

***How Should We Approach Issues in a Plurilingual EFL Class
in an EFL Environment Country?***

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to propose solutions for issues in class of reading and writing English at Japanese college. The college English classes in Japan include many students from South Korean, China, Thai and other Asian countries, which is a typical plurilingual EFL composition class. In Japan, a college class of reading and writing English is requisite to students from other Asian countries as well as Japanese students. In the class teacher needs to improve students' academic abilities for correctly reading and writing English. Many of the other Asian students cannot understand Japanese well and some of them and many Japanese students also cannot understand English well. Teacher is, hence, at a loss for a choice of language for explanation. This is not so easy for teacher of native speaker of English as well as Japanese teacher of English in Japan. Recently, research books and articles about a plurilingual EFL class have been published, but they usually propose pedagogy in English-speaking countries and hence they cannot work well in Japan without modification. As for the typical issues in Japan, first of all, many students in the class score lower than average on the scales of motivation and academic abilities of English. There are also other various issues to resolve, but in this paper, we will focus on teachers' communication ways and how to improve students' motivation in a plurilingual EFL class in Japan.

Keywords: a plurilingual EFL class, Asia, motivation, ICTs

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to develop pedagogical tools to address challenges in plurilingual English reading and writing classes in an EFL environment country, Japan. Currently, many foreign students, especially from China, Taiwan, and South Korea, study in Japanese universities as part of the rapid progression of their internationalization. Japanese universities usually require foreign students from non-English-speaking countries, as well as Japanese students, to take an English reading and writing course. Thus, it is not uncommon for Japanese students to study English with students from other parts of Asia. These classes present pressing issues in pedagogy that need to be resolved. Recently, useful research about EFL plurilingual classes has emerged (e.g., Ferris 2009, Herrera & Murry 2010, Zamel & Spack 2014, Herrera & Murry 2015, and Ortmeier-Hooper & Ruecker 2016). However, these works address classes in English-speaking countries for foreign students and immigrants, and hence may not work effectively in Japan. English education in Japan takes place in an EFL environment region, and plurilingual EFL reading and writing classes in Japan present their own unique issues.

The issues are as follows:

(a) The choice of language for presentation and communication. Foreign students are required to pass the Japanese Language Aptitude Test (the Japanese equivalent of the TOFEL or IELTS) at least at level 2, for university study in Japan. Logically speaking, it thus follows that these students should have sufficient Japanese skills to understand Japanese-speaking teachers. Practically speaking, however, apart from students at national universities and a small number of private universities, most students lack these skills. While at least some of the foreign students will certainly be able to communicate well in English with their teachers, some of the foreign students do not even have sufficient oral communication skills in English. This is also true of many Japanese students. Thus, teachers are at a loss for choice of language for teaching.

(b) A lack of teacher knowledge about English errors stemming from students' first languages. This is a common issue in plurilingual EFL classes in other countries.

(c) Pedagogy. Many Japanese teachers teach English in Japanese and naturally use Japanese grammatical terms, such as *kankei daimeishi* (relative pronoun), *ippan doushi* (general verb), and so on. This could be solved easily. Even foreign students who understand Japanese may be unfamiliar with these technical terms. Additionally, in English reading and writing classes, Japanese teachers tend to have students translate from English to Japanese and vice versa. This is difficult for foreign students who lack sufficient skills in either Japanese or English.

(d) Lack of teacher's familiarity with various educational cultures. This issue is again common in plurilingual EFL classes in other countries. A plurilingual class will have students from various educational backgrounds with different local educational cultures. If Japanese teacher teaches English assuming Japanese educational norms, foreign students may become disoriented or confused. The teacher, hence, needs to have a concrete understanding of the educational cultures of students in each class. Such an understanding includes not only a knowledge of the curriculum and system of English education in each area, but also of students' potential emotional responses based on their educational cultures.

Solutions to these issues could contribute to improving students' English reading and writing while addressing another issue (e) students' low motivation to learn English. Student with low academic abilities in English tend to have low motivation to learn English, regardless of nationality. These students tend to belong to Groups 1 and 2 of Kata Csizér & Zoltán Dörnyei's (2006) categorization of four groups of language learners by L2 learning motivation.¹

Issue (a), the choice of language for teaching, presents special challenges. For this reason, we set issue (a) aside for now. And, because of the time of our presentation, we focus on (e) and roughly (d).

1. Affinities and Differences Beyond and from Educational Cultures in Students' Motivation to Learning English

Motivation depends not only on academic abilities but also on other factors. The factors vary somewhat among students from different countries and areas. Logically speaking, however, there are no differences without affinities or no affinities without differences. So, we think of motivation from the viewpoints of the similarities and differences among students in the different areas along with their educational cultures.

1-1. Affinities and the Basic Requirements for Education

The most important factor in the classroom in any country is interaction between the teacher and students and among students. This is especially important in English classes because acquisition of language takes place through interpersonal interactions. Thus, a good class environment is crucial. Teachers must cultivate a good environment in which students can talk to each other and ask their teacher questions without anxiety about errors or anxiety. This raises the question of what teachers should do to create such an environment in the classroom.

Zhang & Watkins (2007) investigated the qualities of good teachers for Chinese EFL teachers and Chinese college students (both English majors and non-majors) and analyzed the gaps between the concepts in their minds. They found that "Chinese teachers placed much greater importance on their personal knowledge base and subject knowledge as EFL teachers. The students, however, were also concerned about their teachers' appearance, manners, personality, and attitudes toward students in addition to teachers' knowledge base and instructional competence" (787). Thus, Chinese students believed that a good teacher "should be good at many aspects of life" (787). This is true of students in Korean, Taiwanese, and Japanese students, as well, as Zhang & Watkins and Bahous & Nabhani (2011) reported.

¹ Following Tatsuya Taguchi et al.'s (2009: 85-86) summary of Csizér & Dörnyei's categorization, the four groups can be described as follows: Group 1 students score lower than average on all of the motivational scales and are therefore the least-motivated students, Group 2 students have a more positive attitude toward the L2 community and culture, but do not understand the relevance of English to their future lives, Group 3 students score high on instrumentality and are motivated by their ought-to L2 selves without strong support from attitudes toward the L2 community and culture, and Group 4 students score higher than average in every motivational area and are labeled the most motivated students. The students addressed in this study fall mainly into Groups 1 and 2.

In another example, based on research in Brazil, Hirano (2009) noted the importance of a teacher's empathy toward students and their learning in improving students' motivation to learn and improve their English. She emphasized learner identity, noting that "people tend to maintain their identities, day after day, throughout their lives, to create stability and coherence in their lives, even when circumstances changes" (37). She focused on a male student with learning difficulties and realized that "his difficulty learning the language seems to have triggered the construction of a poor learner identity" and his "learning difficulty and his learner identity were indeed tightly related and strongly affected each other" (37). Hirano, hence, changed the pedagogical strategy for the student. She made a point to understand how he felt about his learning, was patient with his slow progress, and let him realize his progress. Hirano was ultimately able to improve his poor learning identity and improve his academic skills in English. This supports Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert's (1999) statement that "regardless of whether low self-confidence is subsumed under the construct of language anxiety or vice versa, the evidence of a consistent association between low self-confidence and anxiety encourages a serious consideration of the role low self-confidence might play in students' expectations about second language anxiety" (437).

Zhang & Watkins' and Hirano's discussions remind us of educational principles of student-centered education established by Carl Rogers, who influenced Dörnyei and whose work formed the basis of his motivation theory. Rogers stressed the importance of showing unconditional positive regard through warmth, enjoyment, respect, sympathy, recognition, caring, and praise. At the same time, even when learner's self-fulfillment is not ideal, such as positive concern should be continued to make the learner feel respected and understood and to facilitate self-development (Rogers 1959: 104). According to Kuwamura (2013), Rogers' "student-centered" basic concepts are based on the assumption that human nature is positive and learning is an inherent skill for self-realization. Therefore, focusing on the learning process is part of the process for self-realization. Emphasizing student-centered education would stimulate learner enthusiasm. Requiring teaching and learning to be student-centered would be respectful to the students, demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the students, and cultivate students' emotional well-being, needs, and aspirations. It creates a free, relaxed, harmonious, and happy learning environment. Such a nurturing and understanding environment would improve students' initiative and enthusiasm.

This is very important especially for the Asian students because they tend to be face-conscious (cf. Taguchi et al. 2009: 90-96). The more face-conscious one is, the more tightly learning difficulty and learner identity are related, and the more strongly they affect each other. Thus, when working with the Asian students with low motivation and academic abilities of English, teachers should be mindful to help them save face. Rogers' student-centered education is relevant in this area because, as mentioned earlier, teachers treat students with unconditional positive regard and use such positive treatment to make learners feel respected and understood.

Kuwamura (2013) confessed her surprise when starting to teach English in Japan. She taught two senior English classes at a private university whose level was near the bottom in Japan. In her class, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean students learned English. Following Rogers' suggestion to be mindful of student needs when teaching English, Kuwamura (2013) carefully examined his notion of "student-centered education" and

put it into practice. Kuwamura conducted an anonymous survey of seniors in her classes in 2011 and got 72 valid responses. When she asked them in the second class whether they wanted to make a presentation in English, only five students wanted to. However, when she asked them again in one of the last three classes 67 students of them wanted to.

1-2. Affinities in Differences

Motivation stemming from cultures and societies are diverse. As for Chinese students, Taguchi et al.'s survey is suggestive; as for Korean students, Yuto's (2013, 2015) and Iwabuchi's (2013) surveys, and as for Taiwanese students Chen's (2012) survey are suggestive. However, they share an opinion about the factors of students' low motivation and learning difficulty in English. It is imbalance between the ideal L2 self and the ought-to L2 self. In particular, the future when they use English is vague for them because the Asian students study English for preparation of exam for universities.

Hence, Chen suggests that teachers should show students their possible L2 selves to allow them visualize their ideal L2 selves concretely. But how? Chen's findings could also be applicable to Chinese, Korean, and Japanese students with low motivation. Chen's article, however, does not propose concrete methods for doing so. However, Chen's proposal is exactly same as ours. We realized a way to solve the problems of low motivation with E-Job 100.

2. E-Job 100 as a Solution for Improving Motivation

E-Job 100 is a website we made about 10 years ago in order to enhance motivation of Japanese students, and E-Job 100 has proven effective in improving Japanese students' motivation to learn English. Our description will slightly focus on the pedagogy of oral communication, because practice in communication could be incorporated into an English reading and writing class, but E-Job 100 has various educational materials for reading and writing.

2-1. The Features of E-Job 100²

The E-Job 100 website contains videos showing people of various occupations reading, writing, listening to, and speaking English in their workplaces. In addition, students can access English documents used in real work environments. Students are able to practice their English in different situations by playing different roles after choosing their favorite occupations. By doing this and developing an understanding of why they need to study English, students improve their motivation and are driven to improve their English abilities. Because society offers students a variety of possible occupations, students learn English in the classroom by practicing communication skills, such as negotiation and cooperation, in English. Through this practice, they improve not only their English skills but also their consideration for and understanding of others as well as appropriate vocabulary for different situations.

² With regard to the material about the E-Job 100 in the succeeding sections to from 2-2 to 2-5, see Suzuki (2010a) and Suzuki & Kuwamura (2011).

2-2. The Origins of E-Job 100

2-2-1. Problems in English Education in Japan

E-Job 100 (Suzuki & Kuwamura 2003: <http://www.e-job-100.sakura.ne.jp/modx/>) was initially designed as a solution to a specific, major problem that Japan faces in English education for college students: a combination of low motivation to learn English and low skill level.

Motivation to learn English in Japan has traditionally been driven mainly by college entrance examinations. However, Japan faces the problem of low birthrate, and to survive, many colleges in Japan admit less academically qualified high school students. Moreover, many colleges in Japan now admit these students without an achievement test, requiring only a short essay in Japanese. Hence, high school students who are not good at English do not learn English, and even those who are better at English, tend not to learn English well (Suzuki 2010b: 30-33). Many Japanese college students enter college with low motivation to learn English and low skill levels.

However, even these students recognize the importance of English. This belief is highly influenced by the mass media. TV, magazines, and the Internet, which often tell them English is required of the Japanese because of globalization. In short, many Japanese students recognize the importance of English in a general way but do not see its importance for themselves personally.

This situation is rooted in the Japanese social condition. Most Japanese do not need English in their daily lives. However, the Japanese media report that employees of many large Japanese companies need English language skills. However, not all Japanese college students aspire to jobs at large companies where English is required. In addition, college students in Japan cannot accurately comprehend the real work environment due to a lack of information. Moreover, no research has been done in Japan to determine whether English is needed in various occupations. Therefore, even when teachers tell their students that they need English after entering the job market, many students fail to take this warning seriously (Suzuki & Kuwamura 2011).

2-2-2. The Use of E-Job 100 for Problem Solving

The first goal of the E-Job 100 project is to answer students' question, "Do Japanese people who live in Japan really need English?" Although many Japanese do not need English in their everyday lives, those working in some fields, such as flight attendants or business employees in international companies, do. Other professionals whose need for English is less well known include beauty salon staff, pharmacists, musicians, medical processors, and sports store staff.

What is the true degree of English knowledge required by Japanese employees? To answer this question, first Suzuki, one of the authors, researched approximately 180 kinds of jobs to determine whether or not they required a knowledge of English. Suzuki asked people in different occupations if they needed English, and when, how, at what level, how often, and for what purpose they used it. All occupations except

tax accountant now require the use of English. In fact, most Japanese now need to use some English in their work.

At first, to increase students' motivation, Suzuki informed them of this fact and showed them a variety of actual documents used in real work environments. However, this did not have the expected impact on students, who failed to connect the documents with their potential future lives and approached them as if they were simply a part of English textbook. Because the students lacked an understanding of the full scope of each job, they failed to appreciate how important the English documents were for these jobs and thus for their future lives. In short, they failed to understand how important English is in the Japanese workplace. Therefore, we went to each job site and made videos of English being used as well as videos of interviews with the staff. We edited the videos to approximately two minutes in duration.

Since we started to use these videos in our English classes, the attitudes and motivation of Japanese college students toward learning English have dramatically improved.



Figure 1: Home page



Figure 2: Top page job (Japanese pharmacy)

2-3. The Contents of E-Job 100

Figures 3-1 to 3-8 show scenes of the videos. One of the features of the videos is their range of employment sectors. Many occupations are familiar to students and popular with them, but have not been regarded as jobs in which English is needed. Also featured are scenes of English conversations with people of various races and nationalities. When Japanese hear that they need English, they tend to think only of conversations with native English speakers. However, given the current global context, such a limited view should be dispelled to make Japanese students realize more clearly the necessity of English in Japan.

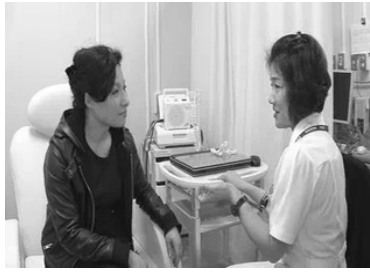


Figure 3-1: Nurse with a Chinese patient



Figure 3-2: Musician



Figure 3-3: Printing CO staff with a Finnish colleague



Figure 3-4: Waiter with a Nepalese customer



Figure 3-5: Beautician with a Chinese customer



Figure 3-6: Pharmacist



Figure 3-7: Medical processor with a Saudi Arabian patient



Figure 3-8: Doctor with a Chinese patient

Some pages include English documents actually used by companies in their everyday work, such as materials for meetings, invoices, e-mails, and also includes information on job interviews, CVs, cover letters, requirements, average salaries, and average ages of their intended jobs. The site has about 120 videos in total currently, and we are continuing to the number of videos. Regarding examples of pedagogies in the classroom, we are so sorry for skipping it because of the issue of our presentation time.

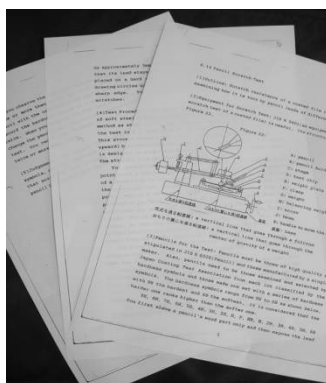


Figure 4: Materials for meeting

2-4. For Humanistic Communicative Language Teaching

Communication means sharing information with others and helping others understand; however, without attention to the needs of others, there is no communication, only mere monologue. Therefore, teaching English as a communication tool should focus on more than improving language competence. It should also focus on developing students' interpersonal skills. English education should thus be education of the whole person.

This view comes not only from academic logic but also from our experience shooting the workplace videos and related interviews (which were in Japanese and also available on the E-Job 100) website. The interviews made us keenly aware of the need to focus on interpersonal skills.

Consideration, empathy, and understanding of others are important not only in the workplace but in the world at large. We can learn about, empathize, and understand others through the use of language. Hence, an important role of language teaching is to educate students about how to learn about, empathize with, and understand others. Therefore, English teachers should facilitate the development of students' interpersonal skills through practice in English communication.

2-5. A Model of Humanistic Communicative Language Teaching Incorporating E-Job 100

In this model, students are required to play roles by mainly speaking and listening to the types of English needed in their intended future job. Students access the E-Job 100 website and research their favorite jobs and the use of English in the corresponding workplace to personally discover the significance of learning English.

Based on their motivation for learning English, students first establish basic skills for communication in English. For this purpose, they make a presentation about goods or services to introduce them to selling. They write sentences for the introduction, following patterns of paragraph writing from English for Academic Purposes (EAP) given to them by the teacher. After the teacher reviews what they have written, they memorize it and each gives a presentation. The teacher then gives each speaker feedback and asks several questions about the goods or services they presented. This is to give students practice speaking English by broadly building from the English sentences they had memorized. Using the teacher's feedback and questions, the

students conduct more online research, revise and memorize their presentations, and present them again.

During the second presentation, the rest of the students play the roles of clients and customers. The listeners ask a couple of questions to the speaker after their presentation, just as their teacher had. This enables students to become accustomed to communicating in English and to practicing it with other students.

The second step is for each of the students to memorize short, simple conversations essential for his or her intended future job. Students learn these in the first page and the video on the site for each occupation. The students then pair up, memorize the conversations together, and practice them. This practice requires them to introduce goods or services for sale and to raise questions. The students then switch roles and repeat the exercise to give themselves more practice with English conversation and with expressing what they want to say and ask.

The third step is task-based learning. The teacher gives each student a set of directions (for instance, “First, go to the post office to pick up your package. Second, talk about at least five kinds of medicine with a visitor in the post office. Finally go to a computer shop, ask about some computers and get an invoice from the clerk”).

The teacher gives each student a different set of directions every week. Of course, the teacher must create the directions based on the range of occupations chosen by the students, what they learned, and what they can learn independently on the E-Job 100 website and the Internet.

The teacher walks around in the classroom, facilitating the students’ communication in English, correcting errors, and sometimes even joining their conversations. The teacher also reminds them of the need for empathy for others and teaches them appropriate English expressions to express it.

After the students become accustomed to oral communication, the teacher should teach them about cultural differences and etiquette to improve their English and develop their interpersonal skills. As mentioned earlier, communication is to share information with others and help other people to understand. It is true to communication in jobs: nobody wants to talk with or contract with a person whose personality is not good. Teaching English, hence, should not be just focused on improving competence of language. It also should seriously think of the development of the students’ personality. English education should be education of a whole person. By making the classroom a place where students with varied interests communicate, thus a microcosm of society, the teacher could facilitate their skill development in English as well as in etiquette, empathy, and other interpersonal skills, and hence develop their personalities. For this, student-centered education is essential: The teacher models how to treat others with a positive attitude. This can help students help each other study and develop their interpersonal skills. Rogers calls such a class an encounter group, in which students empower each other. This is Rogers’ ideal for effective education.

3. Application for a Plurilingual EFL Class in Japan

E-Job 100 was created to increase the motivation of Japanese college students learning English by showing them real-life examples of how English is used in various occupations in Japan. The classroom is treated as a microcosm of society comprising people of various occupations, and students learn English and develop interpersonal skills through communication in English. E-Job 100 can make the need to learn English more real and personal for college students in Japan, and similar tools and programs might be effective for learners of EFL in other countries as well.

As previously noted, E-Job 100 will help students imagine themselves using English in their future lives. It is true that the videos in E-Job 100 were shot only in Japanese companies. However, the videos and interviews show examples of the relevance of English for businesses not only in Japan but also in other countries. In a globalized society, small and mid-sized as well as large companies must transcend national borders and communicate with others in English. E-Job 100 teaches students this.

One of the videos in E-Job 100 that was especially relevant for the plurilingual group examined in this study was an interview with a Chinese woman working in a company that produces and sells gifts and materials for gift-wrapping products such as ribbons, tags, etc. This woman had studied Japanese language and culture at Japanese college because she enjoyed them. Her dream was to obtain a job in a Japanese company and work with Japanese “kawaii” goods. She learned Japanese and its culture well, and her dream has since come true. After she started working at the company, however, she found she also needed English because the employees often traded with companies in other countries and traveled to other countries to attend international exhibitions and negotiate with others there. She thus started learning English. Her sharing of her experience was effective in convincing Chinese, Taiwanese, and Korean students studying in Japan think about the significance of English in their own future lives.



Figure 5-1: Cover page of the company producing and selling gifts and materials for gift-wrapping paper.



Figure 5-2: Interview with a female Chinese employee who had studied Japanese language and culture at a Japanese college.

Conclusion

Each job section in E-Job 100 contains Japanese texts about the contents of the videos, and the interviewers respond to these questions in Japanese. The Japanese used is fairly simple, and thus foreign students could mostly understand the texts and the videos. In a trial, we asked students in Tokyo (14 students) and Kyoto (14 students) who had responded to the survey to watch the video. After doing so, their attitudes

toward learning English changed dramatically, just as those of the Japanese students had. The students could visualize their possible L2 selves and understood the need to learn English even in Japanese colleges.

In the business world, negotiation starts after communication: people start negotiation once they trust the other party and thus their company. For this reason, interpersonal skills are essential. In plurilingual EFL classes in Japan, E-Job 100 could be expected to improve students' motivation in this area as well.

While the Japanese used in the videos and texts in E-Job 100 is fairly basic, some students from other countries might still find it challenging; hence, we plan to include captions in the videos in basic Japanese or English, or add the texts in basic English, Chinese, or Korean.

We have discussed a potential way to enhance English-learning motivation in a plurilingual EFL class, focusing on cultural differences in students' educational backgrounds and theories of motivation relating to identity. E-Job 100 contains English texts from which students can learn reading and writing as well as oral communication.

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