksheet

After submitting the worksheet, the teacher reviews the student’s reformulations. Because the student corrects the error in both oral and written English, they can receive full, half, or no points for each sentence. For example, if the student writes the sentence correctly but the teacher identifies their pronunciation as

having intelligibility issues, they can mark the written sentence as correct and the audio as incorrect. After receiving teacher feedback, the student must attempt the incorrect sentences again. During this recursive process, the student is allowed to ask for assistance from other classmates or the teacher. Finally, once all audio and written corrections have been made successfully, the worksheet is considered complete, as shown in Figure 1. For some students, this is achieved on the first try, but sometimes it takes several attempts.

In a study by Hunter (2011), the validity of “Small Talk” in balancing fluency, accuracy, and complexity language development was explored. Hunter stressed the importance of mixing activities on linguistic forms with authentic communication while involving students in their own language acquisition process. He argued that “Small Talk” is “...effective in increasing students’ pragmatic competence since it gives them an opportunity to practice, in a relatively low-stress environment, the kinds of speech acts they would need in higher stress interactions outside the classroom. It also puts students in the position, as leaders, to practice a variety of speech acts and discourse management strategies that are usually restricted to the teacher” (Hunter, 2011, p. 4).

In addition to extensive speaking and problem solving, students receive delayed CF in “Small Talk”. Hunter suggested Comsem.net worksheets provide feedback that (1) can help stabilize student interlanguage if the mistake reflects form variability and (2) provide the appropriate structure if the student does not already know it. Because the student must actively participate in repairing their own errors, the CF is more likely to lead to uptake. While Hunter’s study showed “Small Talk” promoted self-correction of common chunks of language (e.g. **“I’m agree”*), it cannot prove acquisition of the corrected forms (Hunter, 2011).

Research questions

To explore this research contextualized within a classroom, I conducted a pilot study in my practicum class. The setting was a U.S. satellite campus for a private women’s Japanese university. The students were young adult English majors. Although the campus was in the U.S., the student body was homogeneous in country of origin and language background, making the classroom much like an EFL setting. In addition, this 2021 semester was taught fully online due to COVID-19, so while students attended class online with U.S. teachers, they were living in Japan, making the language learning experience fully EFL.

After reading research on the topic of CF and Japanese students, I was curious to see how my Conversation class responded to U.S. classroom strategies and norms such as oral CF and expectations of active participation. The literature would suggest my students would be uncomfortable with teacher behaviors like asking for spontaneous opinions and student behaviors like voluntarily offering answers.

My mentor teacher, Shannon (pseudonym), has extensive experience with Japanese students, as she first taught EFL in Japan from 1987 to 1989 and has since worked with many Japanese ESL students. More recently, she worked in an intensive English program with a multilingual group of university students from Arabic, Spanish, Korean, and Japanese language backgrounds. She has taught over thirty groups of Japanese students at our current satellite campus. With such extensive experience, I was interested in

discussing her choices of classroom and CF methods and experiences with Japanese students.

To explore these two topics, I focused on these central questions:

1. What types of oral CF did Shannon prefer to use in class? Why?
2. How did she gauge her student's receptiveness to CF?
3. Which CF methods did she find that Japanese students were most responsive to?
4. How did our students experience her CF methods?
5. How did our students experience U.S. classroom oral participation expectations?
6. To what extent were they conscious of a difference between Japanese and U.S. teaching styles and/or their own adjustments in student behavior?

Methodology

The data for this study were collected from three sources: observations in one intermediate-level Conversation class, an hour-long, recorded interview with Shannon at the beginning of the semester, and a 26-question student survey at the end of the semester.

I participated as a practicum student for one 15-week semester with this Conversation class. The class met twice a week for 1.5 hours each class. The class contained twelve EFL students participating in a "study abroad program", although due to COVID-19, the students were attending U.S. classes remotely while still living in Japan. During the classroom observations, I collected notes on the norms and expectations established by Shannon, student behavior, and classroom activities.

The second source of data came from an hour-long, recorded, individual interview with Shannon about her views on CF and classroom culture. I relistened to the entire interview later and took notes about the responses to research questions #1-3; next, ten minutes of the interview were identified as of particular interest, transcribed, and coded. Furthermore, since Shannon expressed an approach called "Small Talk" © to be effective at simultaneously increasing student talk-time, providing CF, and avoiding cultural conflicts often experienced in the classroom by Japanese students, I decided to investigate it more through observation and student surveys.

Shannon supports this activity for several reasons. First, after modeling the activity a couple times, it can be completely student-directed, increasing both student autonomy and student talk time (Hunter, 2011). Second, since the topics are chosen by the students, it is guaranteed to be relevant to their lives, increasing motivation and engagement. Third, the small group discussion fosters fluency development and independence since the teacher does not intervene. Fourth, delayed CF is provided via the worksheets, which helps students avoid repeating common errors without negatively impacting their willingness to speak. Fifth, since learner errors are used to build the worksheets, teaching can be based on real learner language needs, instead of driven by a standardized curriculum often present in textbooks. The limitation to this activity is that "it is not suitable for true beginners, who do not have sufficient language" for extended conversations (Hunter, 2011, p. 5).

The third data source for research questions #4-6 was a student survey. The survey was mixed method; students answered Likert scale and open response questions. The first half, focused on student experiences

of “Small Talk” and Comsem.net, was adapted from a study conducted by Hunter (2011) with students in Abu Dhabi. The second half was composed of questions drawn from my reading about student perspectives of classroom culture and expectations to explore to what extent “Small Talk” effectively balanced learner language goals, CF, and cultural preferences. Ultimately, I aimed to learn how receptive students were to “Small Talk” as a culturally sensitive method of CF, and how self-aware they were about differences and similarities between Japanese and U.S. classroom expectations. Since only nine students answered the survey, the results cannot be generalized to represent the experience of other Japanese EFL students. In addition, one student took the survey twice, so her open-response answers were added together, and the second Likert-scale answers removed from the study to prioritize her initial Likert judgements while expanding her longer responses. Nine out of twelve students completed the survey; since it was anonymous, it was difficult to motivate the missing students to take it. Consent to share responses was given by all participants.

Limitations of the study

The study is limited in breadth and depth. First, I was limited in sample size. As this pilot study is focused on Shannon’s teaching methods specifically in the context of this Conversation class, I only had twelve students to survey and only nine took the survey. I was also limited in depth. Due to time restraints, I will be unable to conduct a formal follow-up interview with Shannon about the results of the survey and the development of the students over the semester. Also, I would have liked to conduct individual interviews with students about their survey results to gain deeper insight into their views of our classroom and their personal growth.

Conclusion

Linguists agree on the pedagogical benefits of CF for accuracy development, especially types that involve metalinguistic feedback and offer opportunities for student-generated repair, and support extended speaking practice for fluency development. However, students’ receptiveness to such methods can differ depending on their previous learning experiences. Japanese students who are more accustomed to direct instruction and silent participation can struggle to volunteer verbal contributions in class, particularly if they are concerned their answers might cause conflict with their peers or be incorrect and result in harsh corrections. Additionally, even if a student has accepted the risk of committing errors when speaking, Japanese students can face an identity dilemma when shifting their participatory role in English classes.

While teachers cannot eliminate these difficulties, they can soften the transition by using culturally informed practices. Understanding that Japanese students’ silence is not a reflection of disinterest or timidity is the first step. Second, teachers can ease student tensions by taking student questions before and after class, supporting a relaxed, open-minded classroom atmosphere, and demonstrating themselves to be respectful of cultures and tolerant of errors. Finally, teachers can encourage extensive speaking practice through “Small Talk”, which further supports Japanese students by assuaging student anxieties through small group settings and promoting accuracy development while avoiding loss of face through delayed

CF.

The findings of this pilot action research project will be explored in a subsequent article. Specific approaches to fostering a high challenge, high support classroom used by the lead teacher, Shannon, are shared from an interview. Our Japanese EFL student responses to “Small Talk”, Comsem.net, and U.S. oral participation norms are shared from student surveys. The next article will argue that these methods can effectively develop student speaking skills without overwhelming students with novel classroom expectations.

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